"COMPROMISED"

10 page excerpt

By Mike Bencivenga

SYNOPSIS:

In COMPROMISED a celebrated journalist and his wife invite a young couple to their home to help them recover their missing car. The encounter reveals unpleasant, hidden truths that threaten to destroy both relationships. While covering the 911 attack, New York Times reporter Brian Mulcahy was exposed to the toxic smoke that has caused his breathing, 16 years later, to become compromised. The young playwright, Alan Clay Parker, is fascinated by Brian's life and situation and learns something tragic that Brian's wife has kept from him. Alan puts both of their stories into a play, which turns into a big success bound for Broadway. The problem is he never got either of their permissions. When Mulcahy hears about it he demands that the play be stopped or his wife's dark past will be revealed. The play deals with issues of privacy and how much we own our own lives. And how we can be crippled by the bad choices we make and the secrets we're forced to keep.

Mike Bencivenga
DG Member: 98288
Phone: 917-797-7654
E-Mail: imshmenge@aol.com

CHARACTERS:

BRIAN MULCAHY (60) - A well known writer for The New York Times
TERRI MULCAHY (47) - Brian's wife and a hospital administrator
ALAN CLAY PARKER (32) - An unemployed playwright from a good family
LISA HOROWITZ - PARKER (30) - Alan's wife and a real estate agent

PLACE:

New York City, the fifth floor apartment of a building in the West 70s

TIME:

Act One - The fall of 2017
Act Two - Two years later

STAGE SETTING:

Brian and Terri Mulcahy's apartment is old and spacious. They occupy half of the top floor of a building that dates back to the 1940s. A door at stage right leads in from the fifth floor landing stairwell. A kitchen area, upstage, has windows facing out onto Columbus Avenue. To the left of the kitchen is a small office area complete with a tower computer and monitor easily ten years old. On the desk is a huge, bulging rolodex with business cards and news clippings sticking out of it. There is a three drawer, wooden filing cabinet in the corner. Downstage from this area is a sunken living room with a very broken in sofa and an easy chair separated by a coffee table. Stationed throughout the apartment are humidifiers to keep the air moist and comfortable for Brian.

ACT I

LIGHTS UP. It's night in the fifth floor walk-up apartment. The sounds of the city drift up from the street below. As two people make their way up the stairs we can hear them quarreling outside.

BRIAN (O.S.)
I don't see why you have to be so damned sociable.

TERRI (O.S.)
One of us has to. Otherwise we'd never do anything or see anyone.

BRIAN (O.S.)
Sounds wonderful. Let's do that.

The door opens and TERRI MULCAHY (47) enters and flips on the lights. She removes her coat as she awaits her straggling husband.

TERRI
We already do that. Six nights out of seven. Tonight was a startling departure.
(looking out at him)
You all right?

BRIAN MULCAHY (60) staggers in the door, struggling to catch his breath. He holds onto the door jam, weakened from the climb.

BRIAN
Did this building grow an extra floor while we were out?

TERRI
Nope. Still five flights. Same as always.

Brian walks in as she closes the door. Terri keeps a watchful eye on him as she moves around the apartment, turning on a series of humidifiers located on every open space. She moves quickly and efficiently, as befits her training as a nurse. Brian takes off his coat and struggles to breathe. He violently coughs.

BRIAN

Views. We had to have views.

TERRI

If we never go anywhere we might as well have a view.

BRIAN

(dropping in a chair)

We had a terrific view until they built that damned ten story eyesore across the street. Before that you could see all the way to Jersey. I miss that.

TERRI

I thought you hated New Jersey.

BRIAN

I do. But I like to look at it. From a distance. From a distance it's fine.

TERRI

Don't get too comfortable. Come on. Help me straighten up.

BRIAN

<u>You</u> straighten up. You invited them.

TERRI

(moving about)

We both did. When we saw that girl from the party freaking out about her car I said you could help. And I distinctly heard you snarl 'okay.'

BRIAN

(snarling)

Okay.

(getting out of the chair)

I just don't like'em is all.

TERRI

She seemed nice. A little unhinged, but sweet.

BRIAN

Not her. She's cute. I meant her husband, the literary genius. Going on and on all night, saying Tennessee Williams said this and Shakespeare said that. As if he had coffee with them last Tuesday.

(breathless, moving to her)

What do you want me to do?

TERRI
I'll put something out. You go straighten up the bedroom.

BRIAN
Why should I straighten up the bedroom? Are we going to sleep with these people?

TERRI
No.

BRIAN
Good. I'm not up to an orgy. I'd need a nap first.

TERRI
(going to the refrigerator)
Just go tidy it up.

BRIAN
Can't we just close the door?

TERRI
No.

BRIAN
Why not?

TERRI
Because I might want to show them the apartment.

BRIAN
Here's an idea. Don't show them the apartment.

TERRI
She's in real estate. She's going to want to see the apartment. She doesn't need to see your underwear on the floor.

BRIAN
Don't think of it as 'underwear on the floor.' Think of it as potpourri.

TERRI
Go.

Brian goes into the bedroom while Terri rummages in the fridge. She finds something.

TERRI

What is this?

BRIAN (O.S.)

What?

TERRI
(holding a plate)

What is this?

BRIAN (O.S.)

Where?

TERRI

In the fridge. Under the cellophane.

BRIAN
(appearing in the doorway)

I can't see the refrigerator from the bedroom. What are we talking about?

TERRI
(holding it out)

This.

BRIAN
(stepping closer)

It's flan.

TERRI

What are we doing with flan?

BRIAN

Is there a law against having flan?

He walks back into the bedroom.

TERRI

Where did you get it?

BRIAN (O.S.)

I bought it from the Puerto Rican guy who runs the deli. His wife makes it.

TERRI

Is it good?

BRIAN (O.S.)
It's terrific.

TERRI
I mean, is it still fresh? When did you buy it?

BRIAN (O.S.)
Yesterday. I was going to write you a letter about it but I couldn't find a pen.

TERRI
I'll put it out.

BRIAN (O.S.)
No. Don't put it out.

TERRI
Why?

BRIAN (O.S.)
Because it's mine.

The downstairs door BUZZES. Terri moves to the intercom and shouts into it.

TERRI
(into the intercom)
We're here. Top floor. No elevator. Sorry.

During this Brian steps out.

BRIAN
You might want to ask 'Who is it?' You could've let in an ax murderer.

TERRI
There are no ax murderers in this neighborhood. Go finish the bedroom.

BRIAN
It's finished. Socks, underwear gone. No sign of them.

TERRI
What did you do with them?

BRIAN
I threw them out the window. That's what keeps the ax murderers away.

TERRI

Go fix drinks.

BRIAN

Drinks? I'm not fixing drinks. I offered to help them get their car back. That's all.

TERRI

Please, get the bar together.

BRIAN

I don't see any reason for that.

TERRI

The 'reason' is because I asked you. Please don't be like this.

BRIAN

Like what?

TERRI

Like the way you've become. At least for an hour or two.

He grudgingly goes to the bar and organizes it.

BRIAN

I've asked you not to do that.

TERRI

Do what?

BRIAN

Say 'this' and 'that' when I'm out of earshot.

TERRI

You mean 'eyeshot.'

BRIAN

You know what I mean. I told you how that irritates the crap out of--

TERRI

I'll do my best. Anything else?

BRIAN

'Anything else' what?

TERRI
Any other rules you want to lay down before our guests get here.

BRIAN
No.

TERRI
Good.

Brian sees he's upset her and moves toward her.

BRIAN
I'm sorry.

TERRI
For what?

BRIAN
For being like 'this.' And when I threw my underwear out the window I accidentally tossed out all your jewels and evening gowns.

TERRI
I don't have any jewels and evening gowns.

BRIAN
No jewels, no evening gowns and no view of Hoboken. Fine provider I turned out to be.

She moves to him and kisses him on the cheek.

TERRI
Just fill the ice bucket and try not to growl at our guests. Or I'll throw <u>you</u> out the window.

BRIAN
How about this? I'll find Carlucci's number so we can get rid of them fast.

TERRI
Fine. Do that.

He moves to his desk and starts searching through an enormous rolodex of contacts. During this Terri rummages in the fridge.

TERRI

Is this any good?

BRIAN

What's 'this?'

TERRI
(holding up a bottle)

This bottle of wine?

BRIAN

I guess. It's still white. And cold.

TERRI

And what about that cheese?

BRIAN
(exasperated)

What about that cheese?

TERRI

Is it any good?

BRIAN

It's delightful. Goes great with flan.

She arranges the food on a tray.

TERRI

Since when do you like flan?

BRIAN

I don't. I think it's disgusting. Like something that might come out of your body when you're sick. But if it's done just right it's amazing.

TERRI

I had no idea I married a flan snob.

BRIAN

It's important to have standards. I'm very picky about my flan. Just like you are with your donuts.

She carries the tray of food to the coffee table.

TERRI

If you ate as many stale donuts off that coffee cart as I have you'd be picky too.

BRIAN
You wouldn't have to eat off of a cart if the food in the hospital was better.

TERRI
If the food was better the patients wouldn't leave. We make the food disgusting on purpose because we need the beds.

BRIAN
So its all a conspiracy?

TERRI
Absolutely.
(moving to him)
You know who makes great donuts? The Amish. Remember when we visited your aunt and we had those great donuts?

BRIAN
(smiling)
Those were <u>some</u> donuts. Perfect sinkers.

TERRI
Just the right consistency. Cake-like with a slight bit of crust. And nothing smeared on them or squirted inside. Those Amish have it down.

BRIAN
The way the Amish make donuts is the way this guy's wife makes flan.

TERRI
It's that good?

BRIAN
Sensational!
(the doorbell RINGS)
Much too good for these assholes. Put it back in the fridge.

TERRI
No!

BRIAN
(moving to the table)
She made it special for me!

TERRI
But they're our guests.

BRIAN
Exactly! That's why they can't have any. One bite of my flan and we'll never get rid of them.

The doorbell RINGS again.

TERRI
Leave it there. And no growling.

She affixes her most pleasant, relaxed smile and opens the door. ALAN CLAY PARKER (32) and his wife LISA HOROWITZ-PARKER (30) step in. They are young, affluent and stressed.

ALAN
(stepping in with Lisa)
Hi.

TERRI
Hello again.

LISA
Thank you so much for offering to help us out.

TERRI
It's our pleasure, really.

ALAN
This has never happened to us before. I mean never.

Lisa takes a look at their apartment and gasps.

LISA
Oh my God! Look at this place. Would you look at it, Alan? It's amazing. But, of course, it would be. I was saying to Andrea at the party that you two are just what I imagine when I think about New York. Charming, funny and smart.

TERRI
That's us.

Brian slinks back to his desk and rolodex.