

"COMPROMISED"

(15 Page Excerpt)

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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 the ongoing health struggles of the first responders and journalists who covered 911. And how we can be crippled by the bad choices we make and the secrets we're forced to keep.

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.

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.

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 stragglng 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. There was a time you carried me up the whole way and across the threshold. Remember?

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 all around. Brian 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

You straighten up. You invited them.

TERRI

(moving about)

We both did. When we heard that girl at 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)

This! What is it?

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.

Brian comes in from the bedroom.

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'em.

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

You know, I've asked you hundreds of times 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.

(putting food on a tray)

And 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.

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. And we need the beds.

(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)

Yeah. Those were some 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!

(looking at her)

Hey!

TERRI

What?

BRIAN

I'm sorry.

TERRI

For what?

BRIAN

For being like...the way I've been. I'm sorry for that.

TERRI

Thanks.

BRIAN

You know what else?

TERRI

What?

BRIAN

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 kisses him on the cheek and pushes him toward the bar.

TERRI

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

BRIAN

How about this? I'll find Santini'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. Terri continues to dig through 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 isn't it?

TERRI

And what about that cheese?

BRIAN

(exasperated)

What about that cheese?

TERRI

Is it any good?

BRIAN

It's delightful. Goes great with old white wine. But not with flan. I'm putting the flan back in the fridge. It's much too good for these assholes.

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. Terri puts the tray of food on the coffee table.

TERRI

Leave it there. And no growling.

She affixes her most pleasant 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

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 the 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.

LISA

It's so lovely. And simple. Our place is gi-normous. Like a McMansion. It's so big that when we built it there were zoning issues. But we got around it. It pays to have a good lawyer, am I right? But this is so cozy. You always feel like you're together. You know? Not like you live in separate states like us. Do you mind if I look around?

Terri shoots Brian a knowing smile.

BRIAN

No. By all means. Be sure to check out the bedroom.

She walks into the bedroom followed by Terri. Brian continues to search his rolodex.

ALAN

You really think you can find the car?

BRIAN

(flipping through the entries)

If it got towed, yeah. I know a guy who's a big mucky-muck at the Port Authority. He's in charge of the whole towing scam. If they have it, he'll know where it is. All I have to do is find his number. It's in here somewhere. You want a drink?

ALAN

I don't drink.

BRIAN

Okay, make me one. Scotch rocks.

Startled, Alan goes to the bar and fills a glass with ice. Brian continues to search as Lisa and Terri come back out of the bedroom.

LISA

(to Terri)

So charming. I'll bet you get great light too.

TERRI

We do. We used to get more before they built that monstrosity across the way.

LISA

Can't stop progress. One man's monstrosity is another man's paradise.

(looking around)

You know what makes it? The cameo frame moulding.

TERRI

The what?

LISA

The decorative touches all around the walls.

TERRI

Ha! I've always just called them little pieces of wood. 'Cameo Frame' sounds so much more elegant.

LISA

(to Alan)

Babe, what are you doing? You know you're not supposed to drink.

ALAN

I'm making it for him.

Alan shoots her an angry look as he moves with the drink to Brian.

LISA

Sorry. I didn't mean to snap. This whole car thing has me on edge.

TERRI

Do you want a drink?

LISA

No. I shouldn't. I'll be driving when we get the car. Alan can't drive.

BRIAN

(to Alan)

You never learned to drive?

ALAN

I can drive. It's just--

LISA

He got a DUI and they suspended his license. He's on probation. Two years. So I have to drive him everywhere.

ALAN

I still can't believe we got towed.

LISA

I told you to read the signs.

ALAN

I did. They don't make any God damned sense. In Connecticut there's either 'parking' or 'no parking.' Here its 'alternate side parking' or 'loading but no standing' or 'no parking between eleven and three or after two AM.' What the hell is that?

BRIAN

(sipping his drink)

Rules are rules. But like you say, it pays to have a good lawyer. Right? Heh heh heh.

LISA

Right. My father's a lawyer. Here in the city. We were going to call him before you offered to help out. Thank God we didn't. He'd kill me if he heard we got towed.

(to Brian)

Could you please call your friend? I really need to find my car. If they didn't tow it, it could be stolen. And if that happened, I'm as good as dead. You know? So call.

TERRI

(moving to her)

Try to stay calm. It's just a car.

LISA

It's more than 'just a car.' I'm in real estate. Without a car I have no legs.

TERRI

Don't say that. It's--

LISA

I've got clients who expect to go out. Tomorrow.

TERRI

Can't you call a cab or an Uber?

LISA

When you're an agent your car is your office. It's part of your persona. Losing your car is like having your legs chopped off.

TERRI

Please stop saying that.

LISA

Why?

BRIAN

Because my wife works in recuperative care. She's surrounded by people who've actually had their legs chopped off. And their hands. Feet. So--

LISA

(to Terri)

Oh my God. I'm so sorry.

TERRI

It's okay.

LISA

No. It was horribly insensitive. I apologize. I tend to get a bit 'crazy' when I come to New York. I lived here as a child and it got under my skin. In a bad way. It's so relentless, you know. I just couldn't take it.

BRIAN

(still searching)

New York isn't a place for the faint of heart. Or the overly optimistic. Or the easily depressed. It's to be avoided by pretty much everybody. The next time you think about coming I suggest you stay home.

Terri shoots him a silencing look.

LISA

I need a cigarette. Okay if I smoke?

TERRI

No it's not. Sorry.

LISA

(further upset)

All right. That's fine. I get it.

TERRI

Get what?

LISA

You're still upset by what I said. I understand. It was thoughtless and horrible and now you're sorry you ever asked us here. I don't blame you for feeling that way.

TERRI

That's not it. Brian has breathing issues. If you want to smoke why don't you go up on the roof? That's where I go.

LISA

(smiling)

You smoke?

TERRI

Every chance I get.

LISA

Wonderful. Join me?

TERRI

Sure.

Terri leads the way out. Lisa follows.

LISA

(to Alan)

Stay on the car thing, babe. The minute you hear anything call me.

They go out the front door to the roof stairs. As soon as they're gone Alan sighs.