



Beach Lane
"Pilot"

Written by
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EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- DUSK (PRESHOOT)

It's raining. MIKE, his business suit soaked, is walking down a country road in the middle of nowhere. As a pick-up truck approaches, Mike turns and sticks out his thumb. The pick-up stops. An ELDERLY FARMER rolls down the window and speaks to Mike, while his ELDERLY WIFE stares at him.

FARMER
Where you headed?

MIKE
Manhattan.

FARMER
(TO WIFE) Toldja.

And with that, the pick-up peels out -- spraying Mike with gravel. FREEZE-FRAME on Mike, soaked and alone.

MIKE (VO)
You're probably wondering how I got here. So am I.

INT. LARRY KING SHOW -- NIGHT (PRESHOOT)

Mike is across the desk from LARRY KING.

LARRY KING
When it comes to the celebrity profile, no writer is more sought after -- or prolific -- than my first guest. You've read his work in Vanity Fair, Esquire, GQ, and many other magazines. Mike Brennan, nice to see you again.

MIKE
Good to be back, Larry.

As the interview continues, Mike's VO replaces the interview audio...

MIKE (VO) (CONT'D)
Not to brag, but everything Larry said is true: sought-after, prolific, well-paid -- all that. But also? Bored out of my mind.

INT. FOUR SEASONS HOTEL LOUNGE -- DAY (PRESHOOT)

COLIN FARRELL

...and when it comes down to it,
the craft of acting -- not the art,
but the craft -- is an amalgam of
sense-memory, of actual memory, of
real emotion, of feigned emotion,
of imagined emotion, of--

REVEAL: Mike sitting across from COLIN FARRELL, writing this all down in his reporter's notepad. Mike is nodding intently, but we catch him yawning with his mouth closed. Then signaling the waitress for a drink refill.

MIKE (VO)

This isn't journalism. And I would know. Because I used to be a real journalist.

EXT. KUWAITI DESERT -- NIGHT

Pan across three sleeping SOLDIERS, dug in for the night next to an armored vehicle, till we find Mike -- wearing a combat helmet that's too big for him and writing in his reporter's notepad by the light of a penlight he's holding in his mouth.

MIKE (VO)

Those were the days. Yes -- even the threat of death by dysentery or artillery shell evokes fonder memories than typing up... you know... Gwynneth Paltrow's secret recipe for homemade muesli.

INT. WHITE HOUSE BRIEFING ROOM -- DAY

Mid-90s analog video footage of PRESIDENT CLINTON taking questions from the press.

PRESIDENT CLINTON

...So we'll see what develops. Yes, Mike?

In treated-to-look-like-mid-90s-analog-video, Mike stands up.

MIKE

Mr. President, with regard to NAFTA, do you plan to insist that the *maquiladoras* -- the Mexican raw goods factories -- abide by the same emissions standards that...

MIKE (VO) (CONT'D)

Ah, NAFTA. Sweet, sweet NAFTA. But now...

INT. DRESSING ROOM -- NIGHT

ZACH GALAFINIAKIS slouches in his chair, wearing an only-partially closed bathrobe.

ZACH

...and when it comes down to it, the craft of comedy -- not the art, but the craft -- is an amalgam of observation, of expectation, of anticipation, of...

Mike, not even pretending to take notes, is trying to open a bottle of backstage beer.

MIKE

Is there an opener, or--

ZACH

It's a twist-off -- of expected anticipation, of suspense, of release...

INT. TROPICAL BEACH -- DAY

Mike sits on a boulder on the beach, writing in his notepad while bathed in the warm glow of a beautiful tropical sunset.

MIKE (VO)

All I really want is get away from all this -- from New York, from the magazine world, from the famous people and the uninteresting stuff they're always saying. Just go someplace peaceful, and write a book.

Two PROP GUYS walk up to Mike and gesture that they need the boulder he's sitting on. WIDEN TO REVEAL: the lights and rigging of the soundstage movie set Mike is sitting on. The beautiful sunset, which is just a painted backdrop, gets wheeled away. A PUBLICIST retrieves Mike...

PUBLICIST

So Nicolas is waiting in his trailer for you.

(MORE)

PUBLICIST (CONT'D)

And as per our agreement: no questions about his tax mix-up. Or his last movie. Or his family. Or--

INT. LARRY KING SHOW -- NIGHT (PRESHOOT)

Mike is in mid-interview.

MIKE (VO)

You can waste a lifetime planning the perfect exit strategy. Or you can just burn all your bridges at once, and move on to the next chapter.

Interview audio up...

LARRY KING

So magazine journalism -- where's it headed?

MIKE

Honestly? Straight down the toilet. It's all celebrity profiles. And celebrity profiles, it's taken me all-too-long to realize, are just glorified press releases. I am just a cog in the machine.

LARRY KING

A well-paid cog in the machine.

MIKE

Yes. A whore, if you will. And I'm done with it.

LARRY KING

You've made that pretty clear. So what's next?

MIKE

I'm going to take some time off. And get back to what I love: good, old-fashioned shoe-leather journalism. A book.

LARRY KING

About...?

MIKE

I'd rather not say just yet.

LARRY KING

Well, we look forward to it,
whatever it is.

MIKE

So do I.

INT. MIKE'S NYC APARTMENT KITCHEN -- MORNING (PRETAPE)

Mike, in jeans and a t-shirt, enters with a Greek diner take-out cup of coffee. He sits down at his kitchen table, opens his laptop, and cracks his knuckles.

MIKE (V.O.)

There was only one problem. I didn't actually have an idea for a book. At all. Not even an inkling of a notion that could become an idea. Nuth-thing.

CLOSE-UP on the computer screen, as Mike slowly types "T...H...E." Then stops to think.

MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

On the plus side, the phone certainly wasn't ringing anymore. So I had plenty of time to think...

INT. MIKE'S NYC APARTMENT KITCHEN -- MORNING (PRETAPE)

Mike, unshaven and unkempt, enters with another Greek diner take-out cup of coffee. He takes off his coat to reveal he's just wearing a bathrobe. He sets the coffee down on the kitchen table, which is littered with empty Greek diner take-out coffee cups. As is every other flat surface in the kitchen. Mike opens his laptop, thinks, then types, "B...O...O...K." Then nothing.

MIKE (V.O.)

So when my agent called and told me about some consulting job...

The phone rings. Mike answers it immediately, like a man who hasn't had human contact in three weeks.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Hi, Roger! No, I'm good! I'm good! I'm really busy, but I'm really good! I'm super good! What kind of consulting exactly?

MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I thought a change of scenery might
just the thing to keep me from...
you know... killing myself.

Mike scribbles down the contact info on a slip of paper.

INT. DINER ON WEST SIDE HIGHWAY -- MORNING (PRESHOOT)

Mike enters the diner, now clean-shaven and well-dressed. The place is empty, except for a MAN with a crewcut in a dark blazer. Mike approaches him.

CREWCUT MAN
Mr. Brennan?

MIKE
(CONSULTING SLIP OF PAPER) James
Wilson?

CREWCUT MAN
Nope. But I can take you to him.

Crewcut Man pulls out a walkie-talkie and speaks into it:

CREWCUT MAN (CONT'D)
(INTO WALKIE-TALKIE) Bird in hand.
Fire it up.

EXT. WEST SIDE HIGHWAY -- MORNING (PRESHOOT)

As Crewcut Man leads Mike across the highway to a pier -- where a helicopter is throttling up. As Crewcut man guides Mike onto the helicopter...

MIKE
I thought this was just going to be
a breakfast meeting...

CREWCUT MAN
We'll have a full breakfast waiting
for you at the destination, sir.

MIKE
And what's the destination?

CREWCUT MAN
Dockhampton.

INT./EXT. HELICOPTER -- MORNING (PRESHOOT)

Mike looks out the helicopter window, fighting his hangover, as the town of Dockhampton comes into view: beautiful beaches on the south shore of Long Island, big mansions and small cottages, a one stop-light Main Street, etc.

EXT. DOCKHAMPTON DRIVING RANGE -- MORNING (PRESHOOT)

The helicopter has landed in the middle of the driving range. Mike gets off and ducks his way out of the rotor wash. He waits for Crewcut Man to get off -- but instead, the helicopter just takes off again. Mike is standing alone in the middle of an empty driving range. He starts walking towards the tees. As he walks, he hears something from the far end of the driving range. He turns and looks. It's a man on horseback, riding towards him. Mike waves faintly -- but as the horse gets closer and closer, it seems like it's coming straight towards him. Mike turns and walks faster, looking over his shoulder -- but the horse keeps coming. Finally, Mike breaks into a run, certain he's about to get trampled. When he gets to the tees, the horseman pulls up right next to him. JAMES WILSON (tanned and tousled from a life of leisure) gets off the horse. He's wearing tennis whites.

JAMES

Mr. Brennan? James Wilson. Glad you could make it.

MIKE

(WINDED) My pleasure. Except for you almost trampling me with the horse.

JAMES

Sorry. What I was trying to do was not trample you with the horse. I never really learned how to drive one of these things.

MIKE

You don't "drive" a horse.

JAMES

You can say that again! Just saddle up and hang on for dear life, am I right?

MIKE

Not exactly the textbook definition of equestrianism, but okay.

(MORE)

MIKE (CONT'D)
(RELAXING) She is a beautiful
animal, though.

Mike rubs the horse's forelock

JAMES
Isn't she? I call her Sally. Her
real name's Shandooah, but I find
that hard to pronounce. Come on --
let me show you the paper.

James starts walking away, leaving the horse alone and
untethered.

MIKE
You're just going to leave her
here? What if she... you know...
eats a golf ball or something?

JAMES
No, they don't do that. Believe me,
I've tried.

MIKE
Why would you--

JAMES
To settle a bet. But that's a story
for another time. Let's go.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY (PRESHOOT)

As a bright-red Lamborghini speeds -- way too fast -- down
the road. The car recklessly swerves around two innocent
people on bicycles, one of who runs off the road and
disappears into a drainage ditch.

INT. JAMES'S LAMBORGHINI -- CONTINUOUS (PRESHOOT)

James, oblivious, is talking on his cellphone.

JAMES (INTO CELL)
Javier? Send someone down to the
driving range. Ol' Shnandoo got
loose again, and I think I saw her
down there. (HANGS UP) So Mike...
let me tell you what I'm talking
about here.

Mike is hanging on for dear life, and through this
conversation tries to silently encourage James to keep his
eyes on the road.

JAMES (CONT'D)

What I got is the Dockhampton Gazette. One of the oldest continually-published small-town newspapers in America, or so they tell me.

MIKE

How old is it exactly?

JAMES

Oh, it started way back in... like... the olden-time days.

MIKE

That old, huh?

JAMES

Even older maybe! Now, I'm going to be honest with you. I don't know thing one about running a newspaper.

MIKE

Uh-huh. And how long have you owned it?

JAMES

Just bought it last week.

MIKE

You bought it, but you don't know anything about--

JAMES

Actually, my stepmother bought it. Bought it for me, put me in charge. And if I do a good job at this, we're going to buy a few more newspapers, and build up a nice little media empire, making me...

MIKE

A latter-day William Randolph Hearst.

JAMES

Who's a great guy, by the way. I partied with him once in Gstaad.

MIKE

I really don't think you--

JAMES

Well, here we are!

EXT. DOCKHAMPTON GAZETTE PARKING LOT -- CONTINUOUS (PRESHOOT)

The Lamborghini skids to a stop in the gravel parking lot. In front of a very old single-story clapboard building with a wooden sign that says "DOCKHAMPTON GAZETTE" on it.

INT. DOCKHAMPTON GAZETTE OFFICE -- DAY (AUDIENCE)

Mike and James enter the newspaper offices. It's small and quaint. Wooden desks, ceiling fans, ancient framed photos on the wall. The decor and office equipment look like they're from the 1950s -- with a few updates in the 1970s. It's an open layout, but at the opposite end, there's an editor-in-chief's office with a door that closes. As James and Mike cross, STEVE -- a young reporter -- pulls a sheet of paper out of an actual electric typewriter and hands it to James.

JAMES

Thanks, Dan. Dave. Is it Dan or Dave?

STEVE

It's Steve.

JAMES

You're right. Which one is Dan or Dave again?

STEVE

I don't think we have a Dan or a Dave, sir. Maybe you're thinking of... Carol?

JAMES

Probably. (RE: NEWS COPY) Anyway, what's this?

STEVE

It's my story about the fundraiser at the Coast Guard station.

James scans the copy intently for a long beat.

JAMES

This looks great, Steve. Really great stuff.

STEVE

Really?

JAMES

Yep. And I am going to read it just as soon as I find my glasses. Now, could you bring us two coffees?

STEVE

Okay, but... (TRYING TO BE DELICATE) as a reporter, it's not technically my job to fetch--

JAMES

(TO MIKE) Cream? Sugar?

MIKE

I'm good.

JAMES

Make it one coffee, Steve. And also, if you can find my glasses, I'll toss you five bucks or so.

INT. EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS (AUDIENCE)

James and Mike enter. James sits down behind the big wooden editor's desk. James hands Mike Steve's news copy.

JAMES

You want to give this a read?

MIKE

Sure.

Mike sits down and starts reading Steve's copy.

JAMES

Out loud, please?

MIKE

I'm not going to read aloud to you.

JAMES

Dyslexia?

MIKE

Dignity.

JAMES

Fair enough.

MIKE

So why don't you tell me what...
um...

(MORE)

MIKE (CONT'D)

what your proposed plan for...
Basically, what the hell am I doing
here?

JAMES

Right. Here's the deal, in a
nutsack: I saw you on Larry King. I
know you're writing some kind of
book, right?

MIKE

Well, that's... um... that's...
let's just say yes.

JAMES

So this is perfect. I just need you
for one or two days a week. In
which you come in here, you teach
me how to run a newspaper. And the
rest of your time is yours -- to
write your book.

MIKE

For how long?

JAMES

Well... how long does it take to
learn how to run a newspaper?

MIKE

Some people would say it takes a
lifetime.

JAMES

I'm a fast learner, Mike. So why
don't we say three months or so?

A knock at the door. Steve pokes his head in.

STEVE

Staff meeting.

James gets up and starts to exit.

JAMES

Coming. (TO MIKE) Perfect
opportunity for you to see what
we're all about here. See, we have
these get-togethers called "staff
meetings," during which we--

MIKE

I know what a staff meeting is.

JAMES

Then you're going to love this. I
call head of the table!

INT. DOCKHAMPTON GAZETTE OFFICE -- DAY (AUDIENCE)

Gathered at the conference table are Steve and Carol (another young reporter, very well-dressed) -- and that's it. James rushes to take his place at the head of the conference table -
- as if he expected Mike to try for it.

JAMES

Mike? Say hello to the staff of the
Dockhampton Gazette.

MIKE

Hello, everyone. (TO JAMES) So this
is the entire staff?

CAROL

There was another guy, but he quit.

STEVE

He died, actually.

CAROL

Tomato, tomahto.

JAMES

So yes -- we are a little short-
handed right now. But we get by --
don't we, gang?

STEVE

Actually, we do. It's a very small
town. Nothing ever happens here.

JAMES

Well, I wouldn't say "nothing." For
example: tomorrow's issue. What's
the lead story?

CAROL

The "lead" story is the main story
that goes on the front page of the
paper.

JAMES

(TO CAROL) He knows what a "lead
story" is, Carol.

CAROL

You didn't.

JAMES

It's a learning process. Now,
seriously -- what do we got?

CAROL

(LAYING OUT PHOTOS) "Whale Carcass
Washes Up On West Beach."

James looks to Mike, hoping Mike shares in his enthusiasm.

JAMES

Huh? Huh? And we've got the photos
to prove it. See? That's the tail.
That's the eye. That's the--

MIKE

(TO CAROL) It is a small town,
isn't it?

STEVE

Very small, sir.

MIKE

Are there... any other contenders?

STEVE

(A LITTLE NERVOUS) Well, I'm not
sure it's a lead story, but I did
some pretty solid work on it and
um... the headline would be:
"Fundraiser At Coast Guard Station
Goes Off Without a Hitch."

Dead silence.

STEVE (CONT'D)

And then underneath that, the sub-
head would be... (LOSING
CONFIDENCE, TRAILING OFF) "Silent
Auction Pleases Crowd."

JAMES

Whale carcass. (TO MIKE) Whale
carcass? (DECISIVE) Whale carcass.
(TO MIKE) Right?

MIKE

Well, I mean... does this happen
often? A whale carcass washing up
on the beach?

JAMES

Hell, it seems to happen about five
or six times a year!

MIKE

So then... that's not really news,
is it?

JAMES

It's news to the whale, that's for
damn sure!

James laughs heartily at his own joke, but no one else does.

CAROL

It does sell papers. Which should
give you some idea of our
readership.

MIKE

I just mean that it's sort of a
"dog-bites-man" story.

JAMES

Right! Hang on -- a who-does-what
story?

MIKE

It's just another way of saying
that... if a whale carcass is such
a common occurrence, then it's not
really news.

JAMES

(THOUGHTFULLY) Right. Right. Two
different ways of saying the same
thing. One confusing, the other a
little more understandable.

MIKE

Didn't anything else happen out
here this week? A house fire? A
burglary? Anything?

STEVE

It's a very small--

MIKE

I know, Steve. I know.

JAMES

Okay, how about this? Same photos,
different headline: "Dolphin
Carcass Washes Up On West Beach."

MIKE

But it's not a dolphin.

JAMES

Who's going to know? I mean, what it is is a carcass. Of some kind of seafaring animal or creature. And unless you're a... a...

MIKE

Marine biologist--

JAMES

Thank you -- then who's going to know the difference?

MIKE

James? What you're proposing is, in fact, the exact opposite of solid journalism. Nobody has anything else?

CAROL

Well, the town council finally gave approval to have the old Wingate Mather Orphanage Building demolished.

JAMES

Snooze. (TO MIKE) Right? Snoozer!

MIKE

(TO CAROL) What is it again?

CAROL

It's basically a old, rotted-out shack. The locals have been trying to tear it down forever. But the Committee For The Preservation Of Historical Dockhampton wants to keep it there and make it a landmark.

JAMES

The "Preservation Committee"? Puh-lease. Entirely made up of rich snobs who only come out here to their fancy second homes on weekends when the weather is nice to pretend they're living the "real" country life. "City" people, you know? (TO MIKE) No offense.

MIKE

None taken. But this sounds like something. For one, there's conflict.

(MORE)

MIKE (CONT'D)

And if you've got conflict, you've got a story. Maybe not a great story, but definitely better than the whale carcass.

JAMES

What if it were a manatee carcass?

MIKE

But it's not. (TO STEVE AND CAROL)
So why don't you guys find out more details about the orphanage? The property it's on, who's for tearing it down, who's against it...

JAMES

Okay, I get it. The carcass story is too hot for you. It's too real -- too raw.

MIKE

Yes, James. I've been sent here as part of a massive whale carcass cover-up. Society just isn't ready to know the full truth.

JAMES

I wish I was sure you were joking.

INT. BEACHFRONT COTTAGE -- DAY (AUDIENCE)

James is showing Mike around the living room of a New England-style cottage. There are off-season drop-cloths covering the furniture. It's a little musty, but very cosy. James pulls aside the half the curtains, revealing a beautiful view of the dunes and the ocean beyond.

MIKE

Wow. Wow!

JAMES

I knew you'd like it. You could sit in here and write your book, then go out there to the beach. Then come back and write your book some more. Then after that? Back to the beach. Then? After tha--

MIKE

I get it. And I can't say I'm not very, very intrigued. But this place is probably a little pricey...

JAMES

It is. But for you? One dollar a month.

MIKE

And you'd just need me one or two days a week?

JAMES

Three tops.

MIKE

I've got to say, James - this does seem like a great place to get some good writing done. And--

They're interrupted by the sound of FEMALE GIGGLING from outside on the porch. James opens the other half of the curtains, revealing TWO GORGEOUS GIRLS in bikinis, who are stepping out of their robes into the hot tub outside.

JAMES

Hang on, Mike. I apologize. (TO GIRLS) Desiree? Mindy? Not today, okay? Sorry. I'll explain later.

Pouting, the girls put their robes back on and exit.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I told the girls who work at my stepmom's restaurant they could use the hot tub here when no one's around.

MIKE

Far be it from me to... you know... interrupt the standard operating procedure around here.

JAMES

Tell you what, Mike: If the girls turn out to be a nuisance, I'll knock that rent down to fifty cents a month.

MIKE

You drive a hard bargain, James. But I think we just might be able to work something out here.

INT. EDITOR IN CHIEF'S OFFICE -- DAY (AUDIENCE)

James sits at his desk, eating a sandwich. Mike, poking around, uncovers an old-fashioned electric typewriter.

MIKE

Wow. This is a genuine IBM Selectric. I had one of these in college. They don't even make these anymore.

JAMES

Well, they do -- but now they're called computers and they're better.

MIKE

Are they, though? Are they really?

JAMES

Yes.

MIKE

I don't know. There's nothing like banging out a good story on a real, old-fashioned typewriter.

JAMES

Hey, I did some banging in college, but it wasn't on a typewriter, I'll tell you that much!

James laughs at his own joke, then trails off.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I'm kidding of course. I didn't actually go to college.

Carol enters with a folder full of photos, which she hands to Mike.

CAROL

Here you go. The Wingate Mather Orphanage, in all its glory. You can almost smell the raccoon piss just looking at these.

MIKE

Alright, so it's just an old shack. But there's something to be said for the value of keeping old things around.

JAMES

It's that kind of thinking that made us the last town on Long Island to get a 7-11.

MIKE

And is that such a bad thing?

JAMES

Here we go again with the city folk perspective.

MIKE

"City folk"? James, you own a newspaper. You're not exactly a farmer.

JAMES

No. But my Granddad was. A potato farmer. Till he ended up selling all his property to city folks like you who wouldn't know a potato from a tuber.

MIKE

A potato is a tuber.

JAMES

My point is: it's not about money. It's about city folks versus locals. Weekenders versus year-rounders.

MIKE

Okay. And not to sound pretentious, but-

CAROL

Too late.

MIKE

Am I really the last man left who believes in cherishing and honoring our history?

JAMES

No. You're the last man left who's never had to drive an hour and a half just to get a Big Gulp.

As Carol exits, Mike notices that Steve is gesturing to him from the outer office -- where James can't see him.

INT. DOCKHAMPTON GAZETTE OFFICE -- DAY (AUDIENCE)

Mike steps out from James's office. Steve closes the door.

MIKE

What's up?

STEVE

Okay. Well. Here's the thing. Okay.
Alright.

MIKE

Just take a deep breath, Steve.

Steve takes a deep breath. Mike waits a long beat, then...

MIKE (CONT'D)

And let it out.

STEVE

(EXHALES) Okay, I went down to the
county assessor's office, and...
Okay. I would rather not be
involved in this, so...

Steve hands Mike some xeroxed documents and rushes away. Mike
takes a look at them. A long look.

INT. EDITOR IN CHIEF'S OFFICE -- DAY (AUDIENCE)

Mike enters, perusing the xeroxed documents.

MIKE

So, James...

JAMES

Yes?

MIKE

It would appear that the property
the old orphanage stands on was
purchased just last year by a
company called "Wilson Investments,
LLC"

JAMES

Weird name for a company.

MIKE

(OFF OTHER DOCUMENT) A company
solely owned by one Mrs. Neelie
Wilson. Who, unless I'm mistaken--

JAMES

(BREAKING DOWN) Okay, my stepmother owns the land, okay? I knew that! Guilty as charged! But what was I supposed to do? She wants to build a day spa on the property.

MIKE

I knew this was too good to be true...

JAMES

I was hoping you wouldn't find out! It was Steve, wasn't it? That sneaky little glasses-hiding shi--

MIKE

Journalism is about facts. Not about hiding the facts to protect our friends. Or our families. Or ourselves.

JAMES

You don't know my stepmom, Mike. If we run this story, she'll tear me a new one. Again! A newer one, I guess you'd call it!

Mike starts putting on his jacket.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Don't go. I've learned my lesson. So let's just run the shark--

MIKE

Whale--

JAMES

--whatever-carcass story, and I'll never lie to you again.

MIKE

Have a nice life, James.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- DUSK (PRESHOOT)

Mike walks along in the rain -- just as he was in the first scene -- talking on his phone.

MIKE (ON PHONE)

Just find me a train station, a bus station, a taxi service.

(MORE)

MIKE (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Roger, if I knew where I was, I
wouldn't be here. (LOOKS AROUND)
I'm on a road. By a pond. With some
ducks and/or geese in it. Does that
help? Alright, call me back.

Mike hangs up, just as James's red Lamborghini pulls up
alongside him. James rolls down the window and drives along
next to Mike at walking speed.

JAMES
Get in. Come on. There are wolves
out here.

MIKE
There aren't wolves out here.

JAMES
Okay -- coyotes, then.

MIKE
There aren't coyo--

JAMES
Ticks? Deer ticks? There are
definitely deer ticks.

INT. JAMES'S LAMBORGHINI -- DUSK (PRESHOOT)

James drives, as Mike checks his arms for ticks.

JAMES
I did some soul-searching, Mike. I
searched my soul. I really did.

MIKE
Find anything of note?

JAMES
You're right. If I want to do this
whole newspaper thing, I've got to
do it right.

MIKE
I remain skeptical.

JAMES
Look. Let's run the orphanage
story. And let the chips fall where
they may.

MIKE
I reiterate my previous remark.

JAMES

I want to do this right. (BANGING STEERING WHEEL) For once in my life, I want to do something right!

MIKE

(A LITTLE FRIGHTENED) Okay, okay -- take it easy.

JAMES

So let's do this!

MIKE

Okay. But that's not exactly how it works. The first lesson of journalism is--

JAMES

Hey, Mike? Exactly how many "first" lessons of journalism are there? Cause that's like the fourth or fifth one you've laid on me today.

MIKE

Sorry. The... second lesson of journalism is: "Always get a quote."

JAMES

From who?

MIKE

From all parties involved. Which would include your stepmothwe.

JAMES

You're killing me, Mike. You're killing me. And she's going to kill me. Maybe she'll kill you too. Is that what you're after? Would a double-homicide be good enough for you, or is that just another "man-eating-dog" story?

INT. JAMES'S STEPMOTHER'S STUDY -- NIGHT (PRESHOOT)

A book-lined study. Framed nautical prints, etc. James paces, then notices Mike studies a large oil painting -- a portrait of a silver-haired man, his much-younger wife, and a yellow Labrador Retriever.

JAMES

He was quite a guy, my pop. He used to say the funniest things. Like "When's dinner?" And "The next time someone touches the thermostat I'm going to put a lock on it!"

James laughs fondly, remembering.

MIKE

A real bon vivant, huh?

JAMES

Yep. Whatever that means, he was it.

MIKE

And that's your stepmother?

JAMES

Yeah, that's her. The Wicked Witch Of The Worst.

The door bursts open and James's stepmother, NEELIE, enters. She's in mid-conversation with LEE, an interior decorator who's struggling with an armload of blueprints and wood samples.

NEELIE

(TO LEE) No on the maple, no on the oak, and definitely no on the... what is this one again?

LEE

Teak.

NEELIE

Teak? Teak? We're building a mudroom, Lee -- not an opium den.

LEE

But--

NEELIE

Enough! And don't start crying. (PATIENTLY) I don't hate you, I just hate your ideas. Which is part of my process. Now run along and design me a boot bench that doesn't look like it belongs in a Filipino dollhouse, okay? Kiss, kiss, still loving you with mild reservations...

Neelie closes the door in his face.

NEELIE (CONT'D)
(TO MIKE) Never hire a designer who
is not to-the-manor born.

MIKE
Okay.

NEELIE
(KISSING JAMES ON THE CHEEK)
Darling boy. And this must be the
famous Mr. Brennan. Charmed, I'm
sure.

MIKE
As am I.

NEELIE
So does our James here show any
aptitude as a prospective member of
the Fourth Estate?

MIKE
He does. I really think he does.
But journalism can be a... rather
tricky proposition.

NEELIE
So how can I help you tonight?

Mike nudges James.

JAMES
Well, Neelie, it's like this: we're
working on a story for the
newspaper, and... well... this one
is kind of a toughie, but... Mike
here wants to get a quote from you.

MIKE
Actually, James -- I think you need
to do this.

Mike reaches into his breast pocket and hands James a
reporter's pad. And then a pen. Then Mike takes back the pen,
uncaps it, and hands it back to James.

NEELIE
I'm all ears.

JAMES

Okay. Well. It has come out that... they're going to tear down the old Wingate Mather orphanage and you own the property so you stand to benefit so do you have a quote?

Neelie pours herself a shot of brandy from a decanter.

NEELIE

So let me get this straight. (TO MIKE) I buy him a restaurant, he burns it down.

JAMES

Not intentionally.

NEELIE

I buy him a vineyard, he turns it into a lagoon.

JAMES

(TO MIKE) No one ever warns you about over-irrigating...

NEELIE

Now I buy him a newspaper, and he makes me public enemy number one?

JAMES

Maybe Mike here can clarify the--

NEELIE

Okay, you want a quote, I'll give you a quote. Take this down: "America was built on progress. The Wingate Mather orphanage is not only an eyesore, but a sad reminder that Dockhampton's better days lie in the future, and not in the past." Did you get that?

JAMES

(CLOSES PAD) Got it.

NEELIE

Read it back to me.

JAMES

(OPENS PAD, SQUINTS) Um... "America was... um... something on..."

MIKE

(FROM MEMORY) "America was built on progress. The Wingate Mather or--"

NEELIE

He's got it. And that's all I have to say on the matter. Good evening, gentlemen.

Neelie exits. Mike pats James on the back, and James finally exhales.

JAMES

And that's my stepmom. You got any fancy French words for what she is?

MIKE

I could think of a few...

INT. EDITOR IN CHIEF'S OFFICE -- LATE THAT NIGHT (AUDIENCE)

Mike, in shirtsleeves, is banging out the story on the Selectric typewriter. James is slumped in a chair, glum.

JAMES

How's it looking?

MIKE

(TYPING) It's looking good, James. It's a solid story. Not earth-shattering, but it's good, old-fashioned journalism, which is...

Mike notices that James is silent. He stops typing and turns.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Come on. I know that was hard with your stepmother. But you did a good job. And maybe not now, but eventually? She's going to respect you for doing something and doing it right.

JAMES

And what is that: the eighteenth rule of journalism? Or are we up to nineteen already?

MIKE

(BACK TO TYPING) Lighten up, James.

JAMES

The Preservation Committee people are going to eat this up with a spoon.

Carol enters.

MIKE

What do you got, Carol?

CAROL

I went to the historical foundation, and dug up the original deed for the orphanage. Written by Wingate Mather himself, in 1853.

MIKE

(STILL TYPING) Perfect. Read me the good parts...

CAROL

(READING) "I, Wingate Mather, do hereby bestow up this town..." Blah, blah, blah... "A home for orphans, foundlings, and the other human detritus of this troubled world."

MIKE

(TYPING THIS IN) Excellent. Keep going.

CAROL

"...In hopes that our community will be spared the ungodly public sight of children of Native Savage, mixed-race, or pure Negroid descent."

Mike's typing slows to a trickle, till he stops. But he doesn't turn around to face Carol.

CAROL (CONT'D)

(READING) "Likewise shall the unwanted offspring of the nefarious Jew and the filthy Irish be kept under lock and key in this well-fortified orphanage, such that their presence will not be a blight on our God-fearing township." And he goes on--

MIKE

I think I get the general idea.

A long beat.

MIKE (CONT'D)

So. What do you guys say we take
another look at those whale carcass
photos?

EXT. WINGATE MATHER ORPHANAGE -- DAY (PRESHOOT)

TIGHT ON: Someone holding a copy of The Dockhampton Gazette. The headline: "DEMO SET FOR SHACK OF SHAME." Over a photo of the orphanage, which really is just a broken-down old shack. The newspaper is lowered, revealing the orphanage itself in real life. Pull back to reveal: a backhoe is standing by to begin the demolition. Pull back further to reveal: Neelie is standing at a raised podium, giving a speech over a PA to a crowd of townspeople in folding chairs.

NEELIE

And so it is with a great sense of civic pride that we hereby demolish this last remaining testament to our darker days, as we move forward to a future in which the tragedy of hatred and intolerance and hatred will be a mere memory to our fine community.

Panning across the crowd, we find Mike and James. James is doing his best to write down Neelie's speech in his reporter's notebook.

NEELIE (CONT'D)

And yes, we've had our battles over this issue. But let not the bonds between us simple country folk and our city cousins be torn asunder. Preservation Committee Co-Chair Jon Bon Jovi? I offer you my hand, in peace.

Polite applause as JON BON JOVI steps up to shake Neelie's hand. They smile for a photographer. As soon as the photographer is done Neelie drops her smile and gestures to the back-hoe operator, who starts up his machine. ON Mike and James...

MIKE

Did you get all that?

JAMES

(LOOKING AT PAD) I got it. I got it. I mean, I got it up through "civical pride," but--

MIKE

Don't worry. I got it. "Civic pride that we hereby demolish, et cetera, et cetera." (TAPS HIS HEAD) It's all up here.

JAMES

I don't know how you do that. You think you could teach me?

MIKE

Probably not.

Neelie walks up.

NEELIE

Good job, boys. Great story. (TO MIKE) And I understand you'll be staying on here?

MIKE

Just for a few months. While I work on my book.

NEELIE

What exactly is your book about?

MIKE

I'd rather not say just yet.

Neelie steers Mike away from James.

NEELIE

A man of mystery, as always.

Neelie looks over at James, who's trying to suavely eat a big mouthful of cotton candy while talking to Mindy and Desiree.

NEELIE (CONT'D)

And do what you can with James, will you? I promised his father that James would amount to something someday.

MIKE

I'm sure he will.

NEELIE

His father didn't think so. But I do like a good project. (SHIFTING GEARS) Anyway, let me know when you're free, and I'll put together a little dinner for you at the house and you can regale me and eight of my closest friends with the latest hot goss from Tinseltown.

MIKE

That's nice. But I'm sort of done with the whole celebrity thing.

NEELIE

So you've said. But I pay James and James pays you, so let's say tomorrow night at seven, okay?

MIKE

Smart casual?

NEELIE

Business attire.

Neelie sees Lee approaching, with a handful of wood samples.

NEELIE (CONT'D)

Will my troubles never cease? (TO LEE) Please tell me that's not cedar? Cedar? (TO MIKE) Cedar?

MIKE

Cedar.

NEELIE

I know! (TO LEE) Fine! Let's just use cedar and be the Swiss Family Robinson and drink out of coconuts and have ostrich races all the live long day! Come on...

INT. BEACHFRONT COTTAGE -- NIGHT (AUDIENCE)

Mike is sitting at a table, typing on an electric typewriter.

MIKE (VO)

"E.B. White once said that to make it in New York, you have to be willing to be lucky.

(MORE)

MIKE (VO) (CONT'D)

I'd say the same holds true when you're done with New York -- and when New York's done with you."

Close-up on the page as he types: "A Year In The Life Of A Small Town Paper." Then, below: "By Mike Brennan." He pulls the page out, rolls in a new one, and types: "Chapter One." Return. Starts typing, and we hear what he's typing in VO.

MIKE (VO) (CONT'D)

"The daily drama of small town life, though set on the most modest of stages, is no less--AGH!"

James has silently entered, giving Mike a fright.

MIKE (CONT'D)

You scared me half to death!

JAMES

Sorry, buddy. Working on your book?

Mike pulls the page he was typing out and sets it face-down.

MIKE

Just typing up some general thoughts.

JAMES

Cool. General thoughts. I have those sometimes.

James putters around the room, looking at things, bored.

MIKE

What's on your mind, James?

JAMES

I was thinking, if you're not busy--

MIKE

Which I am--

JAMES

We could drive my horse down to West Beach and take a look at the whatever carcass one last time before it washes away.

MIKE

Maybe another time.

JAMES

Okay then. Another time. An. Other.
Tuh. Ime.

Mike rolls the page back into the typewriter. Tries to pick up where he left off. But he can't focus -- as James is still puttering around the room. Mike gives up.

MIKE

I assume you brought flashlights.

JAMES

And a stick to poke at it with!
(EXITING) I call front seat!

END