

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Charlie and Leona sit across from one another at her expansive desk. Off to one side is Leona's son, Reese.

LEONA

Uh, can we have the room please? ...
Moses and Jesus are playing golf.
Moses steps up to the tee and hits
a beautiful shot 250 yards,
straight down the middle of the
fairway. Jesus steps up to the tee
and hooks the ball into the trees.
Jesus looks up into the heavens,
raises his arms. Suddenly the sky
darkens, a thunderclap rings out,
rain pours down and a stream rises
among the trees. The golf ball
floating on top finds its way to
the mouth of a fish then a bird
flies down and takes the fish and
the ball out over the green, drops
it in the cup for a hole-in-one.
Jesus turns to Moses with a
satisfied grin and Moses says
"Look, you wanna play golf or you
wanna fuck around?"

Charlie smiles.

LEONA (CONT'D)

What in God's name has happened to
News Night over the last six
months?

Charlie begins to chuckle.

CHARLIE

Leona...

LEONA

Do not laugh.

CHARLIE

Leona, the ratings have stabilized,
we're doing a show you can be proud
of, and I'll get them back where
they used to be.

LEONA

What happened to human interest
stories?

(MORE)

LEONA (CONT'D)

Obesity, breast cancer, hurricanes,
older women having babies, iPhones...
He was great at that shit.

CHARLIE

He was sleeping during that shit.

LEONA

And whose idea was it to wake him
up?

CHARLIE

For the third time, it was mine. I
engineered a situation wherein an
executive producer with a unique
ability to bring out the very best
in an anchor with a unique ability
were paired to do a news broadcast
this company can and should be
proud of.

LEONA

And re-brand ACN as MSNBC's more
combative brother?

CHARLIE

We did the news.

LEONA

For the left.

CHARLIE

For the center.

LEONA

Are you fucking out of your mind?

CHARLIE

For the center, Leona. Facts are
the center. Facts. We don't pretend
that certain facts are in dispute
to give them the appearance of
fairness to people who don't
believe them. Balance is irrelevant
to me. It doesn't have anything to
do with truth, logic, or reality.
He didn't go on the air telling
people to give peace a chance, but
evolution? The jury's back on that
one.

LEONA

He humiliated congressional
candidates on my air.

CHARLIE
It's not your air, Leona...

LEONA
Excuse me, I...

CHARLIE
He needs to continue with this...

LEONA
Listen to me.

CHARLIE
Listen to me! America just elected
the most dangerous and addle-minded
Congress in my lifetime.

LEONA
I have business in front of this
Congress, Charlie!

CHARLIE
Reese, why don't you give us a
minute?

LEONA
He can stay.

CHARLIE
Reese, get the fuck out.

Leona shrugs. Reese gathers his things and goes. (Line: I'll
be right outside.)

LEONA
How would you like me to respond to
your unfiltered contempt for my
son?

CHARLIE
By telling him to get a paper
route.

LEONA
Look pal, you...

CHARLIE
What the hell is his job, anyway?

LEONA
President of this company.

CHARLIE
Yeah, I don't know what that means.

LEONA

It means he's gonna have my job one day.

CHARLIE

Please, please let me be dead by then.

LEONA

I'd be happy to arrange it.

CHARLIE

So, Will pissed off whoever you were sitting next to at dinner Saturday night. I thought you got where you are by being fearless.

LEONA

No, I got where I am by knowing who to fear. And the Koch brothers are not playing around if that's what you're talking about, they drop Briggs trucks on people they disagree with. You, and me.

CHARLIE

Leona you can't possibly expect us to tailor our news coverage to what best suits our corporate...

Leona holds up a hand to silence him.

LEONA

Let's start over. And this time, disabuse yourself of the idea that this is a conversation between equals where I make an argument, you make a counter argument and we agree to disagree. Our cable news division accounts for less than 3% of AWM's annual revenue. You don't make money for stockholders, which I have a fiduciary responsibility to to. Well, last night, the voters ousted 21% of Congress, including seven members of the House sub-committee on communications and technology. 3 of those 7 are AWM's most reliable friends on the hill. The Congressmen that will be replacing them are the same people that Will has been making look like fucking morons for the last six months.

CHARLIE

They've done a pretty good job of making themselves look like morons.

LEONA

I have business in front of this Congress, Charlie, and whatever you may think of these people, which is the same thing that I think of them, they hold the keys to the future of AWM. Anything more than a pack of gum and I have to go to Congress for permission. You know I don't make the rules, but I do abide by them.

CHARLIE

News organizations...

LEONA

Careful with the lectures.

CHARLIE

...are a public trust with an ability to inform and influence the national conversation.

LEONA

I know. That's why I bought one. Alright. They're not candidates anymore, they are Congressmen and he's gonna lay off.

CHARLIE

He's not gonna lay off anything.

LEONA

Oh, yes he is.

CHARLIE

Let me ask you something, and don't forget I've known you for 20 years. If Joel McCarthy sat on the House sub-committee for communications and technology would you have told Murrow to lay off?

LEONA

No.

CHARLIE

Why?

LEONA

Because he was a genuinely bad guy.

CHARLIE

Michelle Bachman's called for Congress to be investigated to ferret out House members who are un-American.

LEONA

Michelle Bachman is a hairdo. I'm not worried about Michelle Bachman.

CHARLIE

I wonder how many people weren't worried about McCarthy.

LEONA

You know Charlie, a lot of people might argue that Will is on a witch hunt.

CHARLIE

And a lot of people might argue that there are witches out there.

LEONA

I'll fire him, Charlie... I'm not asking him to lie, I'm not asking him to cover anything up, but he's gonna tone it down, or I'm gonna fire him.

CHARLIE

Well, best of luck trying to program against him.

LEONA

Oh, I don't have to. He's got a non-compete clause in his contract. He's gonna have to stay off television for three years.

CHARLIE

That's a death sentence.

LEONA

It is.

CHARLIE

How would you possibly explain firing the second most watched anchor on cable?

LEONA

By creating what we call context.
His firing would be viewed as a
noble step on the part of a
corporation willing to sacrifice
ratings for integrity.

CHARLIE

You'd manufacture a reason to do
it.

LEONA

I've got a really good job,
Charlie. Now you wanna play golf or
you wanna fuck around?