

EPISODES

Episode 409

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EPISODES

"Episode 409"

FADE IN:

EXT. BEHIND THE "PUCKS!" STAGE - MORNING - DAY 1

CAROL is waiting by the dumpsters. BEVERLY comes up.

BEVERLY

By the way, enjoy this, because it's  
the last time I'm meeting you here.

CAROL

(trying for upbeat)  
I think it's fun.

BEVERLY

"Fun" doesn't usually smell like this.

CAROL

So you pick a place.

BEVERLY

Well, you have to agree, this is  
insane! At what point can we stop  
living in fear of your girlfriend --

Just then a SANITATION WORKER drives up in a forklift,  
carrying a dumpster with an enormous load of garbage.

CAROL

(to janitor)  
Uh, excuse me. Hi. Could you give us  
a moment, please? We're kind of in a  
meeting here.

The sanitation worker gives her a blank look, then starts to  
tip the dumpster, spilling bags of garbage into a large  
holding bin.

CAROL

O-kay.

BEVERLY

All right, I'm just putting this out --

The garbage bags are filled with cans and bottles. It's  
particularly loud and clattery.

BEVERLY

I'm just putting this --

There are still more bags, a cacophony of crashing cans and bottles.

BEVERLY

I --

She waits. The cascade of garbage bags is finally done. The driver tips the dumpster back with a loud crash. The forklift pulls away.

BEVERLY

All right. I am just putting this out there... Tomorrow morning I am going on a hike. By myself. Alone. 7:30. Our usual spot. Do with that what you will.

CAROL

Okay. Gotcha.

BEVERLY

I will say this, life was simpler before you became a lesbian.

CAROL

(chuckles)

A lesbian?? I'm not a lesbian.

BEVERLY

Really? What would you call it?

CAROL

I don't know. I feel uncomfortable with labels.

BEVERLY

Well, label or not, if you open a can and there's beans in it, it's a can of beans.

She walks away.

INT. "PUCKS!" STAGE - MINUTES LATER - DAY 1

Beverly returns from seeing Carol. She joins SEAN at the monitors.

SEAN

Where were you?

BEVERLY

Uh, just stepped out for some fresh air.

Sean sniffs something unpleasant. It's Beverly.

BEVERLY

What?

SEAN

Nothing.

But clearly she smells like garbage.

INT. "THE BOX" STAGE - SAME TIME - DAY 1

MERC and ARJEN are giving MATT a tour of the game show set as the crew bustles around them, giving it final touches. Arjen and Merc are explaining the game to Matt.

ARJEN

Once the contestants are in the boxes,  
we begin the questionings.

MATT

Okay...

MERC

You ask them questions. If they get  
'em right, they get points --

ARJEN

(frustrated)  
Not points.

MERC

(rolling his eyes)  
Fine. Not points.

ARJEN

Advantages.

MERC

Right.  
(mouthing to Matt)  
Points.

ARJEN

I see you!

MERC

(backing off)  
Okay...

ARJEN

(sighs; going on, to Matt)  
The contestants are then able to use their advantages in two ways. A, they can --

MERC

(to Matt, confidentially)  
By the way, it's obviously too late for the pilot, but if this thing goes, maybe think about a few trips to the gym.

MATT

(bristling)  
I fucking go to the gym.

MERC

Okay, well, maybe less with the juice bar, more with the machines.  
(pats his belly)  
Just saying.

MATT

Seriously? This is coming from you?  
(gives Merc's belly a much firmer pat)  
Just saying.

MERC

Hey, I'm not the one in front of the camera. I don't have to be pretty.

MATT

Mission accomplished.

He gives Merc's belly one more hard pat.

ARJEN

Gentlemen.

MERC

Sorry. Go on.

Matt and Merc exchange one more resentful look.

ARJEN

(to Matt)  
The contestants can use their advantages in two ways. A, they can acquire necessities for themselves.

MERC

Like a blanket, a chair, food --

ARJEN

Or B, they can use their advantages to punish the other contestants. They can make the other boxes colder or hotter, or fill them with the bugs --

MATT

Really? Bugs?

MERC

Oh yeah, they always go for the bugs. Then you say "Release the bugs!" And the audience goes "Release the bugs!" And then you do not want to be in that fucking box.

MATT

Jesus. Can they get out?

ARJEN

The bugs or the people?

MATT

Either.

ARJEN

No.

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER - DAY 1

Carol and HELEN are having lunch. Helen is focused on someone behind Carol.

HELEN

Okay, don't look, but there's a guy who's been staring at you for the last ten minutes.

CAROL

Me?

HELEN

Uh huh. Ooo, he's getting up... He's coming over... And if it's who I think it is...

An attractive man approaches their table. It's CASTOR SOTTO.

CASTOR

Carol?

Carol sees who it is and audibly gasps.

HELEN

(pleased)  
It is.

CASTOR

(laughs at Carol's reaction)  
That's totally fair. I'm so sorry to interrupt. I just had to say hello.

CAROL

(flustered)  
Oh my god. Hi. Uh, Helen Basch,  
Castor Sotto.

CASTOR

Nice to finally meet you.

HELEN

You, too.

CASTOR

How's my old office? I'll bet you're still picking pills out of the rug.

HELEN

It's like Liza Minnelli's dressing room.

Everyone laughs. Castor is absolutely lucid and sane. He couldn't be more charming. Smart, winning, self-aware.

CASTOR

(to Carol)  
I also wanted to apologize for... I don't even know where to start.  
(to Helen)  
What I put this poor woman through. I'm sure she's told you.

HELEN

Maybe a few colorful highlights.

CASTOR

Oh, I was a *nightmare*.  
(to Carol)  
But you were amazing through all of it.

CAROL

Well... You seem like you're doing much better now.

CASTOR

Much. I'm back on my meds. Even got some new meds.

CAROL

(with a chuckle)  
Couldn't hurt.

CASTOR

(laughs)  
No argument here.

CAROL

Well, I'm happy you're doing well.

CASTOR

Actually, really well. I'm not supposed to say, but...  
(confidentially)  
I just found out I'm going to be running the CW.

CAROL/HELEN

No!

HELEN

What happened to --

CASTOR

He's going over to ABC. It's all still very hush hush. They're making the announcement next week.

CAROL

Wow.

HELEN

Congratulations.

CASTOR

I know, it's *crazy*. But better that kind of crazy than my usual...

He indicates his former "crazy". Everyone chuckles.

CASTOR

Anyway. I'll let you get back to it. Again, I just wanted say so sorry for everything.

CAROL

It's fine.



CASTOR

Mmm, it's not.

CAROL

No. But... thank you for saying something.

CASTOR

Take care. Nice meeting you.

HELEN

You, too.

Castor leaves. Carol starts to say something.

HELEN

(stopping her)

Five second rule.

Carol quietly counts five seconds, then sure that Castor's out of earshot:

CAROL

... three... four... five... Holy shit!

HELEN

Bet you didn't see that coming.

CAROL

They're letting him run a *network* again?? They rolled him out of ours strapped to a thing like Hannibal Lecter.

HELEN

By the way, he is much hotter in person.

CAROL

Oh, yeah, he's dreamy.  
(off Helen's raised eyebrow)  
For a guy. Please. Hello. Thank you. Nooo. Ich. Seriously.  
(little throat clear)  
We should get a check.

INT. CAROL'S OFFICE - LATER - DAY 1

Carol enters, just back from lunch. As she's setting down her bag, her cell phone rings. She answers.

CAROL

Hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. STREET - SAME TIME - DAY 1

Castor is driving in his car.

CASTOR  
Hey, it's me. Can you talk?

CAROL  
(surprised)  
Uh, sure.

She shuts her door.

CASTOR  
I have a question. I couldn't ask in front of Helen. And I may be way out of line here, but...

CASTOR  
I'd like to offer you a job.

CAROL  
I'm actually seeing someone.

CASTOR  
I'm sorry, what?

CAROL  
(quickly)  
What?

CASTOR  
I didn't hear what you said.

CAROL  
(covering)  
You're offering me a job?

CASTOR  
Yes. I would love you to be my number two again. They said I can bring in anyone I want. I'll pay you twice what you're getting now.  
(earnest, persuasive)  
I need you here.

CAROL  
Wow. Uh, I'm really flattered. But I'm very happy where I am. I love working for Helen. I could never -- Literally twice?

CASTOR  
I want you to be happy.

CAROL  
(with some effort)  
No. No, I can't. I --

CASTOR  
Look, I get that you have  
trepidations. How could you not? But  
I still think we could make a hell of  
a team. I promise, I can be the  
person you thought I was.

CAROL  
(conflicted)  
Even so, I --

CASTOR  
At least think about it. If it's a  
"no", I totally understand. But until  
it is, I'm hoping it's a "yes".

Carol hangs up. She stares at the phone, stunned at this turn  
of events.

INT. BAR - THAT NIGHT - NIGHT 1

Sean and Matt are drinking at the bar.

SEAN  
So, excited about tomorrow night?

Matt gives him a look.

SEAN  
(same tone)  
So, depressed and morose about  
tomorrow night?

MATT  
There ya go.

SEAN  
And what exactly is this game?

MATT  
It's just seven idiots trying to stay  
inside these boxes for seventeen  
weeks.

SEAN  
They're in the boxes the whole time?

MATT  
Yep.

SEAN

Dear god. Why would someone do that?

MATT

(shrugs)

Money. To be on TV.

Sean shakes his head.

MATT

I know, it's crazy.

SEAN

(a thought)

Although...

MATT

What?

SEAN

You're willing to be a game show host for money and to be on TV.

MATT

It's a little different.

SEAN

Is it?

MATT

Well, for one thing, I'm making a shitload of money.

SEAN

I'm sure for them whatever they're getting is a shitload of money.

MATT

Yeah, well, I'm not stuck in a box.

SEAN

Mmm...

MATT

What?

SEAN

Not a literal box. But you're trapped, doing this thing you don't want to do, in front of everyone, with no way out.

MATT  
(stares at him)  
What are you doing?

SEAN  
Nothing. I just think it's ironic.

MATT  
Mmmm. You know what else is ironic?

SEAN  
What?

Matt gives Sean a push, knocking him off his bar stool. From the floor:

SEAN (O.S.)  
Um, that's not actually what irony is.

EXT. TRAIL HEAD - NEXT MORNING - DAY 2

Beverly is waiting by her car. Carol pulls up and gets out.

BEVERLY  
Look at you, all gutsy. I wasn't sure you were going to turn up.

CAROL  
I know. It's like all those years sneaking around with married guys. Kind of makes me feel alive again.

Beverly gives her a "who are you?" look. Carol shrugs. They start to walk.

CAROL  
Also, Helen's in New York at an affiliates meeting.

BEVERLY  
So not that gutsy.

CAROL  
Oh, so what!

They resume their hike.

EXT. TRAIL - A LITTLE LATER - DAY 2

Carol and Beverly are hiking, mid-conversation.

BEVERLY  
Look, I swore I would never give you advice again.

CAROL

Nobody believed that.

BEVERLY

Well, good, because if you take this job with Castor, you're as crazy as he is.

CAROL

First of all, it's twice the money.

BEVERLY

No, first of all it's Castor!

CAROL

He seems fine! Plus it might be good for me and Helen. Not to be together all the time?

BEVERLY

Oh, no, it's a brilliant plan. You going to work for your male ex-lover? That won't feed her already *spectacular* paranoia.

CAROL

I'm just saying, I think --

They come round a bend in the trail. Helen is waiting for them.

HELEN

Hi, girls.

Carol screams. Which makes Beverly scream.

HELEN

What a warm welcome.

CAROL

Oh, god... What are you doing here?!

HELEN

I think the question is, what are you doing here?

CAROL

(nervous laugh)

What are we both doing here?

BEVERLY

(to Helen)

Look, this is not what you think.

BEVERLY (cont'd)

It has never been what you think.  
This is just a bloody haircut! It's  
not like I'm wearing a *strap-on* on my  
head!

CAROL

(pleading)

Pubey, I swear, there is nothing going  
on. It's just two friends on a hike!

HELEN

Bullshit. Two "friends" don't sneak  
off on a hike. And you can drop the  
"Pubey".

BEVERLY

Probably for the best.

HELEN

(to Carol)

You told me you were going to be at a  
breakfast meeting this morning.

CAROL

Well, you said you were in New York!

HELEN

And look what happened! You know  
what? It doesn't matter. I'm done.  
(to Beverly)  
You can have her.

BEVERLY

I don't want her!

HELEN

Well, I don't want her, either!

CAROL

(wounded)

Oh, come on!

HELEN

What I want is all your shit out of my  
house.

CAROL

Can we please just --

HELEN

Today. Your cheap moisturizer and  
your stupid sleep goggles and  
especially that fucking scrunchie.

CAROL  
(hurt)  
Really? Okay.

HELEN  
And I would like my ankle bracelet  
back.

CAROL  
Seriously?

Helen extends her hand.

CAROL  
Okay.

She removes her ankle bracelet and hands it to Helen.

HELEN  
And I believe that's my top.

CAROL  
Fine, I'll bring it to the off--

HELEN  
Now.

CAROL  
Now??

HELEN  
Now!

CAROL  
Noooo.

HELEN  
(fierce)  
Now!!

CAROL  
(cowed)  
Okay.

She removes her top and gives it to Helen.

CAROL  
Here you go.

HELEN  
My bra.

BEVERLY  
Oh, come on --



HELEN

You wanna start with me!?

BEVERLY

(to Carol, sotto)  
Give her the bra.

HELEN

(to Carol)  
Bra.

Near tears, Carol removes her bra and hands it to Helen.

HELEN

(to Beverly)  
She's all yours.

Helen marches off.

BEVERLY

I'm so sorry...

CAROL

(trying not to cry)  
I'm fine.

With her head held high, and her arms covering her breasts, Carol starts back down the trail. Beverly walks beside her. She starts to put a consoling arm around Carol, then thinks better of it. As they head off...

CAROL

The car is so far away...

INT. "THE BOX" STAGE - THAT NIGHT - NIGHT 2

It's the night of the taping of "The Box". There is much hustle and bustle as everyone prepares to shoot the pilot. The STUDIO AUDIENCE is starting to file in. Someone crosses the stage pushing a cart with several caged CHICKENS. A SOUND TECHNICIAN is setting the level of a COMPUTERIZED VOICE.

COMPUTERIZED VOICE

Securing the boxes.

SOUND TECH

(into headphone)  
Up ten percent.

COMPUTERIZED VOICE

(slightly louder)  
Securing the boxes.

Merc is talking with the STAGE MANAGER. Matt enters. He's wearing a smart three-piece suit. Merc spots him and crosses to him.

MERC  
There's our star!  
(hugging him)  
Look at you!  
(jovial chuckle)  
What's with the vest?

MATT  
What do you mean?

MERC  
The vest. I never approved that.

MATT  
I didn't approve of what you approved.

MERC  
(tight smile)  
Seriously, lose the vest.

MATT  
I like the vest.

MERC  
I'm telling you. The vest is not your friend.

MATT  
It's classy.

MERC  
It's thickening.

MATT  
It's Armani.

MERC  
Then let him fucking wear it.

MATT  
I gotta say, I'm looking at my reflection on your forehead and I think I look good.

MERC  
(teeth clenched)  
Trust me on this. I've got your best interests at heart.

It's a face off. Finally Matt takes a deep breath.

MATT

Okay.

He moves off.

MERC

Appreciate it!  
(to himself)  
Cocksucker...

Across the way, Sean and Beverly come onto the stage and look around. Merc is the first to see them.

MERC

(bad cockney)  
Well, look who's 'ere! It's Downton  
Abbey!

BEVERLY

(sotto to Sean)  
Why why why why why...

MERC

(crossing to them)  
C'mere!

He hugs them both together. Beverly rolls her eyes to Sean.

MERC

Heard about the new show. Very  
exciting. Tell me!

SEAN

Well, it's a project we actually  
developed in England. Everyone loved  
it, but...

Merc sees that the network has arrived: Helen, ANDY, MAURICE,  
and a handful of other executives. Merc immediately loses  
interest in Sean and Beverly.

MERC

Sounds great. 'Scuse me a sec.

He makes a bee line for Helen.

MERC

Mrs. Basch!

HELEN

Mr. Lapidus!

He gives her a hug.

HELEN

So? How's it going?

MERC

Fantastic!

HELEN

Yeah? You and Matt? Having fun?

MERC

(smile tight)  
He's terrific.

HELEN

(enjoying his discomfort)  
Really? You're happy?

MERC

Happy isn't even the word.

HELEN

Aww. That's what I wanted to hear.

Helen gives him a satisfied smile. She then looks over and spots Beverly. Helen gives her an arctic glare. It's enough of a death look that even Sean picks up on it.

SEAN

My god. Did you see that look she just gave you?

BEVERLY

What look?

SEAN

Seriously? I'm surprised it didn't leave a mark. It this still that insanity about you and Carol?

BEVERLY

Okay. There's something I need to tell you.

SEAN

(with dread)  
What?

BEVERLY

And FYI, I will be forced to remind you of all the times you didn't listen to me.

SEAN  
(dread mounting)  
Oh, shit.

BEVERLY  
I was on a hike with Carol this  
morning --

SEAN  
Bloody hell! I told you not to --

BEVERLY  
This would be the point where I remind  
you of all the things you --

SEAN  
(hurrying her along)  
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

BEVERLY  
We came around a bend in the trail,  
and...

She indicates Helen.

SEAN  
Nooo!

BEVERLY  
She may as well have been wearing a  
hockey mask and carrying a machete.

SEAN  
Do we still have a show?

BEVERLY  
Maybe you do.

SEAN  
Jesus Christ.

Just then Carol comes up to them.

CAROL  
(false good humor)  
Hi, kids.

SEAN  
Perfect.

BEVERLY  
How was the rest of your day?

CAROL

Great!

BEVERLY

(re: Sean)

He knows.

CAROL

Oh. It was a fucking nightmare. She hates me.

Just then, Helen glances over and sees Carol, Beverly and Sean together. She gives the three of them an icy stare.

SEAN

Shit! She just saw us with you! Get away! Get away!

Carol looks to Beverly who shrugs apologetically.

SEAN

Go!

Carol moves away. She comes over to Andy.

CAROL

Hey.

ANDY

(confidentially)

So what is going on with you and Helen?

CAROL

(all innocence)

What?

ANDY

What?? It's like "Frozen" without the songs. Don't tell me it's over.

CAROL

What's over?

Andy gives her a knowing look. Carol gives him a little look acknowledging it's true.

ANDY

Oh, Christ.

He glances toward Helen. She looks over and sees Andy speaking with Carol.

ANDY  
(to Carol)  
Okay, no offense, but you stay here.

He quickly moves away from her, leaving Carol abandoned again.  
Andy sidles up to Maurice.

MAURICE  
So?

ANDY  
I was right. It's a dark night in  
girl town.

MAURICE  
Jesus.

ANDY  
Yup. Get ready for a big, fat mess.  
Speaking of which, where's Myra?

MAURICE  
Haven't seen her.

ANDY  
Huh.

INT. HOSPITAL DELIVERY ROOM - SAME TIME - NIGHT 2

MYRA is in labor, moaning in a distinctly Myra fashion:

MYRA  
Nnnnggg!

DOCTOR  
That's it. Keep pushing...

MYRA  
Nnnnggg! Nnnnggg! Nnnnggggg!

INT. "THE BOX" STAGE - A LITTLE LATER - NIGHT 2

Getting closer to show time. Last minute tumult. The  
audience is full. Matt enters. He's still wearing the vest.  
He spots Sean and Beverly in the audience and comes over.

MATT  
Hey, you made it.

BEVERLY  
Don't you look sharp.

MATT  
Yeah? You like the vest?

SEAN/BEVERLY

I do. Very spiffy.

MATT

Yeah, well...

(indicating Merc)

That asshole won't let me wear it.

BEVERLY

What do you mean "let" you? It's your show, too.

MATT

(considers this)

Hmm.

SEAN

(to Beverly)

What are you doing?

BEVERLY

Well, it is.

SEAN

You're just stirring the shit all over the place today.

STAGE MANAGER

We're starting in two, everyone!  
Starting in two! Matt, I need you  
backstage.

MATT

(to Sean and Beverly)

Here we go.

BEVERLY/SEAN

Have fun. Don't suck.

Matt heads off. Merc speaks to the audience.

MERC

You look like a terrific audience!  
Have a good show!

The WARM-UP GUY leads the audience in big applause. Merc takes a seat at a monitor with Arjen. The network is gathered at their own monitor across the stage. Carol is standing away from them, alone, trying to remain inconspicuous. The stage manager comes up to her.

STAGE MANAGER

I'm sorry, Ms. Rance, you can't stand here.



CAROL

Oh, sorry.  
(moves back a bit)  
Better?

STAGE MANAGER

Uh, no, you can't stand anywhere.  
Mrs. Basch would like you off the  
stage.

Carol is stunned. She looks over at Helen who gives her a thin, satisfied smile. The other network execs are looking at her as well.

CAROL

(to stage manager)  
No problem. That's fine.

Humiliated, Carol musters her dignity as best she can and exits.

INT. BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT 2

Carol stops at the stage door, lip quivering. She takes out her phone and dials. After a moment:

CAROL

Hi. It's me. If it's still  
available... I'll take the job.

INT. "THE BOX" STAGE - SAME TIME - NIGHT 2

The warm-up guy revs up the audience:

WARM-UP GUY

Okay, okay, okay! Is everybody  
ready?!

The audience cheers.

INT. PRODUCTION BOOTH - SAME TIME - NIGHT 2

The production team prepares to begin the show.

DIRECTOR

Here we go, people. In five, four,  
three... Go camera one...

INT. "THE BOX" STAGE - SAME TIME - NIGHT 2

The stage is dark. Pulsing, suspenseful MUSIC. Dramatic game show lighting comes on.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

Seven people...

One by one, the boxes light up revealing the SEVEN CONTESTANTS.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

Seventeen weeks...

More percussive music. More lights. More colors.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

Only one... will beat...

The lights go to black.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

The box!

The center box boxes is illuminated, filled with smoke. The music crescendos. There is a brilliant flash of light as the CAMERA SWOOPS IN and the box opens. Matt emerges, waving the smoke away.

MATT

(re: the smoke)

I'm trying to quit. I really am.

Big audience laugh.

INT. PRODUCTION BOOTH - SAME TIME - NIGHT 2

The director is switching cameras.

DIRECTOR

Camera two... Matt... On my go...

MATT (ON MONITORS)

Welcome to "The Box"!

WOMAN IN AUDIENCE (O.S.)

How you doin'?!

MATT (ON MONITORS)

Ah. Glad we got that out of the way.

The audience laughs.

DIRECTOR

Camera one stand by...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. "THE BOX" STAGE - LATER - NIGHT 2

The game has been underway for awhile. The seven contestants are inside their boxes. A few have won luxury items: one is sitting in a lounge chair, sipping a cool drink. Another is eating a large hero sandwich. A few contestants have received punishing consequences from other contestants. One is sharing her box with several live chickens. Another is wearing a straightjacket. Another is dressed in a stupid penguin outfit. Matt is speaking with a contestant, ERIC, who is in his underwear, shivering. Matt is a natural as a host, charming and easygoing.

MATT

Hey, Eric.

ERIC

Hey.

MATT

Little chilly in there?

ERIC

Little bit.

MATT

I bet. So, okay, you've got seventeen "advantages". More than anyone else so far. Now, you can use them to buy something for yourself, like Mike and Kelly did. Let's see what's left on the board...

A holographic CGI board appears above the stage. Matt surveys the "Advantage" items still available...

MATT

Somehow I'm thinking you don't need an "umbrella" or a "mystery novel". But a "coat". Ooo. How's a nice comfy down coat sound right now?

ERIC

Sounds really good.

MATT

Or you can use your advantages to disadvantage one of your fellow contestants. Maybe get back at Claire. Just saying.

The board switches to "Disadvantages".

MATT

You can...

(looking at board)

...make someone's box ten degrees hotter. We've still got "feathers", "stinky cheese", "Gilbert Gottfried" and... with seventeen advantages... just enough to "release the bugs". What's it gonna be?

The audience shouts out which choice he should make:

AUDIENCE

The coat! Take the coat! Stinky cheese! Feathers! Release the bugs! Release the bugs!

Eric weighs his choices. At Merc's monitor:

MERC

(under his breath)

Go for the bugs... go for the goddamn bugs...

Up in the production booth...

INT. PRODUCTION BOOTH - SAME TIME - NIGHT 2

The production team waits for the answer.

DIRECTOR

Someone make sure Gilbert's ready...

INT. "THE BOX" STAGE - SAME TIME - NIGHT 2

ERIC

Matt, I would like to spend all my advantages to... release the bugs on Claire.

The audience goes crazy.

MATT

Wow. Okay.

He crosses to another box. On the way, he passes the guy in the penguin suit.

MATT

(to the penguin suit guy)

Hey, Pete. Love the tux.

He reaches CLAIRE's box. She is looking anxious.

MATT

Hi, Claire.

CLAIRE

(apprehensive)

Hi.

MATT

(sighs)

This is what happens when you take a guy's pants. So Eric went for the bugs. You like bugs?

CLAIRE

I really don't.

MATT

I can't wait to meet the person who says "yeah" to that question.

Audience laughs.

MATT

So you have a choice. You can become roommates with a bunch of creepy crawly guys... or you can ask me to open your box and forfeit the game.

Claire wrestles with the decision. At Merc's monitor:

MERC

(under his breath)

Go for the bugs... go for the fucking bugs...

MATT

Five seconds...

CLAIRE

I can't. I can't do it. I *really* hate bugs.

(with formality)

Please open my box.

The audience groans and boos, disappointed.

MATT

You sure? You know what this means.

CLAIRE

I'm sure. Open my box.

MATT

Okay...

Dramatic music. Matt presses a large, red button on the side of the box.

COMPUTERIZED VOICE

Opening the box.

The door to the box opens. Claire is released.

MATT

(to audience)

Something tells me the other six aren't gonna give up so easily. But maybe I'm wrong. We'll find out right after this.

Musical sting. Beat.

STAGE MANAGER

And we've cut! We're back in five, everyone!

MATT

(calling over to Merc and Arjen)

We're gonna change that line, right?! She can't really ask me to open her box!

The audience laughs, loving it. Merc bounds onto the stage, laughing.

MERC

Can we keep this audience every night?!

The audience cheers.

MERC

And how amazing is Matt LeBlanc?!

Audience applauds. Still smiling, Merc leans in to Matt.

MERC

So. I thought I told you to lose the fucking vest.

MATT

I like it.

Through all this, both men have smiles plastered on their faces. You'd never know there was conflict.

MERC

Yeah, well, when this is done, we gotta set some fucking ground rules.

MATT

Definitely. 'Cause somehow you got the idea that I work for you.

MERC

Yeah? And what idea do you have?

MATT

Look around. Are you the show or am I the show? If they got rid of you, who gives a shit? There's a hundred of you. We could just open up another box of short, fat producers.

MERC

(smile firmly affixed)

All right, you and I need to have a little talk.

MATT

Fine.

Merc leads Matt into what was Claire's glass box. Everyone can still see them, but no one can hear the sound or dialogue from inside the box. Once they're inside:

MERC

You don't think you're replaceable? Wake up! This isn't ten years ago. You're a guy who *used to be*! You're a *rerun*! You're hosting a fucking *game show*! Look up, way up there, you know what that is? That's the top of the barrel!

MATT

Listen, you big bag of assholes, you don't tell me what to do.

OUTSIDE THE BOX, the argument is starting to attract attention. People can't hear what's being said, but clearly it's not good. Sean and Beverly look concerned.

INSIDE THE BOX, the conversation is getting more heated:

MERC

Really??

MATT

Really!

MERC

Really??

MATT

Really! You bring nothing to this.

MERC

Fuck you.

MATT

All right, you know what? If we're gonna do this piece of crap, I don't wanna see your face.

MERC

Oh really?

MATT

Really!

MERC

Really?!

MATT

Really!

MERC

Really?!!

MATT

You don't talk to me. You don't look at me. You can take your hugs, and your annoying laugh, and your teeny tiny dick - Oh, yeah, Jamie told me. You'd think having only one ball would make it look bigger, but apparently not so much!

MERC

Fuck you!

MATT

No, fuck you!

MERC

Actually, I already fucked you. You know your NBC pilot? Who do you think told Elliot Salad about it?

MATT

What??



MERC

(with relish)

Why do think he picked up "Pucks!"?  
Oh, yeah. That's my tiny dick in your  
ass, my friend!

MATT

You son of a bitch!

He lunges at Merc. The two of them grapple. Matt clearly has the upper hand.

OUTSIDE THE BOX. Again, the sound drops out from inside the box. Matt has Merc by the throat. Everyone stares, amazed. The network executives are stunned. In the audience, Sean and Beverly look on with the others:

SEAN

Somehow, I feel like we've seen this  
show before.

INSIDE THE BOX, Matt still has his hands around Merc's neck.

MATT

You like that?!

Merc grabs Matt's crotch. Hard. Matt gasps. He manages to free himself. He puts a choke hold on Merc. The two men spin in circles as Merc tries to extricate himself. He grabs Matt's crotch again.

MATT

Again with the balls?!

MERC

You got two!!

The audience is chanting:

AUDIENCE

Matt! Matt! Matt! Matt!

Matt escapes Merc's grip. Merc starts for the door, but Matt blocks his way. Matt grabs Merc and shoves him against the glass.

OUTSIDE THE BOX, we see Merc with his face smooshed up against the glass.

MERC

Get your fucking hands off me!

INSIDE THE BOX, Matt throws Merc across the little room. He storms out of the box and hits the large red button.

COMPUTERIZED VOICE

Securing the box.

The door to the box closes, locking Merc in. Matt shouts toward the booth:

MATT

Release the bugs!

Merc is trapped inside the box, silently mouthing "No, no, no!" The audience chants:

AUDIENCE

Release the bugs! Release the bugs!

Up in the production booth...

INT. PRODUCTION BOOTH - SAME TIME - NIGHT 2

A distracted TECHNICIAN hears his cue and presses a button.

INT. "THE BOX" STAGE - SAME TIME - NIGHT 2

Merc is still silently banging on the box to get out. Matt has no intention of doing it.

COMPUTERIZED VOICE

Releasing the bugs.

The audience is going crazy, cheering. Sean and Beverly and the network executives look on in horror. But no one is more horrified than Merc. He continues to bang on the box for Matt to release him. Matt just gives him a satisfied smile.

INSIDE THE BOX, Merc looks up toward an oncoming shower of (unseen by us) insects.

MERC

No! No! No! Noooo!

On his scream...

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. NETWORK OFFICES - THE NEXT DAY - DAY 3

The elevator doors open. Sean and Beverly get off the elevator. As they head toward Helen's office, they speak in intense, hushed voices:

BEVERLY

You know, it might not be what you're thinking.

SEAN

Absolutely. I'm sure she's called us in to give us each a pony.

BEVERLY

Why would she kill the show in person? It's something they do over the phone.

SEAN

Not if she wants to see the look on your face.

BEVERLY

Maybe Carol knows something.

They go into Carol's office.

INT. CAROL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS - DAY 3

Sean and Beverly enter. There's no sign of Carol. Her desk is completely empty. All her personal things in the office are gone. Sean and Beverly are confused.

SEAN

This is her office, isn't it?

BEVERLY

I think so...

Andy appears behind Sean and Beverly.

ANDY

She's gone.

INT. CW NETWORK LOBBY - SAME TIME - DAY 3

Carol enters. She's carrying a small box of things from her office. She approaches the receptionist.

CAROL

Hi. I'm Carol Rance. I'm starting today.

RECEPTIONIST

Oh, hi.

CAROL

Can you please let Castor Sotto know I'm here.

The receptionist scrolls through her directory.

RECEPTIONIST

Uh, I have an Esther Devito?

CAROL

No no. Castor Sotto. It's not official yet, but he's the new head of the network.

RECEPTIONIST

Hang on.  
(makes a call)  
Hi. There's a woman here...

CAROL

Carol Rance.

RECEPTIONIST

Carol Rance. She's looking for Carter --

CAROL

Castor.

RECEPTIONIST

Castor Sotto. She says he's the new head of the network? ... Uh huh. Mmm-kay. That's what I thought.  
(hangs up; to Carol)  
Yeah, there's no Castor Sotto here. No one knows who he is or what you're talking about.

CAROL

Well, that's *insane*.

And as she says "insane", the word resonates, the penny drops, and Carol realizes what's happened. On her sinking expression as she absorbs what she's done...

INT. HELEN'S OFFICE - A LITTLE LATER - DAY 3

Helen sits behind her desk facing Sean and Beverly.

HELEN

I'm not a very forgiving woman. And I don't appreciate being made a fool of.

SEAN

(jumping in)  
I'm sorry, may I just say, there has never been *anything* between my wife and --

HELEN

Oh, honey, please. If it walks like a duck, and it quacks like a duck, it's fucking my ex-girlfriend. Like a duck.

Sean looks to Beverly. She shrugs: there is no way to change Helen's mind.

HELEN

But you know what? First and foremost, I'm a professional. Your show is important to this network. So I'm not going to let my personal issues get in the way of that.

SEAN

(hugely relieved)  
For which we are very, very appreciative.

He looks to Beverly to concur.

BEVERLY

Very.

HELEN

That said, there is one small change I'd like to make...

Just then, TIM enters, a bit breathless. Sean and Beverly are shocked to see him.

TIM

So sorry I'm late. Exciting, isn't it?

HELEN

Oh. I was just about to tell them.  
(to Sean and Beverly)  
I think it's best if Tim runs the show.

Sean and Beverly are stunned. Helen savors her revenge. Tim turns to Sean and Beverly:

TIM

(mouthing to Beverly)  
Oh, no.

INT. HOSPITAL DELIVERY ROOM - SAME TIME - DAY 3

The doctor hands Myra her NEWBORN BABY. She holds it in her arms. Myra looks down at her infant. She coos to her:

MYRA

Nnnnggg...

The baby responds, cooing with an identical nasal voice:

BABY

Nnnnggg...

Myra coos back:

MYRA

Nnnnggg...

BABY

Nnnnggg...

They continue cooing back and forth.

MYRA

Nnnnggg...

BABY

Nnnnggg...

FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW