

CHARACTERS

VIVIAN JADE, 42
MITCH ROHNERT, 46
RICHARD REAGLE, 43
CHRISTOPHER WORTH, 43
MOLLY WORTH, 42
MARGO WORTH, 16
SENATOR KELLY PROWSE
JULIE SHARP, 20s
NICK BLOCK, 50s
CONRAD, 20s
CAMPAIGN WORKER 1
CAMPAIGN WORKER 2
CAMPAIGN WORKER 3
CAMPAIGN WORKER 4
CAMPAIGN WORKER 5

Also needed: three camera operators, one video switcher operator.

Scene 1: Primary election night, about ten p.m. Pacific Time. The ballrooms of the Wicklow Place Hotel in New York and the Century Grand in Los Angeles.

Scene 2: Election night, six months later; about 7:45 p.m. Pacific Time. The Wicklow and Century Grand ballrooms.

Scene 1

SCENE: The stage is divided into three areas. On one side is the headquarters/victory party of United States Senate candidate VIVIAN JADE. It features a raised platform on which are a podium and microphone and several folding chairs behind the podium facing the audience. A reception desk sits off to the side. On the other side of the stage is the headquarters of U.S. Senate candidate CHRISTOPHER WORTH. His "set-up" mirrors that of VIVIAN. The headquarters are decorated with campaign paraphernalia: banners, bunting, balloons, and ballyhoo for the respective candidates. VIVIAN'S podium is labeled "THE WICKLOW PLACE HOTEL, NEW YORK" and CHRIS'S is labeled "THE CENTURY GRAND/L.A."

In the center of the stage is a news anchor set for Cable News Central. The desk has seating for two anchor people. Behind the desk is a large video screen.

The stage also features three manned video cameras which are linked to the large video screen. The signal feed to the video screen is controlled by a video switcher console, which can be onstage or off. (Operators will be needed for this equipment.)

Because the stage areas represent different places at different times, the scene descriptions will indicate what portions of the set are to be "active" but the entire set should remain onstage at all times to keep the play running at a fast clip.

The political parties of the two candidates should not be indicated; all that should be clear is that they oppose each other.

AT RISE: Primary election night, about ten p.m. On the video screen appears a chart showing that CHRIS has received 44% of the vote in his party's primary, his challenger Rufus Columbine has 40%, and the rest of his party's vote is not yet counted. Watching the results from CHRIS'S side are CHRIS, his wife MOLLY, and his daughter MARGOT. On VIVIAN'S side are VIVIAN, MITCH ROHNERT, CONRAD, and RICH REAGLE. Scattered about on both sides are five or more CAMPAIGN WORKERS whose allegiance is not specified and who cheer for whoever is at a podium.

Seated at the News Desk are anchors JULIE SHARP and NICK BLOCK. When they speak, their faces appear on the video screen. When they are not onscreen, they remain motionless. Both wear earpieces. "COMPLETE CAMPAIGN COVERAGE" appears in a graphic behind their desk.

JULIE

Sources inside the Jade For Senate campaign report that Ms. Jade has hired strategists Rohnert and Associates to go on the offensive against Senator Christopher Worth should he prevail in his party's primary race this evening. Nick?

NICK

Julie, Rohnert and Associates is best known for their work on behalf of major corporations facing serious public relations challenges. A case in point: the Chinky's Chicken fast food chain came under fire earlier this year when several children died of food poisoning after eating a contaminated batch of "Chickie Nibbles". Practically overnight the chain lost 75% of its market share and was forced to close sixty of its restaurants. The chain retained Rohnert and Associates who recommended strict new food-handling policies, a complete revamp of the restaurant's supply line, and-- most controversial-- the firing of every employee who handled food at any Chinky's restaurant. These moves were underscored by a multimillion-dollar worldwide advertising campaign designed to reassure consumers that the safety issue was a thing of the past.

JULIE

Nick, Chinky's share price went through the roof after their recent IPO, am I right?

NICK

Absolutely. The price tripled the first day of trading and currently remains at two and a half times the opening.

JULIE

So Rohnert and Associates puts out fires?

NICK

Big ones. However, the Jade campaign insists that Rohnert is on retainer merely to offer a wider range of responses should this closely-watched race turn negative.

JULIE

In other news, complaints about a barking dog led to gunplay this afternoon as...

(Her voice trails off to silence as the lights go down on the News Desk.)

(Lights up on VIVIAN'S headquarters. MITCH discusses strategy with RICH and VIVIAN.)

VIVIAN

Four points.

RICH

Does that even cover the spread?

MITCH

Don't tell me you actually bet on this!

RICH

It would merely be a contribution to the cause.

VIVIAN

The spread is six.

RICH

Nuts. Don't you gloat.

VIVIAN

I'm not gloating. I don't want to face him in November. But barely winning still wins.

(to MITCH)

We may need you after all.

MITCH

Perhaps it's better this way. If Worth were to get the boot now he could do a lot of damage on his way out. We don't need any indigestion.

RICH

Is that a code for something?

MITCH

Are you familiar with the term "poison pill," Mr. Reagle?

RICH

Sure. I made my own company swallow two or three. I don't like hostile takeovers. I don't see what that has to do with being a Senator.

MITCH

Politicians feed them to legislation. For example, say there's a popular crime bill. If I wanted to defeat it but not look like I was doing so, I might attach a death penalty rider to the bill, say, three rapes will get you the chair.

VIVIAN

That many?

MITCH

This little death penalty pill forces my opposition to either vote against the entire bill-- and look soft on crime-- or vote for it and thus go on record as supporting the death penalty. Bingo, the measure gets "tabled" and for some strange reason nobody remembers to bring it up again.

RICH

Can't you just call him on it?

MITCH

Too complicated. Takes too long to explain to voters.

VIVIAN

At this point it looks like I will beat Christopher Worth in November so how do I keep the pills out of his hot little hands?

MITCH

Don't beat him too badly.

VIVIAN

And risk losing?

MITCH

You always risk losing.

RICH

Viv, how much are you paying this guy to tell you the obvious?

MITCH

Mr. Reagle... have you ever considered that your presence here might be a liability to Ms. Jade's campaign?

RICH

I'm a liability to everyone I meet. So what?

MITCH

Voters pay close attention to a candidate's inner circle.

RICH

Not close enough. If they did, Worth would have been impeached already.

MITCH

Excuse me?

RICH

Or thrown out. Whatever you call it.

VIVIAN

Rich, what are you talking about?

RICH

His wife has to be sedated just to live with the guy.

MITCH

What do you mean?

RICH

She takes pills. They're stronger than Sleep-Eze.

MITCH

How'd you find that out?

RICH

We had lunch. They fell out of her purse.

VIVIAN

Oh Rich, you're such a sweetheart!

MITCH

Do you "have lunch" often?

RICH

She and I have a history. Look, check around. Call her doctor or whoever. I saw the pills and they weren't over-the-counter. And she didn't make a heck of a lot of sense, either.

MITCH

If this gets out, she'll be dragged through the mud.

RICH

It might do her some good.

MITCH

Maybe, but that's not your intention and you know it. If we go public with these pills people will think Mrs. Worth is either a drug addict or a psycho or both.

RICH
As long as the senator goes down, too.

MITCH
I sense you have more riding on this race than money.

RICH
Does Ms. Jade have a poison pill or not?

MITCH
This is a "panic button".

(The chart on the video screen shows that
CHRIS now has 45% of the primary vote,
Columbine still has 40%, and the rest is
still uncounted.)

VIVIAN
He's looking better. You might cover the spread after all,
Rich.

RICH
Press the button.

MITCH
How much did you bet?

RICH
Do it.

VIVIAN
(to MITCH)
Don't do it.

RICH
(to VIVIAN)
Nail him. You and he have history, too.

VIVIAN
I can win without nailing him.

RICH
But the guy's clean and he's moving up. What else have you got
on him?

VIVIAN
You.

RICH
Me? I'm nobody.

MITCH
You control Cable News Central.

RICH

Yes, and we're "Fair and Unbiased." That's a trademark, by the way.

VIVIAN

False modesty does not become you, my dear.

RICH

I can't make the news. Somebody has to be doing something first.

VIVIAN

Yes, but you can make what they are doing news. Or not.

MITCH

Does the studio take your calls during a broadcast?

RICH

The studio always takes my calls.

MITCH

If you told them to cut a story short, would they?

RICH

If they know what's good for them. But I'm not going to cut off a juicy story just because--

VIVIAN

What about a speech?

RICH

What would we switch to?

VIVIAN

Me.

RICH

You have to do something first.

VIVIAN

Okay, I will. Bam. I won the primary. I did something.

(MITCH checks something on his BlackBerry.)

RICH

Just like that?

VIVIAN

Declare me the winner.

RICH

What if you're not the winner?

MITCH

She is...

VIVIAN

Goody. See?

MITCH

...as long as nothing scary happens.

RICH

What have you got?

MITCH

Amalgamated Press reports that Ms. Jade has received 39% of her primary vote while her three nondescript challengers earned 8%, 13%, and 19%.

RICH

How much of the vote is counted so far?

MITCH

Thirty-five percent.

RICH

So it could still get scary.

MITCH

Yes... but she has a considerable lead.

VIVIAN

Declare me, honey. I wanna be on TV.

RICH

Would you love me if I didn't run a news network?

VIVIAN

Who told you I love you?

(to CONRAD)

Conrad! I need to look hot.

(RICH dials his cell phone.)

RICH

(into phone)

Rhonda, this is Rich. Put up the stats for the California Senate primary.

(CONRAD rushes over and does a quick once-over of VIVIAN: fixes her hair, lint brush, make-up check, etc.)

(Lights up on the News Desk as JULIE begins a new report. On the video screen appear the same statistics quoted by MITCH: VIVIAN with 39% and her three challengers with 8%, 13%, and 19%. The source: AMALGAMATED PRESS.)

JULIE

CNC continues its election coverage with another look at the Senate primary in California and we show magazine publishing maven Vivian Jade currently holding a promising lead. Nick?

NICK

Julie, AP reports Miss Jade is well ahead of her opponents in early returns...

MITCH

(to Rich)

Have them lose "Miss Jade"-- it's condescending and makes her sound too young to hold office.

VIVIAN

That's a problem?

RICH

(into phone)

Don't let them call her "Miss Jade". Also explain "maven"-- people don't know what that means.

NICK

...but with only thirty-five percent of precincts reporting there's still a long way to go in this race.

JULIE

That's true, Nick, and California has proven particularly unpredictable in recent years. But it has also been quite hospitable to candidates with unconventional backgrounds like Ms. Jade's, who publishes four major women's magazines including L.A. Lady, which premiered last month. Who can forget the two movie stars who took over the governor's mansion..?

VIVIAN

What are they blabbering about? Rich: now.

RICH

(to Vivian)

Wait for it! Otherwise it'll look fishy.

(into phone)

Declare Jade then get ready to go live.

(Immediately, a "WINNER" graphic flashes next to VIVIAN'S name on the video screen. The crowd erupts in a spontaneous cheer. VIVIAN steps up to the podium.)

NICK

Julie, we've just received word that this network has declared Vivian Jade the winner of her party's primary in California, so let's go live to her victory party in, uh, New York City.

(VIVIAN'S face appears on the TV screen as her speech is broadcast. All watch, even CHRIS and his people.)

VIVIAN

Thank you! Thank you everyone! I'm touched and truly humbled by these results and the support of all of you. I... excuse me.

(She takes a moment to collect herself and dab at her eyes.)

MITCH

(to RICH, quietly)

Wow. She's good.

RICH

(quietly)

Isn't she?

VIVIAN

I... I wish I could say that winning this primary is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me, but that wouldn't be true.

(a beat)

The greatest thing will be whipping the pants off Christopher Worth in November!!

(Big cheers. VIVIAN hugs RICH and a few other supporters on her side of the stage.)

JULIE

That is the scene in the Jade camp in New York this evening. Some analysts are surprised by Ms. Jade's insistence on conducting her campaign from offices in New York considering the state in which she is running is clear across the continent. Jade insiders responded, "Vivian has offices and contacts in New York and she just likes it there," end quote.

(On the video screen CHRIS'S chart shows him with 47%, Columbine with 41%, and the rest uncounted.)

NICK

Julie, as you can see from the latest results incumbent California Senator Christopher Worth is leading in his party's primary...

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