

DUTCHMEN

Pilot

Written by

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The Dutchmen:**The owner:**

LARRY JEPSEN, early 40s, owner of the New York Dutchmen and heir to the Jepsen Steel fortune.

The organization:

ELI SAUNDERS, late 30s, public relations director for the New York Dutchmen, high-energy, always in motion. Divorced with two kids.

RANI PATEL, mid-20s, Eli's most trusted assistant. Smart, knowledgeable, ambitious but already cynical.

PAUL HOSKINS, mid-20s, an entry level PR flack, who enthusiasm outpaces his intelligence.

LYLE HUMPHRIES, 60s, head coach of the Dutchmen, an experienced basketball mind and a curmudgeon.

The rival:

VITALY ANIKOV, 40s, Russian billionaire, owner of the Brooklyn River Gulls. Handsome, charismatic and menacing.

The press:

SAMANTHA REDBURN, 35, a reporter for the New York Post. The toughest reporter in town, as wily as she is skeptical.

TODD BANKCROFT, 55, an old-school reporter for the New York Star.

EDDIE SCHLIEGEL, 55, a veteran sportscaster, with an intellectual take on the game

JEREMIAH THORPE, 45, a tall former player who views the game with a dopey childlike sense of wonder

TIFFANY ALBANESI, 25, a sideline reporter with a questionable relationship to Larry Jepsen

The team:**Starting lineup:**

Point guard WALLACE BENSON, 30, a wily veteran known for racking up assists.

Shooting guard CAMILLO BENEDETTI, 24, a top pick out of Italy struggling to live up to expectations

Small forward AHMED AL-KAZEMI, 27, a prodigious scorer, with deeply held religious principles.

Power forward ANDRE LADOCEUR, 26, a superstar with a polished game and a polished image.

Center CARDARION LACEY, 33, a tall, strong big man, utterly lacking finesse

Bench:

PROSPERIO GUTIERREZ, 25, gritty rebounder. A fan favorite.

MENLIK HORSHEV, 37, a veteran sharpshooter from eastern Europe.

"PSYCHO" BILLY MENLO, 35, tall, tattooed, with a faux-hawk.

SKINNY CLOVER, 21, a rookie fresh out of community college.

LEE JACKSON, 33, former superstar shooting guard with a movie career on the side

COLD OPEN

FADE IN:

INT. MEDIA ROOM - POSTGAME

A television feed, graphics identify everyone who speaks. The room is jammed with reporters, and there's an electric hum in the air.

Dutchmen PR Director ELI HINES and Head Coach LYLE HUMPHRIES enter from the side. Eli smiles, but Humphries just slumps into his chair, tired and defeated.

FLASHBULBS. SHOUTING. The questions begin the moment Humphries sits down. Eli steps in front of the table.

ELI

Before we begin, a few quick notes. First, the Dutchmen *won* today's game. I'm not sure if any of you caught that, but it does seem relevant. To me, anyway. I'm not a writer.

More yelling from the PRESS. Eli raises his voice.

ELI (CONT'D)

Second, it's the team's tenth win a row. That hasn't happened since 1989, when we won the title. Again, I'm no journalist, but all my instincts tell me that's a solid lead. So please keep your questions focused and on topic.

He moves aside.

More shouting. A voice rises above the others. TODD BANKCROFT from the *New York Star*. He sits next to SAMANTHA REDBURN, a *Post* reporter.

TODD BANKCROFT

Coach! Were you attempting to lose this game on purpose?

A long pause. Eli stares down Humphries.

HUMPHRIES

No comment.

TODD

That's not a denial, coach.

ELI

It *is* a denial! He's shocked to near silence by your ridiculous question!

SAMANTHA REDBURN

We don't want to hear from *you*, Eli!

Eli glares at her.

THIRD REPORTER

Did it have anything to do with team owner Larry Jepsen's promise to build ten new hospitals?

Silence. Eli jumps in again.

ELI

What happened months ago at some *charity banquet* has nothing--

PRESS

Eli! Let him talk! What about the orphans? And the sick kids?

ELI

Hey! Hey! Hey! Shut up. Coach is here to talk basketball. Those questions are for Larry Jepsen, who isn't here. There will be a time and a place--

LARRY JEPSEN suddenly walks on the stage. He smiles and sits next to Humphries. Eli, wearing a pained smile, lowers his head and speaks under his breath.

ELI (CONT'D)

For fuck's sake, what are you doing?

LARRY JEPSEN

(*loud and showy*)

Don't worry, Eli. I got this one. What is up, my peoples! Jepsen IN!

END COLD OPEN

TEXT: THREE WEEKS EARLIER

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

Groups of well-dressed New York socialites sit at tables interspersed throughout a well-adorned hall, drinking wine and laughing. At a podium in front, a female PHILANTHROPIST is speaking.

PHILANTHROPIST

So thank you again, from everyone at Memorial Beachstowe Hospitals. As a private institution, your support keeps us going. And now I'd like to introduce a very special guest. You all know him as one of the pillars of our city, and, ladies, he's pretty easy on the eyes too! Please welcome Brooklyn River Gulls owner Vitaly Anikov.

The crowd applauds as VITALY ANIKOV, tall and imposing, smiles and approaches the microphone.

Larry sits next to a beautiful blond escort, TIFFANY, at an otherwise empty table, sarcastically applauding.

INT. ELI'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Eli is on his couch. His living room is filled with Dutchmen posters, souvenirs and photographs. He watches Anikov on TV.

ELI

Fuck you, you Slavic Ted Danson.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL his young son and daughter are sitting beside him.

ELI (CONT'D)

Right?

The daughter nods eagerly.

INT. RANI'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Dutchmen front office employees PAUL HOSKINS and RANI PATEL are on her couch in a small apartment. Paul is awkwardly trying to put his arm around her.

PAUL
I'm not saying I don't *like* our
arrangement, I just don't know why
it has to be a big secret.

Rani, distracted, grabs the remote and turns up the volume.

RANI
Because we work together, you
idiot. Shhh. It's Anikov.

PAUL
How did that guy get so rich?

RANI
Probably something horrible. Like
nickel mining or sex slavery or
cable television. He *is* Russian.

PAUL
Then somebody should tell him to
slow down.

He laughs at his own joke. Rani stares at him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
It's a joke! I know you were
talking about a country. Continent?
Country.
(pause)
Is it both...? Like China?

INT. BANQUET HALL - CONTINUOUS

Anikov is speaking, his arms held out wide.

ANIKOV
And this is why I am very pleased
to announce that I will be building
a new wing on Memorial Beachstowe,
paid for entirely by the Brooklyn
River Gulls!

Loud cheering from the room. Tiffany leans over.

TIFFANY
Are you donating anything?

LARRY
I think my dad gave some money. I
don't know. I'm just here for the
eggs.

He spears a deviled egg with a tiny fork and throws back his head to eat it whole. She stares at him in disgust.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Oh, come on. This can't be the worst thing you've been paid to watch.

He looks around the room. Everyone cheers for Anikov. He narrows his eyes with purpose and approaches the podium. He pushes the philanthropist aside. The crowd goes silent.

LARRY (CONT'D)
You all know me. I'm Dutchmen owner Larry Jepsen. Hold your applause.

No one applauds.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Thank you, thank you! And big thanks to our favorite rival owner, Dr. Zhivago, aka Tommy the Commie, for his thoughtful donation.

Silence. Vitaly smiles thinly.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Hey, Vitaly, you know you can't feed the patients vodka, right? They're trying to recover!

Larry takes a pull from a fake flask.

LARRY (CONT'D)
(in a bad Russian accent)
I eem cured! Ees miracle! Miracle on ice good this time!

Larry laughs at his own joke.

INT. ELI'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

ELI
You fucking dunce.

A searching look from his kids.

ELI (CONT'D)
These are all adult words for adult times, kiddos. Don't use 'em at your mom's.

INT. BANQUET HALL - CONTINUOUS

LARRY

And I want to make an announcement
of my own. If the New York
Dutchmen, the city's ONLY
basketball team, win ten games in a
row this season... I will build
this city TEN. NEW. HOSPITALS. For
CHILDREN! That is a Jepsen pledge,
New York!

Slowly, the crowd begins to applaud and then cheer. Larry
basks in the glow.

INT. RANI'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Paul cheers.

PAUL

AMERICA!

RANI

No! No no no! This is not good.
Even Larry can't afford that. A
hospital costs like...a lot.

She looks over, Paul is pointing at America on a globe.

PAUL

Boom. America. The only country or
continent worth pointing a finger
at.

INT. ELI'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

ELI

Where in the *fuck* is he going to
build ten hospitals?

DAUGHTER

How in the *fuck*?

ELI

Exactly. Go to your room.

INT. BANQUET HALL - CONTINUOUS

Larry's fists are raised in the air in triumph.

LARRY
U-S-A! U-S-A!

Nobody joins in his chant.

INT. RANI'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

PAUL
U-S-A! U-S-A!

Rani hits him in the groin with a backhand. Paul buckles.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I wish you would stop doing that.

TEXT: TWO WEEKS AND FIVE DAYS LATER

INT. ELI'S OFFICE - MORNING

Eli, Rani and Paul sit in Eli's office, adorned much like his living room, listening to sports talk radio. Paul eats a large muffin.

The voice of host STEVE BOMBERG, "The Bomber," booms through his office.

STEVE BOMBERG (V.O.)
And with last night's win in LA, the Dutchmen now have a nine-game winning streak, which is the most exciting thing to happen to this team since that false report that Larry Jepsen died in a snowboarding accident.

ELI
Fuck off, Bomberg.

As Bomberg talks, Paul, winks at Rani, wads up the muffin wrapper and shoots it at a mini-hoop sitting behind Eli. Eli rejects it.

STEVE BOMBERG
But I've watched these past nine games, and I have to admit: With Andre Ladoceur, the Dutchmen are playing great ball. GREAT ball...

ELI
That's right!

Larry bursts into Eli's office.

LARRY
We're in trouble.

ELI
What? Why?

LARRY
(*looking around*)
Who are these people? The girl can stay. But you, leave. Wait, no, both of them need to leave.

RANI
You know us.

LARRY
Oh boy. Whatever I promised you, on whatever night—

ELI
(*quickly*)
They're employees, Larry. Our employees.

LARRY
Oh. Oh right. Well, good, good. You're doing terrific work. A lot of people are noticing.

Paul looks very excited at this news as Larry ushers him out.

PAUL
I just want to say what an honor and privilege it's been...

Larry shuts the door on him.

ELI
What's going on--

Larry slaps Eli's radio to the ground. It clicks off.

LARRY
Listen. It turns out hospitals are way more expensive than I thought. Also, you've got to fill them up with all this science-y stuff. Plus, there's not a whole lot of room left in the city. And also I don't have the money. Any thoughts?

ELI
I'd start praying we lose.

LARRY
Don't bring GOD into this, Eli!
Jesus! Let me rephrase. I *know* what
we need to do. We need to lose on
purpose tomorrow.

Eli laughs, terrified.

ELI
You *cannot* throw a basketball game,
Larry. You have to own up to this.

LARRY
No! I own up to nothing. Plus,
there's no way we lose to Minnesota
without trying.

ELI
They have, uh, what's-his-face.
He's a strong player.

LARRY
And the rest of his team is
garbage. I hate garbage, Eli. I
hated it as a nickname at boarding
school, and I hate it now. We need
to throw this one.

ELI
No. No no no. No.

LARRY
Didn't you ever see that Dukes of
Hazzard episode where Luke
convinces Bo to lose to the sexy
lady car racer?

ELI
No. What does that have to--?

LARRY
I'll fire you if you don't tell
Humphries to lose.

ELI
You got that from Dukes of Hazzard?

LARRY
I'm serious, Eli.

ELI

Larry, I'm the head of public relations! Why is this *my* job?

LARRY

The owner of the Dutchmen breaking a promise to build ten children's hospitals is a public relations problem.

ELI

Just apologize!

LARRY

Never. My reputation is at stake. The Jepsen name. It's bigger than a few sick kids!

(another long pause)

Jepsen OUT!

He storms out, but turns around before closing the door.

LARRY (CONT'D)

How is "Jepsen Out" as a catch phrase?

Eli shakes his head. Picks up his radio, clicks it on.

BOMBERG (V.O.)

...and if they win tomorrow, and Larry Jepsen makes good on his generous pledge, I might have to admit that I was wrong about this franchise...

ELI

Good fucking God.

EXT. COACH HUMPHRIES' HOUSE - NIGHT

Rani and Eli are standing outside of a tastefully appointed home in Westchester County. Eli knocks.

ELI

You haven't told Whole Grain Oats about this, have you?

RANI

No. He'd be crushed. He loves children's hospitals. His favorite movie is *Patch Adams*.

Eli stares at her. Humphries answers the door in a wife-beater, unshaven.

HUMPHRIES

What? Why are you-

ELI

Coach, I'm glad we caught you at home.

INT. HUMPHRIES' LIVING ROOM - LATER

A bright, tastefully appointed sitting room with Japanese decor.

Humphries' wife, YASUKO, an older Japanese woman, pours them tea and then exits the room. Humphries waits for her to leave.

HUMPHRIES

(screaming)

I CANNOT THROW A BASKETBALL GAME,
Eli!

ELI

I don't understand what the big deal is! You've won nine in a row. Ten is just greedy, Lyle.

HUMPHRIES

How the hell can I lose to Minnesota? They're a nightmare!

ELI

They're not so bad! What's-his-face is a strong player!

COACH HUMPHRIES

(seething)

His name is Cody James. Is this because that cheap fuck doesn't want to build hospitals?

Yasuko re-enters, alarmed.

NOTE: When Yasuko and Humphries speak it is in subtitled Japanese.

YASUKO (SUBTITLE)

What's wrong? The doctor said you can't get upset.

HUMPHRIES (SUBTITLE)
They are trying to take my honor!

Eli and Rani look at him, shocked.

ELI
(to Rani)
Let's go.
(to Humphries)
Think about who you are without
this team. Think long and hard!

COACH HUMPHRIES
What? OUT! NOW! You fucking
toadies!

INT. ELI'S CAR - LATER

Eli is on his cell phone.

ELI
Larry, listen to me. Unless you
want to put on your hard hat and
start building children's
hospitals, you need to be seen in
public with Bootsy Clinton. For
lunch. Pronto. Be photographed with
him, be public, be fucking obvious.
Be yourself.
(pause)
Or don't, and be a hero to millions
of kids.

He hangs up.

RANI
I've never been called a toady
before.

ELI
It's been about two hours for me. I
have a job for you. You don't have
any plans, right?

RANI
Well-

ELI
Great.

He pulls out a notebook and begins to write.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Rani is at a grimy pay phone with Paul. She covers her nose as she enters. She gestures to Paul to pick up the phone from its cradle, and hold it to her ear. She looks miserable as she dials a number she reads from a slip of paper.

PAUL

I'm glad we're spending this
quality time--

She shushes him, and speaks into the phone with a bad Long Island accent. She reads from the same paper.

RANI

Is this Samantha Redburn from *The Post*? You're my favorite writer! I thought you'd want to know, I just saw Larry Jepsen walk into that fancy sushi joint on 10th and 18th with Dutchmen hero Boatsy Clinton.

She signals Paul to hang up the receiver, and dial again.

PAUL

You can use your words now. The phone's off.

RANI

I'm trying to stay in character.
(*deeper voice, into phone*)
Doug Fairborne? *Daily News*? I got a scoop for you, big boy...

INT. ELI'S OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

Eli is listening to Bomberg's show again, which seems to be on all day despite the fact that everyone hates him.

STEVE BOMBERG (V.O.)

So I'm just getting word... this is what passes for news, apparently, but Larry Jepsen had sushi and drinks yesterday with Boatsy Clinton.

We have triple confirmed this, folks. Boatsy is the hero of the '70s golden years, and everyone's favorite choice to be the next Dutchmen coach.

Eli pumps his fist as his phone rings.

ELI
Hello, coach.

HUMPHRIES
I want ten years.

Eli turns, and Larry is standing next to Rani by the door. He smells her hair, and she recoils.

LARRY
Oh! I know you!

Eli places his hand over the mouthpiece.

ELI
He wants ten years. One per fucking hospital, apparently.

Larry shakes his head.

LARRY
Five.

Rani and Eli who look shocked.

LARRY (CONT'D)
It's just time and money! Not art!

ELI
(to Humphries)
Five. Provided you succeed in...
all your endeavors tonight.

Larry gives Eli a thumbs up.

LARRY
(to himself, triumphantly)
Who's "garbage" now, Phillips
Exeter?

INT. HUMPHRIES' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Coach Humphries hangs up. He speaks to his wife in Japanese.

Subtitled:

COACH HUMPHRIES
I did it. I've abandoned my honor.

YASUKO
Don't be so melodramatic.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. JEPSSEN STEEL ARENA - PREGAME

Players are warming up, as EDDIE SCHLIEGEL and JEREMIAH THORPE, the television announcers for the Dutchmen, go on the air. Eddie is small and intellectual, while Jeremiah is towering, an ex-player, wearing a big, dopey smile in the Bill Walton vein.

They sit in front of cameras, near half-court. The visiting Sand Pipers warm up in the background.

EDDIE SCHLIEGEL

Welcome back to Jepsen Steel Arena, where the Dutchmen are in the midst of an unprecedented hot streak. I'm Eddie Schliegel, alongside my partner in crime Jeremiah Thorpe. 'Miah, the Dutchmen are going for their tenth win in a row, which hasn't happened in 25 years. And on paper, their opponent doesn't appear to present much of an obstacle.

JEREMIAH THORPE

Eddie, the Sand Pipers have been *atrocious* this season. You can't put lipstick on this pig—they've been a disgrace to the National Basketball Association. But there's one man who has lifted them time and time again, striving for the firmament while his teammates languish in the dark valley. That man is Cody James. He's one of the league's leading scorers, and one of the game's consummate gentlemen. If anybody can derail the Dutchmen--

A player in the background falls to the ground and howls in pain. Jeremiah turns.

JEREMIAH

Goodness--

A loud cry is heard as the camera focuses on CODY JAMES, writhing and holding his knee.

EDDIE

Oh my, that's Cody, and he...
doesn't... he doesn't appear to be
doing well.

HUMPHRIES (O.S.)

NO! NO! NO!

Without warning Coach Humphries plows through the announcers
and falls to his knees beside James.

HUMPHRIES (CONT'D)

Cody, no! Cody, are you alright?
Cody? CODY?! GOD HELP US!

James moans and holds his knee.

EDDIE SCHLIEGEL

(uncertain how to proceed)

Well. Dutchmen coach Lyle Humphries
showing grave concern as Sand Piper
star Cody James looks to have
sustained an injury here in pre-
game warmups. An odd, harrowing
scene...perhaps more odd than
harrowing.

JEREMIAH

We are witnessing live as the
bright light of the twin cities is
extinguished by cruel fate!

EDDIE

Sure.

INT. DUTCHMEN LOCKER ROOM - PREGAME

The Dutchmen players are excited, anticipating an easy
victory. We are introduced for the first time to the
Dutchmen:

Stars: ANDRE LADOCEUR and WALLACE BENSON;

Role Players: Europeans MENLIK HORSHEV, MALACHIAH MULLER,
CAMILLO BENEDETTI; Argentinian PROSPERIO GUTIERREZ; and
Americans DASHONTE COLLINS, CARDARION LACEY, LEE JACKSON,
AHMED AL-KAZEMI, "PSYCHO" BILLY MENLO, and SKINNY CLOVER.

Coach Humphries enters in a cold sweat.

HUMPHRIES
 Psycho Billy, you're starting
 tonight.

Psycho Billy punches a locker, while the rest of the players
 exchange glances.

HUMPHRIES (CONT'D)
 You too, Horschhev.

Horschhev stares glumly ahead.

HORSCHHEV
 Da.

HUMPHRIES
 Muller, Prosperio, and Skinny, you
 guys are all in too.

Muller pumps his fist in the air with a huge smile on his
 face, Prosperio Gutierrez picks up his phone and frantically
 dials, as Skinny Clover takes off his headphones, confused.

ANDRE LADOCEUR
 Coach, what the hell?

HUMPHRIES
(starting to yell)
 Maybe if you asked fewer questions
 and started putting that energy
 into practice!

ANDRE
 What are you-

HUMPHRIES
 YOU'VE BEEN DOGGING IT!

ANDRE
 We've won nine games in a row!

PROSPERIO GUTIERREZ
(on the phone)
 Mama! Mama! The man put me in the
 game!

WALLACE
 What about me?

HUMPHRIES
 You... too many passes.

WALLACE

I'm a point guard! That's what I do!

HUMPHRIES

There's such a thing as being too unselfish.

WALLACE

So I can shoot more?

HUMPHRIES

I didn't say that.

ANDRE

What about Al-Kazemi?

HUMPHRIES

(scrambling)

Religious reasons.

Al-Kazemi's eyes narrow in anger. Psycho Billy raises his hand.

HUMPHRIES (CONT'D)

What, Billy?

PSYCHO BILLY

Coach, my fist is bleeding.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - MID-GAME

The scoreboard shows the Dutchmen losing by ten early in the second quarter.

The Dutchmen's mascot DUTCHY, a tall redhead wearing a bright orange outfit and clogs, is dancing in front of a horde of booing fans.

Eddie Schliegel and Jeremiah Thorpe sit in the announcer's booth.

EDDIE

Well, Jeremiah, still anybody's game, but we can't exactly say it's been a paragon of "good basketball" so far.

JEREMIAH

This is an abomination. Where is Ladoceur? Where is Wallace Benson?

(MORE)

JEREMIAH (CONT'D)

It's like Times Square on a Saturday out there, nothing but gawking foreigners!

EDDIE

(after a pause)

You always speak your mind, big man, which is why we love you. And we certainly don't mean to offend anyone watching at home. Let's send it over to our brand new sideline reporter, Tiffany Albanesi, standing by with Coach Humphries.

INT. SIDELINES - CONTINUOUS

TIFFANY ALBANESI, Larry's escort from the banquet, stands next to Humphries. She is heavily made up, wearing a short leather skirt and a tight blouse.

TIFFANY ALBANESI

Coach, talk about the basketball from the game.

HUMPHRIES

Well... we're playing "big ball." Minnesota is undersized, so we're trying to load up with bigs out there. Just squash them under our superior height. Big ball.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Eli's working late with Rani and Paul and others, and in the lobby of the office, he sees the interview on his TV.

ELI

Big ball?

(shouting)

Has anyone here ever heard of fucking "big ball"?

(to Paul)

And I don't mean the medical term for your deformed scrotum, Paul.

Silence as he paces.

ELI (CONT'D)

Fine. Everybody get on the horn to your least favorite columnist and pitch them a big ball story. NOW!

INT. COURT - CONTINUOUS

JEREMIAH

I think it's an interesting move
Eddie. Very shrewd.

EDDIE

Really?

JEREMIAH

Back in my day I always used to
wonder how many championships I
could have won if I had just
multiplied myself five times. Or
would our similar personalities
have clashed? Would we have torn
each other apart? Either way, it's
the greatest team that never was.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Eli and Rani watch the telecast.

ELI

Oh my God. That beautiful idiot.
This might work.

RANI

I can't believe it.

INT. COURT, SIDELINES - MINUTES LATER

Humphries calls a timeout and the team huddles.

ANDRE

Coach, why aren't we in the game?

HUMPHRIES

Being a coach sometimes means not
explaining everything, Ladoceur.

*(he sees Ahmed on his
phone)*

Al-Kazemi! Get off your phone!

AHMED

All done, coach.

ANDRE

This team is a joke! We should be
wiping the goddamn floor with them!

HUMPHRIES

The game is won and lost in the second half! This is a chess match!

Humphries turns back to the court, uncomfortable.

COACH HUMPHRIES

I fucking hate chess.

(yelling)

Less passing!

EDDIE SCHLIEGEL

Alright, well... let's see what our fans on twitter are saying about Big Ball.

(a graphic pops up, Eddie reads)

"Maybe the DUTCH are throwing this one on purpose so Larry Jepsen doesn't have to build ten hospitals. #Cheapskate #DUTCHFIX"

Oh my, that was the promise, wasn't it? This is the tenth game, and--

JEREMIAH THORPE

Now we shouldn't speculate, Eddie--

EDDIE SCHLIEGEL

Of course not, but then again--

JEREMIAH THORPE

The last time I speculated was the summer of 1979. I bought 10,000 commemorative dinner plates with my own image on them at over a hundred dollars a plate, confident that the price would only continue to soar. In fact, it did not.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Rani types on her laptop, as Paul looks over her shoulder.

RANI

Eli? Bad news. This is all over Twitter. All the fuck over. It's trending.

PAUL

Tell him about the hashtag.

RANI

There's a hashtag: #DutchFix. We're talking hundreds of tweets, maybe thousands.

(slyly)

They seem to think Humphries might be losing on purpose so Larry doesn't have to build those hospitals.

ELI

Weird. I, uh...have to go.

Eli bolts out of the room.

PAUL

Rani, is it true?

Rani shoots him a look.

INT. COURT - JUST BEFORE THE HALF

Eli backs up against the front row of the elevated bleachers. Beer spills on his head. He looks up and sees a grinning teenager above him.

ELI

Fucking depraved savages.

A whistle blows, and he hustles over to Humphries. He puts a hand on his shoulder and whispers in his ear.

ELI (CONT'D)

Change of plans. You have to win. At all costs.

HUMPHRIES

(also whispering)

Fuck you. You reek of beer. Has it gotten that bad for you, Eli?

ELI

The whole fucking universe is onto us. You need to win.

HUMPHRIES

It's tempting to say fuck it, Eli.

ELI

You'll never coach again.

Humphries grabs Eli by the collar.

HUMPHRIES

I've already sacrificed my dignity
and everything I believe in as a
competitor. Who fucking cares?

There's a long pause.

ELI

You? I hope.

HUMPHRIES

(looks at the scoreboard)
We're down 26.

ELI

This team is terrible.

HUMPHRIES

Earlier today you were telling me
they're not so bad.

ELI

They weren't.

He starts to walk away, and Humphries looks after him.

HUMPHRIES

(In subtitled Japanese)
You are a disgusting toad man.

ELI

Look I don't know what you just
said. I can't imagine it was
flattering. I don't care. But I
still care more about this team
than I want to admit right now.
We're both done if this goes wrong.
Just win the damn game.

Humphries gives Eli a nod.

Eli sees Eddie Schliegel walking by. He stops him in his
tracks.

ELI (CONT'D)

Hey, could you lay off the
skepticism? Whose side are you on?

EDDIE

Are you kidding? I bit my tongue
for two quarters.

ELI

You're an employee of this company!
And besides, I don't think America
wants to hear the conspiracy
theories of a sex pervert...
nobody's forgotten, Eddie.

EDDIE

Fine.

Eli's phone buzzes, he pulls it out.

ELI

Blanket denials, Rani. Take any and
every call and deny, deny.

*(pause, sidelong glance at
Eddie)*

Don't worry about Schliegel. He
knows we could release more
pictures with him getting flayed on
the testicles by a dominatrix.

EDDIE

(a few steps away)

I heard that. And let me tell you,
getting whipped in the nuts was a
lot more pleasant than this shit!
At least we had a safe word!

INT. LOCKER ROOM - HALFTIME

Coach Humphries with all his players.

HUMPHRIES

We've reeled them in. We've got
them overconfident and fatted up
for the kill. Andre, Wallace, Lee,
Cardarion, Ahmed, you're all back
in. Starting five.

AHMED

So you've forgiven my religion?

HUMPHRIES

Rope-a-dope, Kaz. Just like the
prophet Mohammed in Mecca. Or don't
you know your history? Listen,
fellas, we have a chance to do
something no Dutchmen team has done
in a very fucking long time. Let's
kick their asses. COME ON!

A half-hearted cheer from the team.

INT. OFFICE - LATER

Paul and Rani are on their phones. Paul stares down Rani, who speaks into the phone.

PAUL

As far as I know, there's nothing
untoward happening out there
tonight.

RANI

*(to Paul, mouthing the
word)*

What?

PAUL

(covers the receiver)
Why didn't you tell me?

RANI

Tell you what?

PAUL

You know what!

RANI

YOU HELD THE PHONE WHEN I CALLED
ALL THE REPORTERS!

PAUL

OH! So I'm just supposed to put the
pieces together like some sort of
puzzle man?

RANI

Yes. You are.

They look at each other. Paul interprets the moment as the right time to start kissing her passionately. She pushes him away.

RANI (CONT'D)

Not now, you idiot!
(pulling herself together)
Later... Maybe.

INT. CORRIDOR OFF THE COURT - CONTINUOUS

Eli answers a call.

ELI

Samantha, it's all bogus. Why would we throw a basketball game? Even by our standards, that's too idiotic.

INT. OFFICE, NY POST - CONTINUOUS

SAMANTHA

Funny enough, I wasn't calling about that. I was calling to get confirmation on the rumored five-year contract extension for Lyle Humphries.

INT. CORRIDOR OFF THE COURT

ELI

(to himself)

That fucking pockmarked codger.

(pause, then to Sam)

You know what? Yes, I can confirm that. On the record. And ask yourself, Samantha, why would we extend our coach if we suspected he was throwing a game?

(Pause)

"To shut him up or to deflect attention from a developing scandal?" Samantha, you're scaring me. Have you seen "A Beautiful Mind"? You're sounding like that lunatic right now, only less rational, and far less fucking lovable.

(Pause)

Goodbye to you too.

INT. COURT - LATE

Eddie and Jeremiah are back in the booth.

EDDIE

And after a dismal first half, the Dutchmen are absolutely *roaring* back here in the third quarter. The deficit has been cut to 12, largely thanks to Wallace Benson, who has been putting up an awful lot of shots this half! Big J, I guess this puts the DutchFix theory to rest.

JEREMIAH

I'm just disappointed that they abandoned big ball before it ever really had a chance to flourish.

EDDIE

I guess we'll always have to wonder. And now I'm seeing, as we get ready to resume action... I'm seeing that benched small forward Ahmed Al-Kazemi live tweeted the first half in Arabic and Samantha Redburn at the *Post* is reporting that Coach Humphries and the Dutchmen have agreed to a five-year extension. So how about that? The news is coming in hot and heavy tonight.

JEREMIAH

It only makes sense, Eddie. The kind of experimentation we've seen from Humphries tonight needs to be rewarded. He's a revolutionary. He's the Che Guevara of the NBA.

EDDIE

That's certainly one way to see it.

INT. COURT - LATER

Andre Ladoceur takes the ball out of bounds. The scoreboard shows that it's a one point game, very little time left.

An old man with a white beard and a white pitchfork wearing a white robe. This is STORM GOD.

STORM GOD

YOU TANKER! I WILL EXACT A FURIOUS
VENGEANCE UPON THEE!

STORM GOD glares furiously at Ladoceur, banging the hilt of his pitchfork on a nearby seat. Soon the rest of the nearby crowd is joining in the jeering. Andre calls a timeout.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Eli is back, watching the television with Paul and Rani. The camera fixes on Storm God in the stands. The cell phones of all three begin ringing simultaneously.

PAUL
They need to take that man's
pitchfork away.

INT. SIDELINES - LATER

Coach Humphries huddles up his team. Psycho Billy sits cross-legged on a chair with his shoes off.

HUMPHRIES
Listen, forget that we're down one,
forget that it's the last play.
We're isolating Wallace on the
drive. Cadaveon, you're in the
corner for three if the defense
sags to help, Andre's underneath
for the dish if his man comes from
the weak side. Let's go!

The camera focuses on Humphries' face as the whistle blows. He watches what's happening on the court, cringing, and opening his mouth in anticipation.

Suddenly, a loud ROAR rises in the stands, followed by a BUZZER going off, causing an even louder roar. The Dutchmen have won.

INT. ANNOUNCERS BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

EDDIE
What an ending! And that's ten
straight wins for the Dutchmen!

JEREMIAH
And a city full of happy children,
as Larry Jepsen will now build ten
new hospitals! Well, I guess the
sick kids won't be happy right
away. But eventually. If they can
hang on!

INT. ELI'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Eli fist pumps.

ELI
YES!

His phone rings.

INT. LARRY JEPSEN'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Larry's been watching everything on the couch, and speaks on an ornately adorned rotary phone.

LARRY

Eli, we have to fire Humphries.

(listens)

Five years? I thought we were just chatting...no go-backs? Yikes.

He hangs up, thinks for a moment, and then stands with a purpose. Tiffany comes in from the bathroom.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Aren't you supposed to be at the game?

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. MEDIA ROOM - POSTGAME

We are back to the scene from the cold open, and we pick up where we left off.

ELI

What happened months ago at some *charity banquet* has nothing--

PRESS

Eli! Let him talk! What about the orphans? And the sick kids?

ELI

Hey! Hey! Hey! Shut up. Coach doesn't answer these sorts of questions. Those are for Larry Jepsen, who isn't here right now. There will be a time and a place--

LARRY JEPSEN enters.

ELI (CONT'D)

(under his breath)

For fuck's sake, what are you doing?

LARRY

(loud and showy)

Don't worry, Eli. I got this one. What is up, my peoples! Jepsen IN!

(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)

So, what are we talking about? That we threw a game? That's insane!

SAMANTHA

Larry, or Coach Humphries, how can you explain sitting all of your starters in the first half, and-

LARRY

Bottom line, we won! Come on guys, do you understand basketball as well as a man who's been doing it for over 80 years?

Humphries gives him an annoyed look.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I am *thrilled* that we won. I am thrilled that we rope-a-doped them. I'm hearing a lot of cynicism about "Big Ball," but guess what? It worked. And I am also thrilled that we get to build ten hospitals for these kids.

Eli's face lights up in panic.

ELI

Uh, well...

He is shouted down.

LARRY

I've been waiting for this day since the start of the season. It's hospital time in New York, gang. No more sick kids on the streets. They'll all be in buildings, where we won't have to see them. You can't stop kids from getting sick. I'm not playing God here. But I'm doing the next best thing. I'm playing hospital God.

ELI

Don't write that down.

LARRY

Write that down. Jepsen says BUH-BYE!

Larry stands up dramatically and strides offstage. Eli stands to follow him. Larry whispers.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 "Do you like 'buh-bye'? It felt
 good off the tongue.

There's a short silence in the room before TODD BANKCROFT of
The Star speaks up.

TODD
 Coach, what about Al-Kazemi
 tweeting that you sat him for
 religious reasons?

ELI
(yelling, on his way out)
 That is a translation error! No
 truth to it at all!

EXT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE MEDIA ROOM - LATER

Eli catches up with Larry.

ELI
 So now you're building the
 hospitals?

LARRY
 Oh God no. I can't afford one.

ELI
 Then what the hell was *that*?

LARRY
*(grinning, pleased with
 himself)*
 I tricked them!

ELI
 How?

LARRY
 I lied. Told them what they needed
 to hear.

ELI
 Yeah, but how does this get fixed?

LARRY
 Maybe we'll build ten small
 hospitals, or something! Mini-
 hospitals. Do they have those?

Eli walks away.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Jepsen still here!

INT. RANI'S APARTMENT, NIGHT

Rani and Paul watch TV in bed, Rani texts on her phone.

PAUL
I'm not going in tomorrow.

RANI
I can't believe I'm saying this,
but that sounds smart. Everybody's
going to have the stink of this on
them. Unless...

PAUL
Unless they're not there. We skip
out on the punishment, come back
the next day, clean-up, look
golden.

RANI
I'm so in--

Their phones beep with text messages.

PAUL
From Eli.
(*reading*)
"Just got some really good news re:
today's situation. Expect you all
to be in tomorrow."

RANI
Well, there goes the one good idea
you've ever had.

PAUL
In times like this, it helps to be
intimate with someone close. And,
uh... certain promises were made...

He tries to put his arm around her, she looks at him
reluctantly.

RANI
Fine. But no more talking. Or any
noise at all, actually. Especially
the moaning.

INT. DUTCHMEN OFFICE - MORNING

Eli is addressing the entire PR staff.

ELI

Today will, without a doubt, be the worst day of your professional careers. You will find the revised hospital plan in your e-mails. Use your creativity to justify that one. Any questions?

Paul timidly raises his hand.

PAUL

You said you had good news?

ELI

Ah, yes, thank you for bringing that up. The good news is that my tiny white lie of telling you there would be good news worked at stopping any of you from skipping work today, you malingering fucks.

INT. ELI'S OFFICE - LATER

Eli sits in his desk as Paul eats another muffin. Rani is also in the meeting.

ELI

Last night, Larry made the ridiculous suggestion of building "mini-hospitals." It was the dumbest thing I'd heard in a day full of really dumb things, but this whole dumb fucking problem needs a dumb fucking solution. So I've made some calls, and we're putting Larry's name on ten new walk-in clinics wherever real estate is cheapest.

RANI

So "ten new hospitals" for Memorial Beachstowe has become adding the name "Larry Jepsen" to a few walk-in clinics totally unaffiliated with Memorial Beachstowe?

ELI

When you put it that way, it almost sounds bad. Don't put it that way. We're also buying supplies.

PAUL

Think of the junkies we'll help!

ELI

Yes! Paul, I'm glad you're excited for this. Because I have a big job for you.

PAUL

Stay here and say nothing?

ELI

No, you will be heading to the Memorial Beachstowe children's wing this morning to break the big news.

PAUL

Okay! Wait, what news? I wasn't-- Oh. Oh, no.

ELI

Oh yes. And let me just say, you're doing terrific work. A lot of people are noticing.

Paul, despondent, wads up the muffin wrapper and shoots it at the garbage. Eli swats it viciously.

INT. PAUL'S CAR - LATER

Paul is stuck in traffic, looking miserable, as he listens to Steve Bomberg.

BOMBERG

...and the end result of this latest farce? The Dutchmen have hamstrung themselves for five more years with a coach who still thinks overhand free throws are too showy. And I can't wait to see what happens with these hospitals...

INT. MEMORIAL BEACHSTOWE HOSPITAL - LATER

Paul stands on a stage beneath a huge banner reading, "Thank you, Dutchmen!" The room is full of staff members and a group of about 200 sick children cheering for him.

There are cameras waiting to record his remarks. Vitaly stands in the corner smiling. Paul winks at him.

PAUL

A wise man named Patch Adams once said that the best medicine...is laughter.

Paul puts on a red clown nose.

FADE OUT.