

CLOSED DOOR

by

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CAST:

BRIAN: Mid forties.

MITCH: Mid to late thirties.

SCENE:

An upscale bedroom. Downstage right is a TV, centerstage is a bed and centerstage left is a chair. MITCH is dressed sloppily in jeans and a tee-shirt. BRIAN is impeccably dressed in an expensive, custom-made Italian import suit. The suit is buttoned and the tie is in place, not loosened. From the TV comes the sounds of a basketball game.

AT RISE:

MITCH and BRIAN are laying on the bed. Both are watching the ballgame. MITCH watches it calmly detached, while BRIAN moves frenetically while watching the game, yet careful not to ruin the line of his suit. There is a crescendo of crowd noise in reaction to a play. BRIAN shows various signs of anger in proportion to the cheering on the TV.

BRIAN

Jesus Christ! You believe it?

MITCH

Pitiful.

BRIAN

With all the talent they have, they should be destroying L.A., and look at this.

MITCH

Gonna blow it.

BRIAN

Course their gonna blow it!

MITCH

Already planning their night out.

BRIAN

Partying and women and wine and--

(He stares intently at his watch, then begins adjusting it.)

What time is it?

MITCH

What, it stopped?

BRIAN

(Indicating MITCH'S watch.)

Is that accurate?

MITCH

Uhhh, quarter to four.

BRIAN

Exactly a quarter to four?

MITCH

Close.

BRIAN

Not close, exactly.

MITCH

It's *exactly* ... fifteen minutes and twenty-three seconds to four.

BRIAN

Really?

MITCH

No, now it's fifteen minutes and eighteen seconds to four.

BRIAN

Come on.

MITCH

What do you--

BRIAN

(Adjusting his watch.)

I'm going to synchronize. Tell me exactly when it's fifteen minutes to--

MITCH

What's the diff--

BRIAN

Just tell me!

MITCH

Annnddd ... now!

BRIAN

(BRIAN clicks his watch.)

Oookay. I've got twenty-two point five minutes left for this game.

MITCH

What the hell are you--

BRIAN

I'm talking about--

(Looks at the TV.)

Jesus! I could go out there right now -- in this fifteen-hundred-dollar suit -- and play better defense than that!

MITCH

Maybe then you'd loosen the tie. You ever loosen the tie?

BRIAN

Got to move your feet. Can't just flail your arms. Feet, feet, feet --

MITCH

(Overlapping with the previous line.)

Feet, feet, feet, I know.

BRIAN

Nobody knows the basics.

MITCH

Why bother with the talent they have.

BRIAN

They might have moves. But talent? Phhh.

Talent is what we had. *Team* talent.

(MITCH smiles.)

How many times in that park league we make the playoffs?

MITCH

(Conceding the point.)

Yeah, yeah.

BRIAN

Every year. Champs twice. And why?

MITCH

Because we were better.

BRIAN

Not individually. A better *team*. Nothing fancy, just good, solid fundamentals--

MITCH

(Overlapping the previous line, in a bored tone.)
Fundamentals, right, right, right.

BRIAN

Oh, and that doesn't mean anything anymore?

MITCH

I didn't say --

BRIAN

(Gesturing towards the TV.)
These guys, you see any desperation?

MITCH

No desperation.

BRIAN

How you supposed to win without desperation?

MITCH

Gotta have desperation.

BRIAN

Of course, desperation. How else you supposed to show up day in, day out and beat the sons of bitches who are always coming at you?

MITCH

Can't.

BRIAN

Hell no, you can't. Not in hoops, not in business, not in life. My company, there are a lot of smart people. But I go up against those "geniuses," I always come out on top. Why?

(He points to his eyes.)

It's right here.

MITCH

X-ray vision?

BRIAN

The *fire* in the eyes. That look that says, "however far this goes, I'm going. Name the game: boardroom, back room, bar room. Work it out or pound it out, I'm there.

MITCH

(Sighing, with sarcasm.)

The famous Brian tenacity--

BRIAN

(Touching his own chest.)

This tenacity got you through a lot of your life. Although, the life you live--

MITCH

(Points to the TV.)

Because these clowns can't throw a chest pass, we're going to dissect my life?

BRIAN

Not dissect, observe.

MITCH

Well, then observe the game and --

BRIAN

Sick of watching schoolyard

(He checks his watch.)

and I've only got a few more minutes allotted to this anyway.

MITCH

What's with this allotted--

BRIAN

(Addressing TV.)

Four guys standing around watching the fifth throw up a prayer. What a --

(Back to MITCH.)

So how'd you get the time to visit?

MITCH

Swapped schedules.

BRIAN

Swapped schedules on a construction job?

MITCH

I'm not doing that anymore.

BRIAN

That was fast.

MITCH

Almost four months.

BRIAN

World record. What happened this time?

MITCH

It was six damned degrees on the site. Call me quirky, but I like to feel my toes every now and then.

BRIAN

So you quit.

MITCH

Got a better job. Supermarket stock man.

BRIAN

Movin' on up to the east side.

MITCH

Union job. Me and the boys, overnight, store to ourselves, no customers, no boss, no rush.

BRIAN

(Sarcasm continues.)

And you even get paid? The promise land.

(To TV.)

Go *through* the picks. Don't -- Ahhh!

(Back to MITCH.)

So things are ...

MITCH

Can't complain.

BRIAN

And you're still seeing-

MITCH

Ramona.

BRIAN

Ah, Ramona. Love the purple hair.

MITCH

Back to brown.

BRIAN

And those tongue rings.

MITCH

Gone. Got an office job.

BRIAN

Ramona? She traded in her picket posters for PowerPoint?

MITCH

Everyone changes.

BRIAN

Oh, that I know.

(Beat.)

Like you. What's different?

MITCH

What?

BRIAN

You're, like ...

(Pleading to TV)

He's killing you! Double team him!--

(Back to MITCH.)

Like you decided to pull over and make a pit stop on Earth.

MITCH

What are you--

BRIAN

A union job, steady girlfriend.

MITCH

Wife.

BRIAN

(To TV.)

How could you call a foul? He barely--
(Shocked.)

What?

MITCH

Married last spring.

BRIAN

You got?-- Last?-- On this planet?

MITCH

Yep.

BRIAN

And it just slipped your mind to let your older brother know.

MITCH

We didn't tell anyone--

BRIAN

The older brother who paid your tuition when pop died?

MITCH

I said, we didn't tell anyone. Not you, not ma, not her family.

BRIAN

Ah, well that's better. As long as everyone got screwed.

(To TV.)

Pick and roll!

(Sighing.)

You could've at least told me.

MITCH

You're the first to know -- that should tell you something.

BRIAN

(To TV)

That's a carry! Make a call, moron!

(To MITCH.)

Can I still say congratulations?

MITCH

If you want to.

BRIAN

Then congratulations, you freak!

(He playfully throws a pillow at MITCH.)

Wait till mom hears--

MITCH

Don't tell her anything. Not her, not Liz, nobody.

BRIAN

Don't have to worry about that.

MITCH

Yeah, well, I'm gonna tell mom in my own time.

BRIAN

Always gotta do things your way.

MITCH

Only way I know how.

(Beat.)

So how long's it been?

BRIAN

(To TV.)

Put a body on --

(To MITCH.)

What?

MITCH

You, this room.

BRIAN

I don't know--

MITCH

Come on. You could be in a cave in Kathmandu and you'd know cattle costs in Kansas. Thirteen days?

BRIAN

Liz told you, why you bugging me?

(To TV.)

Finally, a pass!

MITCH

She didn't tell me why.

BRIAN

(To TV.)

Move. Move!
(To MITCH.)
It was time.

MITCH
For ...

BRIAN
A managed metamorphosis.

MITCH
A what?

BRIAN
Managed metamorphosis. A carefully controlled transition
from one life to another.

MITCH
And exactly how are you "metamorphosizing" in here?

BRIAN
Regrouping. Retrenching. Retooling.

MITCH
Reverting to prenatal.

BRIAN
Don't get smart.

MITCH
All your doing is watching ballgames.

BRIAN
They're just part of the plan.
(He looks at the TV.)
Although, how you can watch these guys without your stomach
turning--

MITCH
What else you do in this "managed" metamorphosis?

BRIAN
Read.

MITCH
Those management books you--

BRIAN

Uggh, never again. Chaos management. Just-in-time management. Six Sigma. Same crap, different wrapping.

MITCH

So what are you --

BRIAN

Elmore Leonard. Carl Hiassen. Fun books. Music. Dizzie Gillespie. Jimmy Buffett. Coldplay.

MITCH

(Chuckling.)
Coldplay? You?

BRIAN

What?

MITCH

I'm just trying to picture a million kids at a Coldplay concert smoking dope, with you right in the middle of them in your Armani suit, sipping Chablis.

BRIAN

Chablis at a concert? I'm not that out of it. Chardonnay's much more festive.

MITCH

So what's supposed to happen during this managed metamorphosis?

BRIAN

Well --

(He pulls out a list.)

I spend one point two hours--

MITCH

You have a list.

BRIAN

How else am I --

MITCH

Let me see that.

(BRIAN hand him the list. He reads aloud.)

"Shower: four point three minutes. Work out: forty-two point five minutes. Read: one point nine hours. Watch

hoops: two point five hours. Add point three hours if overtime." Sure you can fit that in?

BRIAN

I borrow from reading time.

MITCH

Of course.

(Continuing from list.)

"Hoop watching could be accompanied with afternoon snack and one alcoholic beverage a day." Hoo boy, you're really letting your hair down.

BRIAN

You're always bugging me to loosen up.

MITCH

(Back to list.)

"Eat lunch: seven point three minutes." You're in this room twenty-four hours a day, you can't swing more than seven minutes for lunch?

BRIAN

Things to do.

MITCH

What the hell are you eating if you're holed up in this room anyway?

BRIAN

It's all in the plan.

(He walks over to a mini refrigerator and pulls out two cans, offering one to MITCH.)

Want a Nutriblow?

MITCH

A what?

BRIAN

A complete meal in a can. Protein, carbs, fiber, vitamins, you name it.

(He holds can out to MITCH.)

Here.

MITCH

No, that's okay--

BRIAN

Shut up and take it.

(He throws the can to MITCH, who reluctantly takes a sip, then grimaces.)

MITCH

Ugh. The hell is--

BRIAN

Gives you all the vitamins and nutrients you need.

MITCH

If you can keep it in.

BRIAN

That's the beauty of it: their patented nutri-drain intestinal drainage system.

MITCH

Must keep you hopping.

BRIAN

That's the idea. My most productive time is when I'm--

MITCH

I don't need to hear--

BRIAN

You know what I mean.

MITCH

No, I don't know what you mean. I don't know why you're drinking a canned colonoscopy. I don't know why you're holed like a hermit, and scheduled like a secretary of state. I don't know anything.

BRIAN

It's all in the plan.

MITCH

Let me let you in on a trade secret: there is no plan to drop out. It just happens.

BRIAN

But how do you know--

MITCH

You wing it.

BRIAN

That doesn't seem efficient.

MITCH

It's not about efficiency! It's about something gone haywire.

BRIAN

Everything's fine.

MITCH

You're living in a room by yourself.

BRIAN

Executing a meticulously crafted plan.

MITCH

See? You can't even screw up like the rest of us.

BRIAN

I'm not--

MITCH

Hiding in your bedroom, and you're making it a case study in transition management.

BRIAN

Managed metamorph--

MITCH

Whatever!

BRIAN

Why shouldn't I do it right?

MITCH

Do what right? Quit your job?

BRIAN

No room for it in the managed metamorphosis.

MITCH

(Sarcastic and referring to the list.)

God forbid you cut into that four point three hours of bathroom meditation.

BRIAN

You know, I've put up with a lot here, letting you talk to me like this.

(MITCH sighs, knows what's coming.)

You, who I was always there for, even when the rest of the family was sick of *your* great escapes.

MITCH

We're different people--

BRIAN

Now *I* decide to live free, and you attack me?

MITCH

I'm not attacking. I'm--

BRIAN

Why'd you come here?

MITCH

Because--

BRIAN

Because Liz called you.

MITCH

Well--

BRIAN

Now there's a laugh.

MITCH

What?

BRIAN

All those years, she's bugging you to "do something with your life." Now she bugs you to do something with *my* life.

MITCH

She's scared.

BRIAN

Liz?

(Waves it off.)
Don't let her play you.

MITCH
You mean, the quiver, the shake and the twitching?

BRIAN
Muscular tricks of hers.

MITCH
The bags under her eyes?

BRIAN
Make-up.

MITCH
The endless tears?

BRIAN
Ex-actress. Cries on demand.

MITCH
Academy Award performance.

BRIAN
Probably working on her acceptance speech as we--

MITCH
Would you stop? I mean, just for a second, step out of your cocoon and into her shoes.

BRIAN
Can't afford them.

MITCH
What part of the plan is torturing her?

BRIAN
Don't you think I've accounted for how Liz might react?

MITCH
It's not just your wife. It's your kids, your friends.

BRIAN
All right, let's work backwards. This is exactly what I needed to see who my real friends are.

MITCH

What?

BRIAN

So many hangers on. Saccharine-smiling, small-talking sycophants. My managed metamorphosis will downsize them for good.

MITCH

Do they get a package, or are they fired summarily?

BRIAN

(Ignoring MITCH.)

The kids are in college, tuition paid for through graduation. Then, my financial responsibility is over.

MITCH

They're your kids--

BRIAN

And I'm doing right by them.

MITCH

By cutting them off?

BRIAN

By making them take responsibility. Because the sooner they realize life ain't just spring breaks and Usher concerts, the faster they'll do something with their lives.

MITCH

And someday, they'll have their own bedrooms to lock themselves into.

BRIAN

Look, it's not like they're studying at school. Well, okay, Jen is studying every boy in the place, and Kara's studying the fine art of binge drinking.

MITCH

They're good kids and you know it. They'll get it out of their systems and move on, just like everyone else -- but you.

BRIAN

Oh, I'm the freak. The one who worked through college, high school, nursery school. It's a little thing called work ethic, and it's taken me this far.

MITCH

To a locked bedroom.

BRIAN

To a *managed metamorphosis*. I've planned for it. I've sweated for it. I've bled for it.

MITCH

Your personal fright of passage.

BRIAN

Look, this is just a temporary respite. My kids were always on me for being too busy. When this phase ends, I'll have the time to go camping with them. To ballgames. To shows--

MITCH

To welfare.

BRIAN

They'll be college graduates. They can pick up the tab.

MITCH

Take their deadbeat dad camping. The stuff of little girl dreams.

BRIAN

Don't worry, I've got money. For me, the kids -- and Liz, if she sticks around.

MITCH

That's a big if.

BRIAN

Her call.

MITCH

She's sleeping in the doorway, wondering if you'll ever come out: plenty of reason to stay.

BRIAN

I'm giving her time to decide if she loves me for me, or for the lavish luncheons, swank shopping, cool cars--

MITCH

(Sarcastic.)

Sad substitutes for eternal love through a peephole.

BRIAN

I told her about this, you know.

MITCH

You did?

BRIAN

Right before I locked the door, I said, "Honey, I'm going on a managed metamorphosis. And you know what she said? "Should I wait before *ordering* dinner?" I'm about to go through this state-of-the-art, life-changing process, and she can't even *make* dinner?

MITCH

What, you want her to pour your Nutriblow into a decanter?

BRIAN

(Sarcastic.)

Ha ha.

MITCH

She raises two kids and puts up with you for all these years, why should she ever cook again?

BRIAN

You know, you're acting like I'm the freak, when this is the exact kid of thing you would do.

MITCH

See, there's the difference: I'm a fuck up.

BRIAN

You're a free spirit.

MITCH

Euphemism for fuckup. Gives moms a way to describe their fuckup sons at the girls' mah jong game.

BRIAN

Oh, stop. I mean, yeah, I used to think the things you did were whacko. But now I understand.

MITCH

Then let me in on it.

BRIAN

You're free, man. Always been. And whenever you got close to losing that freedom, you do something wild to free up again.

MITCH

And look at what "freedom's" gotten me: a supermarket stocking job, a broom closet impersonating a studio apartment, and a bank account that's jealous of the Starbucks tip jar.

BRIAN

Since when is money important to you?

MITCH

Since I woke up thirty-five and tried to figure out what would happen if I got sick or had a kid or just wanted take it easy.

BRIAN

Easy? New Orleans stole the name from you.

MITCH

I mean, easy, as in not worrying about everything.

BRIAN

You don't worry--

MITCH

I *always* worry. Just never show it.

BRIAN

I can't believe--

MITCH

Why do you think I kept changing jobs every year?

BRIAN

Because you just say screw it--

MITCH

Because I'm thinking I'm about to get fired, or I'm not making enough to get by, or I'm just not good enough at what I do.

BRIAN

Yeah, I hear the advanced fruit-and-vegetable stacking course is a bitch. Come on, you breeze through everything-

-

MITCH

Yeah? Talk to my therapist

BRIAN

You have a--

MITCH

Since I was thirty.

BRIAN

Hell for?

MITCH

Have you listened to a word I said?

BRIAN

Yeah, but -- I don't -- Where'd you even get the money to pay for --

MITCH

State program. For clinical depression.

BRIAN

All right, now that's enough. Okay, so you worry a little. Fine. But depression? I've never even seen you cry -- not even at pop's funeral.

MITCH

I'm a master of holding it in.

BRIAN

It's called being a man.

MITCH

It's called being a time bomb.

BRIAN

It's called time for a road trip. You just need to get away--

MITCH

No, it's more--

BRIAN

(Reaches into his pocket.)

I could spot you--

MITCH

I don't need--

BRIAN

How about a decent job? I could set it up--

MITCH

Restocking bedroom nutri-blows?

BRIAN

I still have my contacts, smart ass.

MITCH

Sorry, but I'm no longer taking handouts.

BRIAN

Handouts? What am I, the welfare office?

MITCH

I don't need---

BRIAN

It's not a handout, it's family.

MITCH

It's okay--

BRIAN

Keeps us from copping out.

MITCH

Copping out?

BRIAN

With some la-di-dah L.A. flower-power pop psychologist
diagnosing the catch-all disease of the day,
(With sarcasm and ridicule.)
"depression."

MITCH

You're living in a room by yourself, and I'm copping out?

BRIAN

I'm not by myself. I've got my books, sports, my nutri--

MITCH

You're a classic case of clinical--

BRIAN

Don't you say it! Don't you ...

(Beat.)

My kid brother -- who I basically raised -- sees a shrink,
now he's throwing psychobabble at me.

MITCH

You need to talk to--

BRIAN

To you. And maybe Liz -- if she could slot me in between
salon soirees. And maybe a ballgame with the girls once
the managed metamorphosis is over. I've got a fifty-five
page PowerPoint on this and--

MITCH

This has got to be a first, a corporate presentation on a
man's mental illness--

(BRIAN approaches MITCH with fists clenched.)

BRIAN

No one calls me off the wall! No one.

MITCH

I'm not saying-- Look, I suffer from--

BRIAN

You suffer from being lazy. You see some "therapist"
because it's easier than figuring it out for yourself.

MITCH

Figuring out what? That I have a chemical imbalance--

BRIAN

You bought that?

MITCH

I've been on--

BRIAN

Don't tell me they--

MITCH

Zylec. For the chemical deficiency --

BRIAN

That's all. I'm having a conversation with a Stepford Wife.

MITCH

It's the best I ever felt.

BRIAN

And heroin addicts are having a perennial party.

MITCH

See, shit like that, it used to bother me. Used to make me do what you're doing now, with your fists clenched, your jaw gnashing. I mean, look at you. You're so pissed, you're ready to break the principle you live by.

BRIAN

Don't throw that brotherly bond crap--

MITCH

Wrinkling your suit.

(Beat, then a smile from BRIAN, who subconsciously smooths his suit.)

Brian.

BRIAN

I've got a plan--

MITCH

With no Liz, Kara or Jen to share it.

BRIAN

They'll understand--

MITCH

Okay, let's say they will. Let's say you finally come out, and they're all waiting for you. But what if the plan's not working? What then?

BRIAN

Then I readjust--

MITCH

And you come back to this bed womb to make everyone suffer through this again.

BRIAN

Damn it, I'm not hiding. I'm --

MITCH

You're in trouble, *man*.

BRIAN

No, I'd be in trouble if I sat back and let things just happen. But I'm taking charge.

MITCH

It's catching up to you.

BRIAN

Nothing's catching--

MITCH

Just like it caught up to pop.

(BRIAN lunges to his feet and slaps MITCH. He then sits down and, for the first time, looks drained.)

BRIAN

You can go now.

MITCH

Brian, come on--

BRIAN

Get out!

MITCH

I'm not leaving.

BRIAN

Don't make me ...

(He loosens his tie and takes off his jacket.)

MITCH

(Amazed.)

Wow, you loosened the tie.

BRIAN

Are you going to leave, or--

MITCH

You can't keep denying that pop--

(BRIAN lunges at MITCH, winds up a punch but doesn't throw it.)

BRIAN

I don't want to hear that. Not from you, not from anyone.

(Beat.)

Pop worked like a dog -- a dog! -- for us. He made sure we always had the next meal, a decent home, money for school. Shit he never had, he took three jobs to make sure we did.

(Beat.)

And yeah, okay, he wasn't happy all the time -- with that kind of schedule, who would be? But he never slowed down, never complained, and never -- ever -- wasted time with some new-age, feel-good, I'm-ok-your-ok shrink shit.

(Beat. Then in a conceding tone.)

Course, you work as hard as he did for as long as he did-- I don't care how strong you are -- you're bound to screw up.

MITCH

It wasn't--

BRIAN

Stop!

(Beat as MITCH sighs resignedly.)

Four hours' sleep a night, you can't help but make a few mistakes. For some people, those mistakes, well, they're just stupid things you could laugh about. For pop, driving a truck at three in the morning, there are no small mistakes.

MITCH

It wasn't a--

BRIAN

How do you know that?! How does anyone--

MITCH

He tried before--

BRIAN

One bad night, he takes a few extra pills -- overtired, you know? Made him stupid, punch-drunk. And for years after that, mom says he used to laugh about it.

MITCH

Mom also said--

BRIAN

(Pleading.)

Come on, Mitch! I know you were young, but don't you remember how happy he used to be?

MITCH

Yeah, I remember. I also remember him being very quiet.

BRIAN

He was tired.

MITCH

He was manic depressive.

BRIAN

I told you--

MITCH

The doctors told him.

BRIAN

And he laughed in their faces.

MITCH

And he drove off a bridge!

BRIAN

It was an accident!

MITCH

There was a note!

BRIAN

All it said was "sorry." He could have been sorry for a million things. Doesn't mean--

MITCH

Can't keep denying it.

BRIAN

(Losing steam.)

Could've been an argument with mom, you know? And maybe, you know, he wanted to apol--

MITCH

There was no argument. She knew.

BRIAN

She doesn't know for sure. Nobody knows--

MITCH

Everyone knows -- including you. Especially you.

BRIAN

Especially?

MITCH

You've got the same shit he had.

BRIAN

Don't--

MITCH

So do I.

BRIAN

I'm fine--

MITCH

Runs in the family. Keep ignoring it, it'll eat you up.

BRIAN

It'll eat you up. I make my plans and do what needs to be done.

MITCH

What needs to be done is you opening that door.

BRIAN

When the managed metamorphosis is complete--

MITCH

Liz'll leave you.

BRIAN

I don't think--

MITCH

And Kara and Jen won't take you camping.

BRIAN

They won't desert--

MITCH

You're deserting them.

(Long pause as MITCH awaits intently for BRIAN's response, which never comes. Instead, BRIAN settles back to watch the game. MITCH is visibly upset with the lack of response and sighs in frustration.)

BRIAN

Oooh, he turned that ankle.

MITCH

(He indicates to the TV.)

He'll get help. What's your excuse?

(Beat as MITCH shakes his head, slowly gets up and leaves.)

BRIAN

Call the picks! Talk to each other, damn it! Communicate!
No communication.

End