

THE RIGHT CALL

Written by

Thomas Chadwick

November 30, 2024 Draft

13 Redstone Way, Farmington, CT 06032
860-882-3192

INT. NCJ NEWS DESK - EVENING

STEVEN STONE is finishing his guest anchor slot on the '8pm Nightly News'.

STEVEN

This has been your 8PM Nightly News, I am Steven Stone, and I am going to be handing you off to D.C. with Lawrence Hight for 'The Current Break'. Good night.

As Steven walks off from the desk, his producer MARYSIA runs up to him with a coffee cup and his cell phone. They start to walk.

MARYSIA

Seriously a good showing, live reacts were good, I mean you have traction. Even Claudia said she liked your smile.

STEVEN

My fucking cheeks hurt, I had the charm turned up to eleven so thank god Claudia said something about it. Did we get -

Steven's phone starts to ring. It is his wife LANETTE.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Shit, I almost forgot again.

He answers the phone.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Hey babe, speaker phone, I got Marysia here too.

MARYSIA

Hey Lanette!

LANETTE (ON PHONE)

You said the moment you got off air you would call with the book, why am I the one calling you right now Steven? I swear to God-

STEVEN

Speaker phone, Letty, and let me just get situated, I am not going to miss you guys this time, I promise.

LANETTE (ON PHONE)

Yeah how many times have I fu-
sorry, freaking heard that Steven,
is this promise number 4? Either
read the book like I keep telling
him you will or say you can't do
it.

STEVEN

I will read the book to Beckham
tonight, keep him up for maybe 5
more minutes, I was just breaking
down my slot with Marysia.

MARYSIA

(louder) Hi Lanette!

As they go back and forth, another producer named BLAKE walks
up to the pair. He interrupts as Marysia rolls her eyes.

BLAKE

Hey Steven - great fucking slot.
Like really great.

Steven reaches to shake his hand and to say thanks but Blake
cuts him off shaking his head.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Yeah hey look - we want to run you
again right now as a swap back to
New York on a breaking story.

There is a deep sigh over the phone as Lanette hears this
request and Steven jumps in for damage control.

STEVEN

I appreciate the offer but I'm busy
tonight, promised Beckham I would
read him a story when I got off air
before he falls asleep.

LANETTE (ON PHONE)

Can't you just get Lawrence to do
it?

MARYSIA

Yeah, why cut back to us?

BLAKE

Lawrence sucks, Marysia, no. Look,
I'm not going to be the one to tell
Fitz no, he asked for you
specifically. He's on his way.

Blake goes back towards the control room, leaving Steven and Marysia in shock.

STEVEN

Fitz asked for *me*? Letty, I will call you back I swear in 5 minutes. I am reading this book tonight. Keep Becks up, I love you.

LANETTE (ON PHONE)

Whatever Steven, you know his bedtime and you can sleep in the *fu-freaking* car if he doesn't get a story from you before that.

She hangs up and Steven and Marysia walk towards the control room after Blake.

INT. NCJ CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

Steven, Marysia, and Blake wait in the office as the doors open to LELAND FITZGERALD, the CEO of NCJ News. Everyone stands at attention at his entrance.

LELAND

There he is! You ready to get back on air? Got it all set up for you, wrote it myself.

STEVEN

So appreciative of this offer, sir, but I promised my son I would read him a story before bed - I have missed the past couple of times I planned on this so really have to make good here.

Leland's face remains stoic, but looks around the control room. He motions to Blake to clear the room.

Blake nods his head and motions to Marysia to walk out with him to the hallway. She quickly follows, confused.

LELAND

You know, that's a shame. I had a pretty powerful segment. Was considering it a last hurdle before I gave you your own slot.

STEVEN

What's the story?

LELAND

Ha! I remember being like that too, you hear something that peaks your interest and can't help but know more. You are predisposed though, no point in it.

Steven sits in silence and nods his head slowly. There is a tension in the air, with Steven waiting to hear more.

LELAND (CONT'D)

Remember that pro-choice rally planned at St. Mary's we reported? It is getting violent apparently. Got some footage to run sent in from a first hand witness.

Leland hits play on the control panel with clip of an aggressive gathering, fights breaking out from a chaotic handheld perspective. Steven looks closely at the footage and notices an inconsistency.

STEVEN

You said St. Mary's? I know that hospital, that's... This doesn't really look like 83rd - shouldn't there be a corner store there?

Steven looks closer at the footage.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Someone sent this in? They must've gotten the spot wrong - no point in me going on air with this anyway, right, no way to verify? (nervous laughter).

Leland doesn't return the laughter and pauses the footage.

LELAND

It is tough to tell sometimes with footage like that - I understand you not getting your bearings as a young reporter. Listen, you're raw but you got charm. I understand you have an obligation to your family though, and I can really respect that. When it comes to this field, there are great reporters, and then there are great husbands. I wish I could've been the latter like you are - otherwise I wouldn't be on wife number 3.

(MORE)

LELAND (CONT'D)
(he laughs) I thought I saw something, but I am proud that you could make the right call about who you were tonight.

The same previous tension fills the air. Leland is clearly waiting for Steven to leave first. Steven stares at the paused video, then back to Leland, weighing his options.

STEVEN
I can do it.

Leland claps his hands and motions to the door.

INT. NCJ NEWS DESK - MOMENTS LATER

Makeup preps Steven. He looks down to his phone which shows missed calls from Lanette. He opens up his texts and writes "BIG BREAK FROM FITZ, I SWEAR IT IS WORTH IT. I LOVE YOU."

The phone shows a read receipt, Lanette starts to type, but it disappears. He hands his phone to Marysia, tosses his bag over to the side off set, and he is counted down and goes live.

STEVEN
Yes, Lawrence, we have breaking news from New York as it seems that the large pro-choice rally outside of St. Mary's Presbyterian has turned violent. NCJ has received some first hand footage showing-

The footage starts to play and the teleprompter queues Steven to describe a scene he knows to be false. He clears his throat and continues.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
We apologize for the unsteady camerawork that can make some details unclear but this does appear to be outside of St. Mary's where a-

Steven is sweating and looks down at the desk. His hands tremble with the papers in his hands as he contemplates the choice he made. Finally, he looks up to the camera with conviction.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

My son was born at St. Mary's 5 years ago, and I still remember running down that street to celebrate like it was yesterday. My whole life shifted that day to being about him instead of me, but I fear I have strayed from that path. I promised to myself to be the man I want to see him grow up into.

INT. NCJ CONTROL ROOM

BLAKE

What is he fucking doing, Marysia, are you feeding him this? Is he rogue right now? Can we switch to Lawrence?

MARYSIA

Lawrence is still in makeup because he is a diva. (in headset) Steven, come back to us please, lock in and we can both keep our jobs!

INT. NCJ NEWS DESK

STEVEN

This footage does not appear to be from the protest outside of St. Mary's. This footage was not properly vetted and is being used for an agenda with which I am ashamed to be associated. But most importantly, I am ashamed of the person I am showing my son to be. I may not have the power to fix my first mistake, but... one moment please.

Steven gets up from the desk and rushes over to the bag he tossed, pulling out the book he had planned for his son.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

I wanted to read this tonight to you, Beckham. It was one of my favorites growing up.

He begins to read "The Astrologer", from Aesop's Fables.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

"A man learned to observe the movements of the stars in order to predict the future. He soon became famous as an astrologer."

INT. NCJ CONTROL ROOM

BLAKE

What? The Fuck? Is this? Did he just - do we have anything we can cut to right now, are we kidding? Please - is Lawrence ready? Can we cut back?? Marysia, get this shit off my screen, cut to an ad.

Leland sits in the room watching with a stoic look, analyzing the screen to see what Steven does. Steven continues to read, and Marysia calls out to the room looking at another screen.

MARYSIA

No, I'm not going to - this is the most interaction we have ever seen online. They love it, we have to leave him. And I'm with him.

Blake goes to muscle Marysia out of the way of the control panel, but Leland steps in between them. He stares at the monitor and waits for Steven to finish with a slight smile. Steven ends his broadcast and returns to the control room.

LELAND

Cute stunt - you should've fucked your career. But I knew I saw something in you, you're a shark in a company full of fish. 9pm anchor, The Current Break, it's yours. You start tomorrow. Blake, tell Lawrence he is fired.

STEVEN

I thought a lot about what you told me, sir. But I think I made the right call before - if it comes to being a good reporter or being a good father, I'm going to pick the latter.

Steven walks out, followed by Marysia, who (finally liberated) gives two middle fingers to the shocked room as well. End.