

The Investigation

A 15-minute live comedy for two actors performed in front of media planners in the US

Written for CourtTV's advertising sales department

INT. INTEROGATION ROOM—DAY

A big box of marked "evidence" sits on a table, next to a small, hand held tape recorder. Nearby is a TV monitor and another box, also marked evidence. DETECTIVE PHIL SMILEY, early 40s, gruff, with an attitude is pacing around the room. A battered briefcase sits beside a chair. PAT BIGELOW, an effete, stylishly dressed young executive-type sits in front of him. Smiley gestures with a folder in his hand. Bigelow maintains a cool, superior demeanor with barely concealed hostility.

DET. SMILEY

Beautiful jacket you got there Bigelow. Exquisite tailoring. Armani?

BIGELOW

What are you--the fashion police? (beat) Can I go now?

SMILEY

Not so fast, Bigelow. I got all day to soak up your crap. Unless you want to get this off your chest right now.

BIGELOW

I don't know what you're talking about.

Smiley looks in the folder and starts to read Bigelow's personal information.

SMILEY

Interesting! Dad's still serving time for being one of the Chicago Seven. Never heard of him!

BIGELOW

Well, there was really more like eight or nine of them...

Smiley keeps reading.

SMILEY

Sister's on probation for stealing a shipment of Little Debbie Snackcakes. Mom's a homemaker. (beat) And then there's you, Bigelow. This your first job?

BIGELOW

Media planner.

SMILEY

Cubicle or office?

BIGELOW

(exasperated)

Cubicle.

SMILEY

(in Bigelow's face)

Like I said: how'd you afford the threads?

BIGELOW

Recognizing value is my job, Smiley.

SMILEY

That's Detective Smiley to you. Kid, I got 18 years on the force. I'm king of the castle. Know where I buy my clothes?

Bigelow winces.

BIGELOW

I've got investments, detective.

Smiley takes some official-looking financial documents and slaps them down on the table. He sits on the edge of it, right next to Bigelow.

SMILEY

Who do you think you're fooling here? Is there something you haven't told me?

He plunks a tape recorder right in front of Bigelow.

BIGELOW

I'm good at what I do. I build brands!

Smiley gets up again, glares down at Bigelow.

SMILEY

Oh, you're good, alright. I got a witness who'll swear on a stack of stock options you've been running stolen merchandise ever since college. The job's just a cover-up. Isn't that right, Bigelow? Looks legit. You get to dine out. All those parties and perks. The schmoozing. The expense accounts. How do you explain the Sunsetter motorized awning you just installed at your parent's home up in Buffalo? They don't come cheap.

Bigelow's face brightens.

BIGELOW

The Sunsetter. Now that's a beautiful awning. Easy to use and affordable, Detective Smiley. Four payments—only \$19.95.

SMILEY

Which you never made, Bigelow! It's all hot!

BIGELOW

I deny the allegations--and I demand to see the alligator.

SMILEY

You punk. Think you're smarter 'n me?

BIGELOW

I'm one year out of school, detective. I got a jacket that costs more than you pay in child support. You're sitting there in a pair of pants you can't even button.

SMILEY

Where were you last Wednesday at 3pm?

BIGELOW

I don't know what you're talking about.

SMILEY

We found the merchandise, Bigelow. We know about the storage locker in Jersey City, thanks to your roommate. You're going down, and when you do, it's pop goes the weasel.

Smiley gets up. He starts to pace.

BIGELOW

You can kiss my ass.

Smiley whips around to face Bigelow, picks up the tape recorder and barks into it:

SMILEY

That'd be an all-day job!

He then shuts it off and slips it into his pocket.

BIGELOW

I want a lawyer.

Smiley pulls out his cell phone, plays with it in front of Bigelow.

SMILEY

What do you think? Should we just give Allen Dershowitz a buzz? Because you're headed straight to Rikers, Bigelow. Ain't no special perks there. No cable. And no CourtTV! Unless you're willing to bend over to get them.

Bigelow reacts viscerally to the mention of the network. Smiley notices it.

SMILEY

Something strike a nerve, Bigelow?

Bigelow turns away, resisting. Smiley pushes a button to activate the intercom.

SMILEY

I need a polygraph in here!

BIGELOW

Let me at least call the office! I was due at work four hours ago—they'll wonder where I am.

SMILEY

How's about we call them together.

Smiley opens up the phone, watching Bigelow's reaction.

BIGELOW

I can't tell them where I am. I'll lose my job!

SMILEY

So say you were out late with a client—you got food poisoning from the blowfish at Nobu. You've come up with excuses before...

BIGELOW

They'll never go for it.

Smiley puts his cell phone down on the table, but he doesn't take his hand off it.

BIGELOW

Everybody in media uses that one.

SMILEY

So where were you then?

Puts the phone back in his pocket.

BIGELOW

I told you. I was presenting a media plan to Wesson Industries.

SMILEY

Isn't it true you were home, watching CourtTV?

Again, Bigelow reacts when Smiley mentions CourtTV.

BIGELOW

That's just plain crazy. I was at a client...

SMILEY

Bigelow. Make it easy on yourself. Tell us what you know about CourtTV.

Again, Smiley pulls out the tape recorder. Bigelow reacts once more, but controls it.

BIGELOW

Nothing, I told you.

SMILEY

Nothing? You're a media planner and you don't know about CourtTV? How is that possible? Didn't you in fact recommend that your client, Wesson Industries, buy spots on CourtTV? Refresh my memory, Bigelow. What do they make?

BIGELOW

Pepper spray.

SMILEY

Pepper spray! For self-defense!

BIGELOW

No—cooking. They also make spray on sea salt and paprika. Plus a whole other line of all-natural aerosol seasonings.

SMILEY

Aha! I knew it! CourtTV, Bigelow. You're hooked on it!

There is silence.

SMILEY

I got all the evidence. Media plans. Dates. Dayparts. GRPs.

Pats box of evidence. There is more silence as he pulls out stacks of paper and photographs. Still more silence. Again, he puts the recorder back in his pocket.

SMILEY

You not only recommended CourtTV. You lived it! Media planner by day, criminal by night. Their investigative reporting is pretty riveting. The stories. You wouldn't be the first to learn the tricks of the trade from some of those shows. I'm hooked on Forensic Files myself. Learned more about DNA testing than I did at the Police Lab.

BIGELOW

You got it all wrong, Detective Smiley. CourtTV means nothing to me. It's just another show.

SMILEY

(cuts him off)

You recognize any of these people?

Shows Bigelow a picture of John Walsh. Then Catherine Crier. Dennis Franz. Bigelow shrinks away from the photos like Dracula before a cross.

SMILEY

The truth hurts!

BIGELOW

(Starts to shake uncontrollably)

Why are you doing this to me?

Smiley is standing over Bigelow, bearing down, threatening, photos in hand.

SMILEY

Bigelow! Who do you see? John Walsh! America's Most Wanted. And look! Why it's your buddy, legal eagle Catherine Crier. You know them, Bigelow. You know what they do. You have intimate knowledge of CourtTV's pull with audiences. The investigative excellence. The unique position in the crime and justice genre. The awards...

BIGELOW

I...I...thought it was just a channel for courtroom geeks.

SMILEY

You're lying. Look at the stats, Bigelow! [include sales data here] They come from your own files. I got all day, Bigelow. When can I have some cooperation? Eh?

BIGELOW

How about never! Is never good enough for you?

SMILEY

That attitude may work at the office, Bigelow, but it'll never work with me.

Bigelow holds head in hands. Smiley moves toward audience and speaks into small handheld tape recorder.

SMILEY

Note to self: Time to use advanced police psychology.

Smiley pockets tape recorder and visibly softens up. He walks over and puts an arm around Bigelow.

SMILEY

Let's take a break now. Shall we? I was a little hard on you back there. You OK? You want some lunch? You're looking a little peaked.

Bigelow nods weakly. Smiley activates the intercom again.

SMILEY

Can you get our chief suspect some nutrition here? Whaddya want, Bigelow? What can I get for you?

BIGELOW
(weakly)

Got any Sushi?

SMILEY

You want fries with that?

Lunch is delivered. Smiley hands Bigelow a bag of White Castle burgers. He pulls a Tupperware container for himself out of his

battered briefcase. Bigelow looks on enviously as Smiley starts to eat some mini frankfurters, playing up how much he is enjoying them.

SMILEY

These L'il Smokies beef franks are just plain heaven!

Bigelow is getting distressed.

BIGELOW

(dreamily)

L'il Smokies. You didn't finish them.

Smiley slides the unfinished container across the table, within Bigelow's reach.

BIGELOW

(having difficulty resisting)

Nah. I really got to lose some weight.

Smiley pulls an Ab Energizer out of the box of evidence. Plays with it absentmindedly as Bigelow pays rapt attention.

SMILEY

You know, with the Ab Energizer, you can eat as many of those babies as you want and still trim down.

Bigelow is weakening.

SMILEY

Go ahead, strap it on.

Bigelow is transfixed now.

SMILEY

Bigelow?

Smiley pushes the energizer across the table. Bigelow picks it up. Bigelow stands up slowly. Smiley walks around the table, helps Bigelow put it on, and activates it.

BIGELOW

The currents make it feel like you're actually doing stomach crunches. Without even doing them!

SMILEY

I know. We found the literature in your desk. Highlighted.

As Bigelow marvels at the physical effects of the Ab Energizer, Smiley again walks toward the audience and speaks into his tape recorder.

SMILEY

(in a whisper)

Note to self: play it cool!

Smiley pockets tape recorder and walks back to Bigelow, who is wolfing down the rest of Smiley's lunch.

SMILEY

So let's get back to CourtTV, shall we?

Smiley pulls away the tupperware container. Bigelow reaches for it but Smiley puts it just out of reach.

SMILEY

Once the audience is involved with an investigation, they're addicted. Isn't that right? They pay attention to clues and watch the program from beginning to end?

Bigelow clams up. Smiley knows he's in a precarious position. He gets up and circles the table.

SMILEY

Which means they stay tuned. None of this channel switching during commercial breaks. They get hooked. Right Bigelow?

Bigelow, recognizing that Smiley is playing him, feigns going along.

BIGELOW

(feigns losing control)

Just one more L'il Smokie. Just one more! I'll talk. I'll talk!

Smiley relents, sliding the container of food over to Bigelow, who devours it. Smiley plunks down the tape recorder, yet again, anticipating a victory.

SMILEY

So tell me more, Bigelow. Tell me about how audiences are so addicted to CourtTV, they even pay close attention to the commercials—“set it and forget it!” You can relate to those words, can't you, Bigelow?

Bigelow, having finished Smiley's lunch, goes back to playing head games with him.

BIGELOW

I don't know what you're talking about.

Smiley turns around and pounds the table in frustration. He whips around. The tape recorder falls to the floor. Bigelow is enjoying the turn in events.

Lights dim, then come back up to indicate the passage of time. Bigelow is now jacketless. There are papers all over the table. Smiley's shirtsleeves are rolled up. He picks up the tape recorder and starts talking into it again.

SMILEY

(in low voice)

Time to play ball!

He turns around to face a belligerent but tired Bigelow.

SMILEY

It's 11 pm, Bigelow. You know what that means? Either spill the beans on CourtTV—or you'll be spending the night. With me!

Bigelow looks around, uneasily.

BIGELOW

You can't keep me here.

Smiley pulls out an Aero Bed from another box on the floor. Bigelow's eyes bulge.

SMILEY

I'm getting so sleepy.

He inflates the Aero Bed.

SMILEY

Just like on TV, eh Bigelow? Bet you can even recite the commercial for me. (beat) How many payments of \$19.95 is it. Three?

He turns off most of the lights in the room, goes over to the Aero Bed, and lies down. He takes the tape recorder out of his pocket and stands it upright next to the bed.

SMILEY

This is comfy! I can see why you went for this, Bigelow. But five of them. Really—it's just so—greedy!

Silence. Smiley turns one way, then another, trying to get comfortable. Bigelow suddenly gets up from the table and heads for the door.

SMILEY

Door's locked, Bigelow. It's just us two!

More silence. Bigelow sits back down. He puts his head on the table, but can't get comfortable. Smiley is finally quiet, arms crossed across his chest. He is silent for only a moment.

SMILEY

Hell, I'm feeling guilty, Bigelow. I can make some room here.

Bigelow is uneasy, but gets up from the table and moves over to the mattress.

BIGELOW

Can I have that side?

Smiley moves over. Bigelow lies down. The two lie back to back. Then face to face. Then head to foot.

SMILEY

Oh, this is divine. Bigelow?

BIGELOW

Yeah, Detective Smiley.

Smiley fiddles with the tape recorder next to him on the floor.

SMILEY

So—I'm just a little curious. What is it about CourtTV you find so irresistible? It's the movies, isn't it! Or is it the trial coverage that keeps you and women, 18-45 (fill in whatever the demographic target is) glued to your seats.

Bigelow sits bolt upright in bed. Smiley pretends once again to shut his eyes.

SMILEY

Don't try anything funny, Bigelow. I sleep with one eye open.

Bigelow lies down uneasily. There is a funny noise. SFX of buzzing in the room.

SMILEY

What the hell is that noise?

Smiley sits upright this time. He glares down at Bigelow's stomach.

SMILEY

Give me that!

Bigelow reluctantly takes off the Ab Energizer. Smiley throws it across the room, lies down again, and tries to get comfortable. Again, there is silence. The two men lie motionless. Bigelow finally stirs.

BIGELOW

Smiley?

SMILEY

Yeah, Bigelow.

BIGELOW

I can't sleep.

SMILEY

Me neither.

Smiley turns on the TV and they both face the screen, though trying to keep plenty of distance between them. CourtTV appears on the screen. Bigelow is transfixed. There's a commercial for the Showtime Rotisserie and BBQ with Ron Popeil. We hear SFX of the audience repeating Popeil's entreaty to "set it, and forget it."

BIGELOW

It's even more beautiful than I remember.

SMILEY

What did you say, Bigelow?

Bigelow, realizing he has nearly given himself away, snaps.

BIGELOW

I said turn it off!

Smiley holds the remote, taunting Bigelow.

SMILEY

What? But this is what you want! See? It's COPS. Your favorite! Oh look. And L'il Smokies...

Bigelow is pulling his hair. He lunges for the remote as the L'il Smokies commercial finishes up in the background and the monitor returns to COPS.

BIGELOW

Turn it off! Turn it off!

The two men grapple for the remote. SFX OF A GUNSHOT as Smiley's pistol discharges into the Aero Bed, causing it to deflate. Bigelow falls limp.

Smiley looks in horror at Bigelow.

SMILEY

Bigelow! Bigelow!

Smiley shakes Bigelow. Bigelow recoils.

BIGELOW

You're scaring me, detective.

Starts to cry. Smiley hugs him.

BIGELOW

I just wanna go home.

Smiley takes out his tape recorder. Bigelow takes it and begins to confess as the lights come up.