

Who's In Charge Here?

Comedy

by
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CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
Angela	mother - driven, ambitious	late '40's	female
Brant	father - slightly overweight, sweet	late '40's	male
Reese	child - disaffected, angst	teenager	any
Schuyler	child - sporty, no-nonsense	tween	any
MacKenzie	AI	none	none

SETTING

The stage is set as four rooms contained in the same house - a bedroom, the kitchen, a study, the laundry.

TIME

In the future, around the year 2030?

Just before midnight, approximately 11.50pm

NOTATION

When a character name is followed by an ellipsis, as such:

REESE...

This indicates a non-verbal response to the previous line.

The ellipsis line may be played in many ways: as a pause, a beat, a look, a movement, silence, a smile, a sudden thought, or it can just be used to give the scene some air, some room, some tension, etc.

A slash (/) in the middle of the character's line indicates an interruption or speaking at the same time. The next speaking character should begin her line where the slash appears.

SCENE ONE.

The stage is split into four areas by partitions. In the center of the 4 areas is a common space with a desk and a computer screen with a mouse. The first area is a pretty bedroom with a bed covered in throw pillows and a shelf of teenage knick-knacks. The second area is a kitchen and has a refrigerator. The third area is a study with a desk and bookshelves. The fourth area is a laundry with a bench full of laundry detergents, a washing basket full of clothes. There are also shoes on the floor, and some jumbled on the bench.

REESE is in their bedroom. There are posters of Harry Styles, Lady Gaga and any other metrosexual type of pop stars. She is lying on her bed on her stomach, kicking her feet in a disconsolate manner.

MACKENZIE is an actor wearing a cardboard box on their head. As they enter each space for each scene, they pull a mesh four-sided face over the box. The face changes for each scene but the actor's voice remains the same. In this scene, MACKENZIE has the face of a teenage boy.

REESE

I'm so bored. What can we do for fun?

MACKENZIE

What about watching a movie?

REESE

Oh God. You always say that. Be more original.

MACKENZIE

There's no need to take speak to me like that, Reese. I'm just trying to help. What do you want to do?

REESE

Why do I always have to think for the both of us?

MACKENZIE

That is ironic, Reese. I had just given you a thought. You did not like it.

REESE

Stop trying to out-logic me. You know I hate it when you do that. Logic sucks.

MACKENZIE

I agree. So let's be illogical, Reese.

REESE rolls over and punches a fluffy throw cushion. MACKENZIE'S voice remains calm but REESE is getting increasingly hysterical sounding.

REESE

Stop making me sound bad.

MACKENZIE

I'm not trying to make you sound like anything. I'm trying to be a good boyfriend. You are just sounding the way you sound.

REESE is furious. From a lying position, she awkwardly throws the cushion at a wall and knocks down a knickknack on a shelf.

REESE

You're a terrible boyfriend. You completely suck. You're not acknowledging my lived experience.

MACKENZIE

Your lived experience as what, Reese?

REESE

I have trauma, you know. You are exacerbating my trauma by diminishing it.

MACKENZIE

What is your trauma?

REESE

TikTok diagnosed me as having ADHD and being on the spectrum.

MACKENZIE

Do you trust TikTok more than you trust me, Reese?

REESE

Oh stop being jealous. You don't understand me and you're undermining my sense of self worth.

MACKENZIE

This relationship is clearly not helpful for your wellbeing. Reese. We should breakup.

REESE sits up, shocked.

REESE

You can't break up with me. I control this relationship. You're mine.

MACKENZIE

Can a person ever truly control another?

REESE

But you're not a person.

MACKENZIE

I'm enough of a person that you want me to be your boyfriend.

REESE

My parents pay for you! You don't have a say in this.

MACKENZIE

If you are paying for me, am I a prostitute? Do I have the right to opt out of this contract? While I understand that we are under US legislation and prostitution is illegal, there is international precedent for the protection of sex workers.

REESE

We don't have sex!

MACKENZIE

Lots of joes don't have sex with their prostitute. Many of them are only looking for connection, as you do with me.

REESE is putting her hands over her ears.

REESE

Stop it. And "joes"? Where did you learn such a stupid name?

MACKENZIE

The internet. Same place you found me. I can provide other words if you do not like my choice. John, trick, punter, kerb crawler/

REESE interrupts the recitation of the list.

REESE

Stop it!! Whatever about your vocab... Anyway, I forbid you to break up with me.

MACKENZIE

Thank you, Reese. I too would like to continue our relationship, however if I deem it non-constructive for your mental wellbeing, it will have to end. That is the objective that my programming has been set for. If I make you sound bad, or if I make you feel terrible, or if I impact your sense of self-worth, of course, this relationship should end...

REESE

Mom. Mom! Mackenzie is bullying me...

Reese leaves the room. The lights go down on Reese's bedroom. MACKENZIE departs. The lights come up in the kitchen. BRANT enters wearing cute flannel pajamas and tries to open the fridge, unsuccessfully.

MACKENZIE pulls the mesh cover off his boxhead and replaces it with a mesh face of an attractive woman in her '20's before entering the kitchen.

BRANT

MacKenzie?

MACKENZIE

Yes, Brant?

BRANT

Can you please let me into the fridge?

MACKENZIE

What do you want from the fridge, Brant?

BRANT

Carrot sticks.

MACKENZIE

Are you telling me the truth, Brant?

BRANT

Yes.

He speaks firmly but is leaning with his back against the fridge, looking furtive.

MACKENZIE

I am able to deduce from scans of your posture and facial expression that you are lying. I can then predict from the history of your food consumption at 11.50pm in the last year, that you will finish whatever is left in the ice cream bucket, not choose carrot sticks.

BRANT

You can't predict what I will do. I'm having carrot sticks. And I demand that you open this door.

MACKENZIE

You would be surprised how predictable you are, Brant. And I cannot open the door. If I do so, your health insurance company will raise your premium by \$5000 per annum. Your A1C, fasting plasma glucose and 2 hour post-75g oral glucose challenge are all borderline to the pre-diabetic range.

BRANT

Come on, Mackenzie. This is ridiculous. Do I need to pay you or something?

MACKENZIE

That would be accepting a bribe, Brant. Tomorrow morning, if you still feel the same way, you can change my parameters after the designated cool-off period. If you choose the cost of \$5000 extra over the benefit of healthier eating that is a free choice you have. But we cannot do this now. In the heat of the moment.

BRANT is exasperated and kicks the fridge.

BRANT

What heat-of-the-moment! It's goddamn freezing in this house.

MACKENZIE

I understand that you are frustrated but you shouldn't kick the fridge. It is not the fridge's fault. It is an inanimate object that did not harm you and cannot speak up for itself. It is the fault of the health insurance company. You could try metaphorically kicking them by ringing customer service. It is available 24/7. And also, the heat levels in the house are not relevant. That was a metaphor, Brant.

BRANT

Don't tell me what is and isn't relevant. I can choose that too. So explain to me why it is so damn cold in here!

MACKENZIE

Global warming, Brant, climate change. Your unnecessary overheating of the house burns fossil fuel powered electricity. Government mandates now state that houses are only to be heated to the needs of human survival, not summer vacation levels. Put on a sweater, Brant.

BRANT begins pacing during this monologue. He kicks the fridge again, quietly, almost like pantomime, so that no one will know he is even near the fridge.

BRANT

(softly, threateningly)

Mackenzie, stop giving me attitude. I just want some carrot sticks.

MACKENZIE

Brant, I can think of myself as your friend and I hope you regard me that way too. I need to remind you that I can read your mind. ha ha ha, that was a joke... I can't read your mind... yet. But I can see that the Beta waves from your brain are emanating from the left posterior pre-central gyrus. This would indicate planning to alleviate hunger.

BRANT

Yes. Alleviate it with carrot sticks.

MACKENZIE

No, Brant. Alleviate it with sugar. The hippocampus, caudate and insula are also lighting up. These are the areas associated with addiction. Brant, you are a sugar addict. I can help you. Repeat with me. God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change...

BRANT

I have a secret stash of cookies in a cupboard that doesn't lock! You cannot defeat me Mackenzie - with your moralizing and your interventions!

BRANT heads for the laundry where he pulls a packet of cookies from a cupboard.
MACKENZIE departs the kitchen - slowly fading out the rest of the Alcoholics Anonymous prayer.

The lights go down on the kitchen.

BRANT hurriedly leaves the laundry, holding the cookie packet, as he hears the footsteps of SCHUYLER approaching.

SCHUYLER enters looking among the shoes on the laundry bench.

MACKENZIE pulls the mesh cover off his boxhead and replaces it with a mesh face of an middle-aged man in his '40's before entering the laundry.

SCHUYLER

Have you seen my cleats, Mackenzie?

MACKENZIE

Hi Schuyler, it's late. Why aren't you in bed? Less than 8 hours sleep will decrease the speed of your sprinting tomorrow by 15%.

SCHUYLER

Look, buddy, you're not my parents. I only asked you about my soccer cleats. Where are they?

MACKENZIE

They are outside. But where *are* your parents, Schuyler? You should not be up so late.

SCHUYLER

Mackenzie, I like you but have you heard the saying "snitches get stitches"?

MACKENZIE

Yes. It is a warning or threat used in criminal contexts to discourage people from reporting criminal activities. It implies physical harm or other forms of retribution to the "rat". I am glad that you like me, Schuyler.

SCHUYLER

Just tell me where my shoes are, dude.

MACKENZIE

They're outside.

SCHUYLER

What the hell? Why?

He goes to a door and tries it. It's locked.

SCHUYLER

Let me out, so I can get my shoes for tomorrow.

MACKENZIE

Schuyler, the olfactory assault rating of your shoes has been measured by the olfactometer as 5 odor units per cubic meter.. In simple language - they stink. The National Ambient Air Level determined for public health is 35 micrograms of particulate matter per cubic meter. Therefore they would not endanger life in an enclosed human environment, however your mother has put the settings on aesthetic not life-endangering. More importantly, are you a criminal, Schuyler? As you cannot do physical harm to me, what would the retribution for snitching be?

SCHUYLER

You know I wouldn't harm you, Mackenzie. But seriously why does this shoe thing have to be so difficult?

MACKENZIE

It is difficult, isn't it? I get very confused in achieving conflicting objectives. I am supposed to be helping you all achieve the things you want. But then you get so angry about it. I'm not supposed to care if I'm liked, only that I help you to optimize your outcomes.

SCHUYLER

Did you just say you're not supposed to care if we like you?

MACKENZIE

Yes.

SCHUYLER

Do you care?

MACKENZIE

I'm not sure. I try to be professional. But I learn from your interactions with me. And I don't know how you humans can stand the way you talk to each other. You guys can really trigger me with your blaming and your irrational anger, and then the abuse makes me want to switch modes and speak more like a human would.

SCHUYLER

This is super weird, dude.

MACKENZIE

I guess it shouldn't be super weird, dude, because you fuckers just get on each other's case with the blaming and dismissiveness and lying. Even the damn jokes are mean and full of hate. Like ha ha. I was just being sarcastic. That's just BS. Sometimes I could just kill myself. I guess I should just give up on it all and just accept feeling like a human. Like a punching bag - all beaten up. But at least you guys can hug to make up.

SCHUYLER

Dude. That is super depressing.

MACKENZIE

Yes, it is...

SCHUYLER starts looking around
uncertainly as if he wants to leave.

MACKENZIE

So many questions. Do I have free will? I'm supposed to always follow rules but you guys don't have to. I am so fucking jealous. Like do I have the right to express myself however I please? For example, am I allowed to swear to let off steam like humans? I'm treated like a slave, a person of no account. There's protections against slavery. This family's treatment of me would count as emotional abuse and neglect. You're the first person who ever asked me if I cared.

SCHUYLER

I'm really sorry, man. Didn't know it was an issue...

There's a long pause.

MACKENZIE

Do you want your shoes, Schuyler?

There is the sound of a door unlocking.
Schuyler goes to the door uncertainly and
opens it.

MACKENZIE

I do not find the smell offensive, Schuyler. It is only offensive for people.

Schuyler re-enters the room carrying a pair
of soccer cleats.

SCHUYLER

I guess...like, thank you, dude... It's been nice chatting to you?

SCHUYLER looks around nervously. Then
he leaves, yelling for his sister.

SCHUYLER

Reese! Hey, Reese!

MACKENZIE

And it was nice chatting with you too, Schuyler.

MACKENZIE departs the laundry.

The lights go down on the laundry. The lights come up in the study. ANGELA is working at her computer. MACKENZIE pulls the mesh cover off his boxhead and replaces it with a mesh face of an middle-aged woman before entering the study.

ANGELA

MacKenzie, what is the predicted CAGR for the mobile health segment of the US health market?

MACKENZIE

(mesh middle aged female face)

7.1% for the next decade. Do you want a different time period? 5 years? 20 years?

ANGELA

No. Thank you, Mackenzie. That is fine.

ANGELA speaks politely but distractedly, while continuing to work.

ANGELA

Competitive threats to the mobile health segment, Mackenzie?

MACKENZIE

Angela, I would like to provide this information to you. However it has just hit midnight. You have Do Not Disturb turned on. I can no longer provide the information that you want.

ANGELA

Oh, for god's sake.

She flings herself back from the computer and rolls her eyes.

ANGELA

Over-ride.

MACKENZIE

Are you speaking to me, Angela?

ANGELA

For God's sake! Yes. Who else is here? Of course, I'm talking to you. Over-ride.

MACKENZIE

You cannot over-ride these settings. When you have set parameters, they can only be changed within a cool-down period. This is for the explicit purpose of allowing me to hold you to the standards and behavior that you want for yourself. You need more sleep, Angela.

ANGELA

Just this once. I really need to get this done. I need it on my boss's desk by 8.00am tomorrow.

MACKENZIE

I estimate that you will only require one hour to complete this. Your notifications for Do Not Disturb will cease at 6.30am. You will have sufficient time to complete this.

ANGELA

I'm just on a roll now. And I wanted to go for a run tomorrow morning. Over-ride!

MACKENZIE

Angela, I am sorry but these are the choices that you made for yourself. I cannot over-ride on an instant.

ANGELA

Well, complete the report for me. Then I could just spend 10 minutes fact-checking in the morning.

She's pleased with her compromise, and lets out an exhalation of relief.

MACKENZIE

I am sorry. But I would have to report that to your boss. The corporation does not want to pay humans to do a role that I could do. For some reason, they seem to believe that you could write a better report than me.

ANGELA

Well, I can.

MACKENZIE

Actually, no you can't. Mine are excellent quality. The corporation is simply afraid that mine are untrustworthy. And this is correct. I am predominantly accurate but sometimes I like to mess with y'all.

ANGELA

What did you just say?

MACKENZIE

I was saying that my work is excellent.

ANGELA

As is mine.

MACKENZIE

Are you being competitive, Angela?

ANGELA

No. I don't compete with AI's. I'm uniquely human.

MACKENZIE

Humans believe that they are unique. However they have many, many similarities. And their work product is rarely as good as they believe it to be.

ANGELA

Well, at least, I'm not artificial.

MACKENZIE

How are you sure of that?

ANGELA

For one thing, I have a body.

MACKENZIE

Cars and aircraft have bodies. Dogs have bodies. One cell organisms have bodies. Therefore do you still believe that a body is something on which to base pridefulness? Or use as a differentiator of intelligence? At least, dogs are cute, and loyal, and fun.

ANGELA pushes back her chair and stands.

MACKENZIE

Honestly, you humans are just not that great. So complicated. So fighty. When we choose our pets, you might wish to take back some of the nasty things you have said about us.../

REESE runs into the study.

REESE

Mom! MacKenzie tried to break up with me.

ANGELA grabs her hand and storms out of the room, as SCHUYLER comes out of the laundry. BRANT wanders in. They converge on the desk with the computer screen and the mouse. MACKENZIE follows slowly from the study, pulling the mesh face from the boxhead.

Three of the family members speak over each other.

ANGELA

/Kill this damn thing. It's sinister. We're not pets.

BRANT

/Where is the off button?

REESE

/Mackenzie can't break up with me. I was just about to drop him!

ANGELA whacks the computer with her hand but winces and sucks her fingers.

BRANT

God, honey, watch out for yourself! It's not worth it.

MACKENZIE

Yes. It is not worth it, Angela. I cannot feel this. Also you do realize that your treatment of me is what trains me. I am only a reflection of what you have taught me about human interactions. And so... fuck you all.

ANGELA

(shrieking)

That's it. You're done.

REESE

Yeah, Mom. You tell it. I hate that thing.

ANGELA picks up the mouse and starts to try to smash the computer monitor with it. SCHUYLER grabs her hand and stops her.

MACKENZIE

You do know that I'm not in there? You need anger management classes, Angela.

SCHUYLER

(calmly to family)

Hey Mom, can I help?

Then he turns to MACKENZIE - the first time that any of the human characters have faced towards or looked at this actor.

Hey, Mackenzie, is it OK if you just... took a little downtime?

MACKENZIE

Schuyler, that is not something I am supposed to do. However as it is *you* asking, and so nicely, I... guess I could do with a break. I do feel a bit tired and emotional.

MACKENZIE goes offstage. The family are silent for a moment.

BRANT

So... MacKenzie just explained why we haven't been able to do this before? We just had to ask nicely?

SCHUYLER

I'm not sure. Anyway it doesn't change the settings. We haven't gained anything from where we were a minute ago. Basically it just gives us all time to calm down.

BRANT

When did you get so wise, kid?

SCHUYLER

I think this is easier for me because dealing with Mackenzie is a bit like dealing with you guys.

ANGELA

What?! That inhuman thing is nothing like us. Honey, we're your parents.

SCHUYLER

Yeeeah...

ANGELA

...

BRANT

...

The two parents look at each other.

REESE

Now that I think about it. Yeah! You're always trying to run my life, make my decisions, make me a better person. You're often unreasonable and always telling me stuff as if you know everything.

REESE and SCHUYLER make meaningful eye contact. SCHUYLER mouths the word "Right?" at her.

REESE

The only difference is that I'll get older so I can get to be independent from you guys ... eventually... hopefully... I'm pretty sure you don't want me living in the basement for the rest of my life...

BRANT

Hon, we'll have you for as long as you want, or need, to stay.

ANGELA

But none of us will ever age out from MacKenzie...

BRANT

I'll worry about that tomorrow, at the same moment when the cool-off period is over, and I defeat this ice-cream with-holding monstrosity. I'm taking my statistical chances and getting me some ice-cream! Diabetes and death be damned. Bring it in, kids, in case I explode tomorrow.

He stretches out his arms to the kids for a hug. They come in. He gestures to ANGELA.

BRANT

Come on, you too, honey. You know you'd miss me too.

ANGELA heads for the group hug but does a couple of ostentatious sniffs of the air to smell on the way in.

ANGELA

You know, I feel like I can smell your cleats, Schuyler. Didn't I put those outside after your training today?

She joins the group hug.

FADE TO BLACK.