

Let's take a look at the first five pages of a single-cam comedy pilot called Merstein's Mansion, written by Harris Wittels, a student in my Writing Television Pilots class at Emerson College. The work is reprinted with Harris' permission. Watch how fast you understand who the characters are and the show's premise. This is a good example of a pilot that sets up the characters and premise quickly.

## MERSTEIN'S MANSION

### "Pilot Episode"

#### ACT ONE

#### FADE IN:

#### INT. DINING ROOM – DAY

ANDY MERSTEIN, 25, disheveled and unshaven, hovers over the fancy dining room table. Next to him is MR. MABRY, a lawyer in his mid-forties.

Also at the table is ANGIE MERSTEIN, 17, clad in black "Goth" clothing; MATTHEW, 19, a prima donna actor wearing dark shades; and SEBASTIAN MERSTEIN, 15, puny, clean-cut, responsible.

Mr. Mabry hands Andy a pen and points to a signature line on legal custody papers that sit on the table in front of them. Andy takes the pen and signs. The rest look on with fearful grimaces.

MR. MABRY

(to Andy)

There you go (a la game show host) Mr. Merstein. You are now the proud winner of three lovely siblings.

SEBASTIAN

(to Mr. Mabry)

Thank you, lawyer guy. You have made me feel like a car.

MR. MABRY

Cute kid.

ANDY

You want him?

MATTHEW

I can't believe Andy is our guardian now.

ANGIE

(to Mr. Mabry)

Can I call a mistrial? Was this a trial? I call a mis-something.  
Please don't put Andy in charge.

MR. MABRY

Sorry, Angie. This was a misnothing, I'm afraid.

MATTHEW

I'm gonna "miss" everything when Andy pawns it all for booze and coke.

MR. MABRY

Look, laws are laws.

Mr. Mabry packs up his briefcase and gets up from the table.

MR. MABRY (cont'd)

It's been a pleasure meeting all of you. Now, if you'll excuse me, I really must be going. He heads for the door. Sebastian chases after him and clings onto his leg for dear life.

SEBASTIAN

(desperately)

Look, Mr. Mabry ... may I call you Mr. Mabry? Do you take bribes? What do you want? A trip to Hawaii?

(then)

In fact, do you want Hawaii? We're very rich. Just take Hawaii – the whole thing. It's yours.

Mr. Mabry shakes Sebastian off of him.

MR. MABRY

I'm sorry! There is nothing I can do! You are all in his care now.

Mr. Mabry leaves. Sebastian stands in the doorway.

SEBASTIAN

(shouting out to him)

We are all in his doesn't care now!

Mr. Mabry does not respond. Sebastian slams the door and returns to the dining hall, where everyone remains.

ANDY

Look, dudes...

Andy pours himself a Jack and Coke and walks out of the room towards the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM – DAY

Andy strolls in with his drink in hand and plops down on the sofa. The rest enter and stand in front of him.

ANDY (cont'd)

I really don't see what you guys are so worried about. I'm the oldest. The way I see it, responsibility is like wine in that with age it gets to be so that it is...

Andy takes a swig of his beverage.

ANDY (cont'd)

...good. You know what I'm saying?

SEBASTIAN

Do you know what you're saying?

A knock is heard on the door. It is opened and then closed.

RODRIGO, a mustached Guatemalan man in his fifties wearing a suit similar to Mr. Mabry's, strolls into the living room. He speaks with a thick Guatemalan accent. All of the siblings stop talking and stare at him.

ANDY

Mr. Mabry...you're back.

MATTHEW

And you're Mexican.

RODRIGO

Hello. I am Rodrigo, and I am Guatemalan.

All the siblings except for Sebastian look confused. Sebastian goes to Rodrigo and shakes his hand.

SEBASTIAN

Hi, Rodrigo...

(to everyone)

Everyone, this is Rodrigo.

(to Rodrigo)

Rodrigo, this is...everyone.

(then)

I went ahead and hired Rodrigo as our new butler. His resumé and background exceeded all the other applicants. He's here on a trial

basis for a little bit. Everyone okay with that?

ANGIE

I guess.

RODRIGO

You must be Miss Angie.

ANGIE

I'm going to my room.

Angie exits.

MATTHEW

I'm Matthew.

RODRIGO

And you must be Matthew. It is good to meet –

He is cut off.

MATTHEW

(panicked)

Christ, I'm late to my audition for Oliver! I'd die for this role!

Matthew grabs his car keys and bolts toward the door SINGING "Consider Yourself" from Oliver. He looks back to everyone and briefly serenades them.

MATTHEW (cont'd)

(singing in awful Cockney accent)

...Consida' yee' self our mate ... consida' ye'self paht o' th' famileee...

He exits. Everyone is utterly unimpressed.

ANDY

(a moment. then)

Well, Rodrigo. I'm sorry to waste your time, but I'm in charge now, and your services won't be needed.

SEBASTIAN

Shut up, Andy.

(then, to Rodrigo)

Actually, your services are very much needed.

ANDY

Can you quit undermining me?

SEBASTIAN

Andy, we need a new butler! Randolph died cause he was a hundred and eighty-seven years old and I say we give Rodrigo a shot.

ANDY

I don't need some authoritative figure breathing down my neck all the time.

RODRIGO

I plan on breathing down no neck, or any other part of the body for that matter, Mister Andy. I just want to help out a bit. I, too, lost my parents at a young age and know how hard it can be. I have no plan of getting in the way. I am very pretty good.

SEBASTIAN

Andy, he's a butler, not a baby-sitter.

ANDY

Well, with Randolph there was no difference! And the only reason he was around was because Mom and Dad hired him before their accident! But it's just us now!

SEBASTIAN

Exactly! It's just us now! Who's gonna cook and clean and everything else? You?

ANDY

Forget it. Do whatever. I'm only the guardian! I've gotta go pick up something I bought on Craigslist.

(bitterly)

That okay with you, Rodrigo?

Andy grabs his car keys and storms out of the house.

SEBASTIAN

(beat)

Welcome to our happy home.

RODRIGO

Everything will be fine. It is like that old saying –

(then)

“Everything will be fine.”

SEBASTIAN

Okay ... well, make yourself at home. I'm going to finish my science project and go to sleep.

RODRIGO

Goodnight, Mister Bastian.

In these first five pages, we definitely get a feel for what the show will be.

Look at everything we have quickly learned: the Mersteins are filthy rich.

Mr. and Mrs. Merstein died in an accident, leaving their three orphaned teenagers in the care of their oldest and most irresponsible child, Andy.

The jumping-off point is that, against his siblings' wishes, Andy signs for guardianship of them. But it is easy to see that the real "parent" raising this family and holding them together will be the younger sibling, Sebastian.

Rodrigo, the Guatemalan butler, will assist him.