

LIAR, LIAR

Written by
Paul Guay & Stephen Mazur

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INT. FULGHAM KINDERGARTEN -- WEDNESDAY MORNING

Two dozen KINDERGARTNERS listen to their teacher, MS. BERRY, who has just written the word "Work" on the blackboard. She's perky, bordering on annoying.

MS. BERRY

"Work." Today we're going to share what our parents do for work.

QUICK CUTS of a series of five-year-olds standing beside their desks, addressing the class:

JEFF

My dad is a truck driver.

MELINDA

My mommy is a doctor.

CAROLYN

My dad is a librarian and my mom is a vegetarian.

THEODORE

(with difficulty)

My father is a struck-sheer-al engine-ear.

CRAIG

My mother is an actress. She works at Denny's.

KELLY

My daddy works at a place where they make stuff, and my mommy is a mommy.

ELLIOT

(looking a little crazed)

My father is a postal worker.

The QUICK CUTS end with MAX:

MAX

My mom is a college teacher.

As Max starts to sit:

MS. BERRY

And your dad?

MAX

(hesitant)

My dad? He's... a liar.

MS. BERRY

(taken aback)

A liar? I don't think you mean a liar, dear.

MAX

Well... he wears a suit and goes to court and talks to the judge and --

MS. BERRY

(relieved)

Oh! I see -- you mean he's a lawyer.

Max shrugs.

INT. COURTROOM -- DAY

FLETCHER REID, an attractive, likeable man in his thirties, stands before the judge. His manner is utterly genuine and convincing.

Beside him sits his CLIENT, a handsome specimen who resembles George Hamilton. Looking on smugly is the opposition: three brothers and their attorneys.

FLETCHER

Your Honor, in urging the Court to void Mrs. Witherspoon's will, her sons raise a troubling question: isn't my client just a cynical gold digger who married their mother for her money, and then seduced her into leaving him the entire estate with a nothing more than a snappy line of patter and a good tan?

The opposition grins. That's the question, all right -- and even the judge thinks there's only one answer.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Well, your Honor, I have a question of my own -- what is "love"?

The sons exchange glances with their attorneys. Even the clerk stops typing for a moment.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

It can't be seen, it can't be weighed, it can't be measured... and yet we know it exists. My client knew it the moment he first saw Freida. And now her sons seek to deny that love. It is true that her circumstances were first-class and his were coach. And? Should

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

the rich be forbidden to love? Should the poor be restricted to their own "kind"? Why don't we just compel everyone to compare tax returns before they embrace? Her sons argue that the marriage didn't last long enough to be taken seriously by this Court... but what is time? When we're in love, a kiss can last forever, and tomorrow never comes. Surely what matters is that Mrs. Witherspoon's marriage to my client was the happiest seventeen days of her life... a grand send-off for her journey to the Great Beyond. Her sons argue that my client's previous unions show a pattern of frivolousness, fecklessness, falsehood and fraud. But this is a man who searches after truth in matters of the heart. So what if it took him four weddings to find it? The plaintiffs are furious that, late in life, their mother recognized them for what they were: grasping, narrow-minded misers who begrudged the woman who gave them birth her own happiness, her own heart's desire, her own hour in the sun. Your Honor, if you believe in love, if you believe that miracles of the heart may lie just around the corner, you must believe my client and his claim to the six million dollars.

We pan -- from the impassioned Fletcher... to the moved spectators... to the shocked sons and their thunderstruck attorneys... to the judge, who wipes away a small tear.

CLIENT

Damn, you're good.

EXT. COURTHOUSE -- DAY

Fletcher is heading down the courthouse steps when he's approached by MOONEY, one of the spectators from the courtroom, a round-faced man in a white suit.

MOONEY

Mr. Reid, you were marvelous.

FLETCHER

Thank you.

MOONEY

Allow me. Patrick Mooney --

He hands Fletcher a business card.

FLETCHER
Ah, a headhunter.

MOONEY
--" Executive recruiter. Say, if you
haven't any plans for lunch....

EXT. RESTAURANT -- DAY

The two men head into a chichi restaurant.

INT. RESTAURANT -- DAY

There's a crowd waiting. Fletcher takes charge, cutting through the patrons to the HOST and inquiring in a friendly tone:

FLETCHER
How much longer? I've been waiting
twenty minutes.

HOST
Your name again, sir?

Fletcher glances at the list, sees the next name on it:

FLETCHER
Abdul.

HOST
Right this way.

Grabbing a menu, he leads Fletcher and the chuckling Mooney to an empty table.

CUT TO:

Fletcher finishes his meal as Mooney finishes his pitch.

MOONEY
-- With a starting salary of two fifty,
and car, and full partnership within a
year.
(big grin)
Well?

FLETCHER
Tempting... but no. For one, I think I
have the inside track on the next
(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 partnership at Allan, Stewart and
 Konigsberg. Plus, I wouldn't want to
 move to San Francisco.

MOONEY
 Well... I must confess Schirn and
 Masterson will be disappointed. Can
 you think of any of your colleagues who
 might be interested?

FLETCHER
 Not offhand, but I've got your card.

Fletcher stands. The two shake. As Fletcher leaves, he
 passes a hungry MIDDLE-EASTERN MAN arguing with the host:

MIDDLE-EASTERN MAN
 You could not have seated me half an
 hour ago, because I'm still here!

EXT. SUBURBAN PORCH -- AFTERNOON

Max and AUDREY sit silently on the porch steps, looking
 out at the quiet suburban street. Each time a car
 approaches, Max leans forward expectantly; each time it
 passes, he sits back, disappointed.

AUDREY
 He's coming.

Max's eyes don't stray from the street.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
 Max, he said he was coming.

Max shoots her a look that asks: "And...?"

But the vigil ends when Fletcher's BMW pulls to the curb.
 Delighted, Max runs to the car and jumps into Fletcher's
 arms as he emerges.

MAX
 Dad!

FLETCHER
 Where?! Oh, you mean me!

As a stern-looking Audrey comes up:

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 Who's this strange woman you're with?

MAX
(with five-year-old
seriousness)
Mom. She's not so strange.

FLETCHER
Hi, Mom! What's a beautiful woman like
you doing in a place like this?

AUDREY
Waiting for her ex-husband to show up
forty-five minutes late.

FLETCHER
(offering his cheek)
First kiss, then explanation.

AUDREY
How about first explanation, then
punch?

Fletcher puts Max down and turns to Audrey.

FLETCHER
I'm sorry. I came just as soon as I
got out of court.

AUDREY
(skeptical)
Yeah. Right.

FLETCHER
Excuse me for vigorously defending the
sacred institution of marriage.
(re her luggage)
So where are you going, anyway?

AUDREY
Stanford. I'm delivering a paper.

FLETCHER
Oh, really? We use a boy on a bike.

Despite herself, she laughs.

AUDREY
I hate to admit it, but you can still
do it to me, Fletcher.

FLETCHER
Seriously? Because I have a few
minutes --

AUDREY
 (smiling)
 That's not what I meant.

Though Audrey has been through the wringer with Fletcher, there was once a lot of love between them... and clearly there's still a great deal of affection.

Fletcher takes in the "FOR SALE" sign firmly planted in Audrey's front lawn.

FLETCHER
 How's it going?

AUDREY
 I think we finally have a bite. I may need you to come over and sign some papers soon.

FLETCHER
 No problem. You know me -- just call, and I'll be there.

She favors him with a skeptical look.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 I still can't believe you're selling. You love this house.

AUDREY
 No, you love this house, remember?

FLETCHER
 (remembering)
 Oh, yeah. Right.

At this moment a Porsche pulls up. The good-natured, affable JERRY steps out. Max runs up to him.

JERRY
 Max, my man!

He gives Max "five," then kisses Audrey on the lips.

JERRY (CONT'D)
 Fletcher, great to see you!

Fletcher responds with an almost imperceptible nod.

JERRY (CONT'D)
 (re the luggage)
 What do you say, Max? Give me a hand?

Jerry gives Max a piggyback ride to the porch. Fletcher's face turns sour.

FLETCHER

I didn't know the boyfriend was going.

AUDREY

Jerry. His name is Jerry. And yes, the boyfriend is going, not -- parenthetically -- that it's any of your business.

FLETCHER

I know, I know. It's just that you two are getting pretty serious pretty quick.

AUDREY

Fletcher, we've been dating seven months.

FLETCHER

That's not very long.

AUDREY

You and I got married after six.

FLETCHER

Yeah, and look how that turned out. It's just so embarrassing, you going from me to him. I'm better in the courtroom, I'm better on the dance floor, I'm better in the sack --

AUDREY

Your problem, Fletcher, is that you felt compelled to share your gifts.

Fletcher has no answer for this.

As Max and Jerry carry the luggage to his car and begin loading it:

JERRY

We better run if we're going to catch that flight. Fletcher, great to see you!

Fletcher responds with another almost imperceptible nod. Audrey kneels before Max.

AUDREY

Have a good time, Max. I'll pick you up at Dad's tomorrow morning.

Hugs and kisses. Max and Fletcher watch as Audrey and Jerry pull away.

FLETCHER
Wave to the boyfriend, Max.

Max waves.

INT. BMW -- AFTERNOON -- MOVING

Fletcher is driving, Max beside him.

MAX
We really going to see wrestling, Dad?

FLETCHER
Absolutely, Maximilian. We just have to stop by the office for a minute.

Max sighs. He's heard this before.

EXT. SKYSCRAPER -- AFTERNOON

Establishing the headquarters of Allan, Stewart & Konigsberg, in a gorgeous, vaulting skyscraper.

As they head inside, Fletcher and Max pass a BEGGAR.

BEGGAR
'Scuse me, sir. Do you have any change?

FLETCHER
(patting his pockets)
'Fraid not. Sorry.

INT. SKYSCRAPER LOBBY -- AFTERNOON

At the newsstand Fletcher grabs *The Daily Journal*, paying for it with a handful of change. His son takes this in.

On their way to the elevators Fletcher and Max pass PHILIP, a dweebish bore.

PHILIP
Fletcher!

FLETCHER
Philip!

PHILIP
And this must be Max!

FLETCHER
 Can't fool you, Philip. Well, it was
 good seeing you --

Fletcher starts off with Max, when Philip calls after
 him:

PHILIP
 " You know, Ethel and I had a blast at
 our last little get-together.

FLETCHER
 Oh, me too. I can never get enough of
 charades. We'll have to do it again
 sometime.

Fletcher heads into an open elevator... only to find the
 door's closing impeded by Philip's foot.

PHILIP
 When?

FLETCHER
 Soon.

The door again begins to close... when Philip stops it.

PHILIP
 How 'bout tonight?

FLETCHER
 Can't. I'm taking Max to see
 wrestling --

PHILIP
 Oh! Ethel and I *dig* wrestling --

FLETCHER
 I don't think so, Philip. See, Max is
 real shy around strangers.

Max looks up at Fletcher. He isn't.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 Tell you what -- give me your card as a
 reminder. I'll call you. Soon.

PHILIP
 Great!

Philip hands him his card just as the door closes.

INT. ELEVATOR -- AFTERNOON

Fletcher's eyes widen at the it-ain't-gonna-happen thought of a second evening with Philip and Ethel. Max watches as his father tears Philip's card in two.

INT. HALLWAY OF LAW OFFICES -- AFTERNOON

Holding Max's hand, Fletcher strides through the hallway, calling out greetings to his colleagues as he passes.

FLETCHER

Jane! Love the hair!

Max looks at JANE, whose hair is coiled into snaky ropes.

JANE

Oh, Mr. Reid.

FLETCHER

Thomas -- looks like you're losin' weight.

THOMAS glances up from a file. Max notes that he is morbidly obese.

THOMAS

Gained seven pounds.

FLETCHER

(wedging past him)
On you, it works.

Thomas grins, pleased. Fletcher continues on, passing a preoccupied FRED RAND, whose fashion-disaster tie startles Max.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Hey, Fred! Great tie!

Fred smiles at the compliment. But it's only a momentary respite from his troubles as he heads into:

INT. MIRANDA'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

Fred joins MIRANDA, a beautiful, steely partner.

FRED

I can't do it.

MIRANDA

It's your duty to present the strongest case possible for your client.

FRED

The strongest case possible, consistent with the truth.

MIRANDA

This is no time to get technical, Fred.

FRED

If you insist on my taking it to trial, I'll provide Mrs. Cole with aggressive and honest representation... after which, I'll direct her to the nearest welfare line. But, Miranda -- that's all I can do.

Miranda looks out her window, calculating.

MIRANDA

Then we'll just have to find someone else.

INT. HALLWAY OF LAW OFFICES -- AFTERNOON

Fletcher arrives at his office, outside of which is the desk of his secretary, the fiftyish, worldly-wise and world-weary GRETA.

GRETA

Max! What's new?

MAX

Well... it's my birthday tomorrow. We're having a party and everything.

Behind Max, Fletcher's eyes widen. He has clearly forgotten.

GRETA

I'm sure your dad'll give you something wonderful.

Fletcher tries to wave her off, awkwardly stopping when Max turns to him:

MAX

Yeah?

FLETCHER

Oh, yeah. You're going to love it. Uh, why don't you play in my office for a minute? We'll be going soon.

Smiling, Max heads into the office. Fletcher closes the door behind him.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Damn! I completely forgot --

Greta produces a wrapped gift.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Greta, I ought to put you on salary.
Did I get him something good?

GRETA
Don't you always?

She hands him a stack of mail.

GRETA (CONT'D)
So tell me -- how'd the trial go?

Fletcher gives her a look -- "Do you have to ask?"

GRETA (CONT'D)
Congratulations. It's a victory for
scummy gigolos everywhere.

FLETCHER
Thanks, Greta. Any calls?

GRETA
Let's see....
(checking his messages)
Judge Patterson's clerk. He needs your
filing.

FLETCHER
Tell him it's in the mail.

GRETA
(jotting down a note)
Right. You'll do it next week. Mr.
McKinley phoned, questioning that
fourteen hours you billed on Christmas
Eve.

FLETCHER
Write him a long, explanatory letter.
Then bill him for the letter.

GRETA
(jotting down a note)
Done. Your mother called.

FLETCHER
I'm on vacation.

GRETA
This is your fifth week.

FLETCHER
It's a long vacation.

" GRETA
(jotting down a note)
"Break mother's heart." Done. And
that's it, except Miranda's looking for
you.

FLETCHER
(checking watch)
As if I don't have anything better to
do than bow and scrape at her royal
perfumed partner feet. Tell her I'm in
court, or I broke my leg and had to be
shot or something --

GRETA
(gesturing behind him)
Why don't you tell her yourself?

As Miranda approaches, Fletcher continues as if
oblivious:

FLETCHER
-- And then send out a notice of
judgment on my win today.

GRETA
(dry)
Sure, boss. I'll get right on it.

Fletcher turns -- and pretends to be surprised.

FLETCHER
Miranda! I didn't see you.

MIRANDA
Another victory. You're making quite
an impression on the partnership
committee, Fletcher.

FLETCHER
(feigning puzzlement;
then)
Oh, that's right. You folks are
meeting soon. Well, listen, I've got a
client waiting in my office, so --

MIRANDA

Actually, Fletcher, something important has come up. You're not busy tonight, are you?

Before Fletcher answers, we:

CUT TO:

INT. FLETCHER'S OFFICE -- EVENING

A sad Max sits on Fletcher's big sofa. He's been waiting quite awhile. His heart sinks further when Fletcher enters... carrying two boxes of documents.

MAX

We're not going, are we, Dad?

FLETCHER

Of course we are, Max. A promise is a promise.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA -- NIGHT

Climbing up to the top turnbuckle, the resplendent hero leaps into the air, delivering a flying dropkick to the villain. The crowd goes wild -- all except Max, whose attention is focused on his father... whose attention is focused on a legal file.

EXT. HIGH-RISE APARTMENT BUILDING -- THURSDAY MORNING

Establishing Fletcher's apartment building.

INT. FLETCHER'S STUDY -- MORNING

Periodically referring to a file, Fletcher types on his computer. He's been up all night.

He leans back, rubs his eyes. When he opens them he sees Max standing there in pajamas. Fletcher smiles.

FLETCHER

Count Maxula... happy birthday. How old are you? Thirty? Forty?

MAX

Five.

FLETCHER

What's that in human years?

MAX

Five.

FLETCHER

Wow. Five -- the best three hundred sixty-five days of a man's life. I only wish there was some way to commemorate such an occasion, some small symbol to mark this day --

Fletcher reaches down by his desk and produces:

MAX

A present!

FLETCHER

Yeah! That would work!

He hands the colorful box to Max, who eyes it with wonder.

MAX

What is it?

FLETCHER

(no idea)
It's... it's...
(it hits him)
a surprise!

Max knows his father doesn't have a clue, but he rips the box open -- revealing a baseball, a glove, a cap and a full major-league-style uniform.

MAX

Baseball stuff!

FLETCHER

Baseball stuff!

MAX

(hugging his dad)
Will you throw with me?

FLETCHER

Sure!

Max beams.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Tonight, after your party. I promise.

Max nods sadly as Fletcher turns back to his work.

EXT. FLETCHER'S APARTMENT BUILDING -- MORNING

As Audrey gets out of Jerry's car, Max runs over.

AUDREY

You two have a fun time? How were the wrestling matches?

MAX

Pretty good, except you know what? I think they might be fake.

FLETCHER

Naaaaah.

Jerry emerges from the car.

JERRY

Max, my man!

Max hurries over to Jerry. They exchange "fives," then hug. Fletcher is considerably less than delighted.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Fletcher, great to see you!

Fletcher gives Jerry another almost imperceptible nod, then turns to Audrey. Echoing her, he asks:

FLETCHER

(re Jerry)

You two have a fun time? How were the wrestling matches?

AUDREY

Very funny. Listen, I got a message from my real-estate agent. The buyers accepted our counteroffer. You think you can spare a few minutes tomorrow to sign the papers?

FLETCHER

And help my ex-wife rid herself of the last vestiges of our marriage? Sure, why not?

AUDREY

Great. Two o'clock.

FLETCHER

Hey, you're not thinking of moving in with the boyfriend, are you?

AUDREY

His name is Jerry. And it hasn't come up.

FLETCHER

Oh. I've heard of guys with that problem.

She shoots him a withering glance.

MAX

(to Jerry)

Did you see what Dad got me? Baseball stuff!

Fletcher smiles. He has one up on Jerry... until:

JERRY

Neat! Hey, what say you and I play a little catch before school this morning? We can stop at the park.

Fletcher frowns. As she, Jerry and Max climb in the car, Audrey turns back to Fletcher:

AUDREY

So we'll see you tonight?

His mind still on Max and Jerry, Fletcher looks at her blankly.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Max's birthday?

FLETCHER

Oh, yeah. Seven.

INT. FLETCHER'S STUDY -- MORNING

Fletcher returns to his work, but he can't stop thinking about Max and Jerry. Finally he digs in his briefcase, pulls out a card, punches in the number on his phone.

FLETCHER

Hello, Mr. Mooney? About that job in San Francisco? I thought of someone I can recommend....

INT. MIRANDA'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Fletcher looks out the window at the impressive view as Miranda and his client, VIRGINIA COLE, a sweet, earnest, alluring woman in her early thirties, review the document

he spent the day putting together. He checks his watch:
6:50.

VIRGINIA

It's very well done. Very, very well done.

FLETCHER

Thank you.

VIRGINIA

There's just one thing... it's all untrue. Every word of it is a lie.

She looks for a reaction from Fletcher and Miranda. There is none.

VIRGINIA (CONT'D)

Well, isn't that a problem?

FLETCHER

Mrs. Cole, the only problem here is that your husband is trying to prevent you from receiving a fair and equitable share of the marital assets based on your single act of indiscretion --

VIRGINIA

Seven. Seven acts of indiscretion.

FLETCHER

-- Seven acts of indiscretion, only one of which he has any evidence of, and all of which he himself is responsible for. You're the victim here, starved for affection, driven into the arms of another man --

VIRGINIA

Seven.

FLETCHER

(not missing a beat)

-- Seven other men. You're not trying to deny him what is rightfully his. All you're insisting on is what is rightfully yours. And maybe an idgy-smidgy bit more. I think you're bending over backwards.

VIRGINIA

Well, I *did* agree to give him joint custody of the kids....

(to Miranda)

He's always been a good father.

FLETCHER
 Exactly. And you've always been a good wife.

VIRGINIA
 I see what you mean. But -- it's still a lie.

FLETCHER
 That's not for you to say. It's up to the judge to winnow the true facts from the not-so-true ones. He's a professional, seasoned in making these types of fine legal distinctions.

She is still uncertain. Fletcher goes for the jugular.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 Mrs. Cole, as an American, I think it would be a travesty of justice if you were denied your Constitutional right to the pursuit of happiness simply because you signed some papers that said you wouldn't. I for one don't think you should be forced to cleave only unto one man just because you stood in some church and said "I do." All I'm asking is the opportunity to get you what you so richly deserve.

A long moment, then:

VIRGINIA
 Screw the bastard.

Fletcher is a little taken aback at the magnitude of her change of heart. As he leads her to the door:

FLETCHER
 Terrific. It's the right thing to do.

VIRGINIA
 Thank you, Mr. Reid. I'm so grateful I have an attorney I can trust.

With a farewell nod to Miranda, she leaves.

Miranda turns, smiles at Fletcher, then shuts the door. She moves in on him.

MIRANDA
 You're good. You're really good.

FLETCHER

Thanks.

She picks a piece of lint off his jacket.

MIRANDA

No, I mean it. You should be a cinch to "make partner.

(straightening his tie)

How would you like to make a partner right now?

FLETCHER

Excuse me?

She grabs his lapels and pulls him in for a deep kiss.

INT. AUDREY AND MAX'S LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

A party is in progress, with kindergartners playing and parents mingling. The phone rings.

INT. AUDREY'S BEDROOM / MIRANDA'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Audrey comes into her bedroom to answer the phone. We intercut between the two locations.

AUDREY

Fletcher! Where are you? I could use your help.

FLETCHER

What about the boyfriend?

AUDREY

Jerry had to cancel. Some big meeting about a job offer.

Fletcher beams.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

So, what time do you think --

FLETCHER

Actually, Audrey, there's a problem on one of my cases.

At this moment, a slip is tossed at Fletcher by the offscreen Miranda. Audrey's face falls.

AUDREY

Don't tell me. This big thing popped up at the last minute, and you have to do some boning up.

FLETCHER

(uncomfortable at her choice of words)

Uh... you might say that.

AUDREY

Any chance you'll get off early?

A pair of panty hose is thrown about his shoulders.

FLETCHER

It happened once before, but I doubt it.

AUDREY

Max is going to be real disappointed, Fletcher.

FLETCHER

I know. I'm sorry.

AUDREY

Being sorry isn't the same as being here.

Fletcher starts to look guilty... when a pair of panties lands on his face.

FLETCHER

Look, I have to go.

AUDREY

All right, Fletcher. Then I'll see you tomorrow at two.

FLETCHER

Two?

AUDREY

To sign the papers? For the house? Hello?

FLETCHER

Oh, yeah. Right.

AUDREY

(mimicking)

Oh, yeah. Right.

He hangs up. The now-nude Miranda leaps into frame, knocking Fletcher to the ground.

INT. AUDREY'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Audrey sighs. She turns... to find a crestfallen Max standing just outside the doorway.

INT. AUDREY AND MAX'S DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

We pan down from banners reading HAPPY BIRTHDAY, MAX!... to a room full of guests... to a desultory five-year-old sitting in front of a homemade birthday cake.

Audrey finishes lighting the candles on the cake.

AUDREY

All right, birthday boy, make a wish.

Max doesn't respond. He's staring at his new baseball.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

C'mon, honey. It can be anything -- whatever you want most in the world.

When he doesn't respond, she leans down to him.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Max, your dad is sorry. He had to work.

Max's sorrowful face suggests he doesn't believe his father's excuse.

Glancing at the baseball, then at his mother, he turns his full attention to the candles on the cake. In voiceover we hear what she does not:

MAX (V.O.)

I wish, for just one day, Dad couldn't tell a lie.

He takes a breath -- and blows out all the candles. We follow the wisps of smoke up, up, up... to the clock on the wall. It's 9:15.

CUT TO:

A clock on a wall. It's 9:15. We pull back -- to reveal that we are:

INT. MIRANDA'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

We pan around Miranda's office, where the displaced sofa is adorned with Fletcher's shoes...

To the credenza, where Fletcher's pants hang from an open drawer...

To the lamp, where Fletcher's shorts swing...

To the desk, where a ravished Miranda lies next to Fletcher. Any more afterglow and she could light up a city. Superbly confident of the answer, she asks:

MIRANDA

So... was it good for you?

Without thinking, Fletcher responds in the most astonishing way possible -- *he tells the truth.*

FLETCHER

I've had better.

Miranda turns to him in disbelief -- but it's nothing compared to the look of shock on Fletcher's face.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE MIRANDA'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

The door opens -- and the naked Fletcher is kicked out. A rain of clothes follows, climaxing when his shoes hit him in the head. The door slams shut again... leaving him without his pants.

He's about to knock... when he sees a cleaning lady. He picks up his clothes and runs.

INT. BEDROOM -- FRIDAY MORNING

An alarm clock rings. A hand emerges from the covers and shuts it off. After a moment, the lump in the bed sits up. It's Fletcher. With regret and wonder:

FLETCHER

"I've had better"?

INT. FLETCHER'S BATHROOM -- MORNING

Fletcher is brushing his teeth. He looks up at his reflection in the mirror, mouth foaming.

FLETCHER

"I've had better"?!

INT. HALLWAY OF FLETCHER'S APARTMENT BUILDING -- MORNING

Showered, shaved and dressed, Fletcher waits for the elevator.

"
FLETCHER
"I've had better"
(laughing it off)
Well, today's a brand new day.

The elevator arrives. The door opens, and he steps in.

INT. APARTMENT ELEVATOR -- MORNING

The elevator is empty, except for Fletcher... and an astoundingly well-put-together MODEL. After a moment, she notices that Fletcher is staring at her.

MODEL
What're you lookin' at?

FLETCHER
Your breasts.

INT. LOBBY OF APARTMENT BUILDING -- MORNING

The elevator door opens. A stunned Fletcher steps out, rubbing his freshly slapped face.

EXT. COURTHOUSE -- MORNING

A shaky Fletcher strides toward the courthouse... when he is accosted by a BEGGAR.

BEGGAR
Any change, Mister?

FLETCHER
Absolutely.

But he continues walking.

BEGGAR
Could you spare some?

FLETCHER
Unquestionably.

Fletcher continues on, puzzled that he has chosen to answer truthfully. The beggar is even more puzzled:

BEGGAR
Will you?

FLETCHER
No.

As Fletcher heads up the stairs:

BEGGAR
Jerkoff.

INT. COURTROOM -- MORNING

A troubled Fletcher joins Virginia at the respondent's table.

VIRGINIA
You look like you're having a rough morning.

FLETCHER
I've had better.

He winces as he recognizes the words. At this moment RICHARD COLE, a serious, respectable man, enters with his attorney, DANA APPLETON, young, brisk, and confident.

DANA
All right, Fletcher. How much is it going to take to settle this thing?

FLETCHER
Forty percent.

DANA
Forty percent? You must think you have a damn good explanation for the adultery.

FLETCHER
Oh, do I ever.

Fletcher opens his mouth to enlighten her -- but finds to his consternation that he can't get the words out. He tries to force out sounds, but succeeds only in looking like a fish gasping on dry land.

DANA
Interesting, though based on your track record, I expected a little more.

FLETCHER
 (horrified realization)
 I can't say it!

DANA
 I see. So I'm supposed to settle based
 on your assurances? Let's just forget
 it, shall we?

Nearing panic, Fletcher whirls to his briefcase and grabs
 the brief.

FLETCHER
 Wait! Wait! I've got it in writing!

But when Dana tries to take the document, the astonished
 Fletcher finds himself physically unable to release it.

DANA
 Let go!

FLETCHER
 I'm trying!

At this moment the BAILIFF calls:

BAILIFF
 All rise for the Honorable Judge Robert
 Samoian.

DANA
 (whispering as she
 releases the brief)
 Fine, Fletcher. You want to play
 hardball, I'm game.

JUDGE SAMOIAN takes the bench.

JUDGE SAMOIAN
 Calling case BA09395, *Richard Cole*
versus Virginia Cole. How're we doing
 this morning, counsel?

DANA
 Fine, thank you.

JUDGE SAMOIAN
 And you, Mr. Reid?

FLETCHER
 Well, I'm a little upset about a bad
 sexual episode I had last night --

Fletcher screeches to a standstill, suddenly aware of
 what he just said. After an awkward silence:

JUDGE SAMOIAN

I'm sorry to hear that. Perhaps we should get down to business. First, Mr. Reid, I see that your client was previously represented by Mr. Rand of your office.

FLETCHER

Yes, your Honor.

JUDGE SAMOIAN

I take it you're seeking to substitute in as counsel?

FLETCHER

Yes, your Honor.

JUDGE SAMOIAN

Fine, fine. And for the record, the reason is?

FLETCHER

Mr. Rand had severe ethical objections to my client's case, your Honor.

Fletcher is incredulous. Somehow his greatest asset in the world, his mouth, has become his worst enemy.

JUDGE SAMOIAN

Read that back, Madame Reporter.

COURT REPORTER

"Well, I'm a little upset about a bad sexual episode I had last night --"

JUDGE SAMOIAN

No, after that.

COURT REPORTER

"Mr. Rand had severe ethical objections to my client's case, your Honor."

JUDGE SAMOIAN

(to Fletcher)

That's what I thought you said. I take it you don't share the same ethical objections, Mr. Reid?

FLETCHER

I have lower standards, your Honor.

JUDGE SAMOIAN

I see. Well, if Mrs. Cole wants the substitution of counsel, I'll allow it. Is that what you want, Mrs. Cole?

Virginia looks to the judge, then to Fletcher, whose unorthodox style seemed so brilliant earlier.

VIRGINIA

(unsure)

Yes?

JUDGE SAMOIAN

Fine.

VIRGINIA

(aside, to Fletcher)

What are you doing?

FLETCHER

(worried)

I don't know.

(to judge, with some desperation)

Your Honor, I'd like a continuance!

JUDGE SAMOIAN

This case has already been delayed several times, Mr. Reid.

FLETCHER

I realize that, your Honor, but I'd really, really, really like a continuance.

JUDGE SAMOIAN

I'll have to hear good cause, counselor. What's the problem?

FLETCHER'S POV

The room begins to spin slowly -- then faster -- then faster -- until we wind up squarely on:

FLETCHER'S FACE

FLETCHER

I can't lie!

THE SCENE

JUDGE SAMOIAN
 (impatient)
 Commendable, Mr. Reid, but I'm still
 waiting for the good cause. Now, do
 you have it or not?

FLETCHER
 (truthful)
 Not.

JUDGE SAMOIAN
 Motion for continuance denied. Is
 there any chance of a settlement in
 this case?

DANA
 I don't think so, your Honor. Mr. Reid
 made it abundantly clear that the last
 thing in the world he wanted was to --

FLETCHER
 (desperate)
 Settle! Settle! Settle!

Dana and Mr. Cole look at Fletcher with surprise.

JUDGE SAMOIAN
 Perhaps there's been a change in
 strategy. Let's go to my chambers and
 negotiate.

He bangs the gavel.

INT. JUDGE SAMOIAN'S CHAMBERS -- MORNING

Dana and an apprehensive Fletcher sit before the judge.

DANA
 Your Honor, under the terms of the
 prenuptial agreement, if Mrs. Cole
 commits adultery, she is entitled to
 nothing. We have in our possession an
 audiotape made by a licensed private
 investigator of an explicit act of
 sexual congress with a man who is not
 her husband.

JUDGE SAMOIAN
 Sounds pretty damning, Mr. Reid.

FLETCHER
 It sure does.

DANA

However, my client has no desire to see his ex-wife destitute. Against my advice, he's willing to offer her ten percent of the marital assets, which comes to one point eight million dollars.

JUDGE SAMOIAN

One eight seems like a pretty fair offer, Mr. Reid.

FLETCHER

Fantastically fair. Phenomenally fair. In fact, I'd say beyond fair, bordering on stupid.

Dana fumes. The judge finds Fletcher's boldness refreshing.

JUDGE SAMOIAN

What are you suggesting, Mr. Reid? That Ms. Appleton's willingness to proffer such an offer betrays a lack of faith in her position?

FLETCHER

(utterly sincere)

No, not at all. She's got my client dead to rights. Her case is rock solid. When attorneys go to sleep at night, they dream of having a case as strong as this.

DANA

Can the sarcasm, Reid. All right, I admit it -- I've seen you make even the lamest case fly. By the time you get through with them, Mother Theresa is the Whore of Babylon and Manson was just terribly misunderstood. But this time I have you. Even Clarence Darrow couldn't explain this away.

She brandishes the audiotape.

JUDGE SAMOIAN

Well, Mr. Reid? Without a dynamite explanation, I'd say you're dead in the water. How's your client's story?

FLETCHER

The best that money can buy, your Honor.

JUDGE SAMOIAN
Strong corroborating evidence?

FLETCHER
We have evidence that you are not gonna
believe.

Despite herself, Dana is beginning to look worried.

JUDGE SAMOIAN
You're pretty confident how this trial
is going to come out, eh, Mr. Reid?

FLETCHER
(hopeless)
"Confident" is too weak a word, your
Honor. I am certain what will happen
if I take this puppy to trial. The
verdict will be a stunning, humiliating
defeat that will cut a spectacularly
promising legal career off at the
knees.

Fletcher is referring to himself, of course, but Dana
thinks he's speaking about her. She buckles:

DANA
All right! Twenty percent! Three
million six! And not a penny more.
(venomous, to Fletcher)
Bastard!

She storms out, leaving an astounded Fletcher behind.

JUDGE SAMOIAN
You are one fine negotiator, Mr. Reid.
Your client should jump at the offer.

CUT TO:

VIRGINIA
No!

We pull back to reveal that we are:

INT. COURTROOM -- MORNING

Fletcher has joined Virginia at the respondent's table.

FLETCHER
No?! Mrs. Cole, this offer was a
miracle. I'm talking a walking-on-
(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

water, Lazarus-rising-from-the-dead, finding-no-line-at-the-friggin'-DMV miracle! You've gone from one point eight to three point six million! Think of it this way -- now you're getting *paid* five hundred thou per schtupp!

VIRGINIA

Mr. Reid, you convinced me yesterday -- I'm the victim here, starved for affection, driven into the arms of another man --

FLETCHER

Seven.

VIRGINIA

-- Seven other men. With the story you came up with, I don't think I can lose. I want to proceed.

FLETCHER

Mrs. Cole, you don't understand. I --

But before Fletcher can finish, the judge enters.

JUDGE SAMOIAN

Well, Mr. Reid. Do we have a settlement?

Fletcher looks pleadingly at his client, but she is firm. He shakes his head unhappily. The judge is irritated.

JUDGE SAMOIAN (CONT'D)

Then this case is assigned to Judge Stevens, Department 119, trial to start at one-thirty sharp.

He bangs the gavel. Fletcher emits an involuntary whimper.

INT. HALLWAY OF LAW OFFICES -- MORNING

Dazed, Fletcher makes his way down the hall. When Jane comes toward him wearing a hairstyle that resembles a nest, he tries to avoid her... but she bobs her head at him.

JANE

What do you think?

FLETCHER

As a hairstyle, boo; as a birth-control device, yay.

Horrorified, Fletcher hurries on. He has a clear path to his office -- until the heavysset Thomas ambulates his way.

THOMAS

What's shakin', Fletcher?

FLETCHER

Your cellulite, Tubster.

Thomas looks like he's just been punched. The now-panicked Fletcher breaks into a run, passing Fred, who wears yet another inexcusable tie.

FRED

Hiya, Fletcher. How's the Cole case going?

FLETCHER

(not stopping)

Straight into the crapper, you wuss, with my career right behind it.

(without looking back)

And your tie looks like your neck threw up.

Fletcher speeds past various co-workers, including --

GRETA

Hi, boss. What's happening with --

FLETCHER

Don't ask! For God's sake, please don't ask!

-- And races into his office.

INT. FLETCHER'S OFFICE -- MORNING

He leans against the door, trying to catch his breath.

FLETCHER

O Fate, why have you squatted on me?!

(pacing)

Don't panic. You can beat this -- it's all a matter of willpower.

He dives for his desk and rifles through it.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

A test... something small.... Aha!

He holds up a blue pen.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Red. Red. All right. Focus.

" (with great deliberation)

The color of this pen is r--. R--.

R--! It's such a little word. Three letters. Two consonants. One vowel, perched cunningly in the middle. The color of this pen is -- blue! Aaaah!

(burying his head)

One tiny lie and I can't say it!

(suddenly sitting up)

Maybe I can write it!

He turns to his computer and starts typing: THE COLOR OF THIS PEN IS. Taking a deep breath, he aims his finger for "R"... but it swerves, pulling him over to "B."

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

C'mon. Concentrate.

He tries again for "R," but his finger swerves to "B." He stands, grabs his left hand in his right, forces his index finger to the "R" -- but he still can't hit the key. In frustration, he bangs on the keyboard.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

No, no, no, no, no!

When he looks up, he sees what he has inadvertently typed: BLUE, BLUE, BLUE, BLUE, BLUE! He screams. Greta enters --

GRETA'S POV

-- To find Fletcher running around the office, shaking the blue pen in the air.

THE SCENE

GRETA

Boss, what's wrong?!

FLETCHER

The pen is blue! The pen is blue! The goddamn pen is blue!

Almost weeping, he collapses into a chair. A moment -- then Greta tentatively offers a red pen to her boss.

GRETA

Red?

FLETCHER

(bitter)

Oh, that's easy for you to say!

Hesitantly, Greta glances at Fletcher's messages.

GRETA

Uh, just a couple things, boss, then
I'll let you get back to your...

(at a loss)

pen. Rubin and Dunn called. They want
to know where the Darvis settlement
offer stands.

FLETCHER

I only proposed a settlement to dick
with them. I never had any intention
of going through with it.

Not certain why her boss would shoot himself in the foot,
Greta nonetheless dutifully jots down his remarks:

GRETA

"... dick with them." Okay. Your
accountant, Philip, called to remind
you about getting together.

FLETCHER

I'd rather vomit blood.

GRETA

(jotting down a note)

"Twelfth of never." Uh, your mother
called again. Are you still on
vacation?

FLETCHER

(emphatically nodding
"yes")

No.

GRETA

So then you're here?

FLETCHER

(emphatically shaking his
head "no")

Yes.

GRETA

I'm sure it's me, but I'm having a little trouble following. What do I say to your mom?

FLETCHER

(resigned)

Tell her I'm a thoughtless son who'd rather spend ten hours clogging the wheels of justice than five minutes talking to her -- but only if she asks. You might also add that she deserves better, though I hope to God you don't.

GRETA

Thanks for clearing that up. And that's it, except your ex called and asked if you could bring the file on the house when you --

FLETCHER

Oh no! Audrey!

INT. VOLVO -- MOVING / FLETCHER'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Audrey is driving Max, who wears his new baseball uniform, to kindergarten when her cellular phone rings. She picks it up. We intercut between car and office.

AUDREY

Hi, Fletcher.

Max lights up.

FLETCHER

Audrey, I can't make it. I have to cancel.

AUDREY

What? Don't tell me the same thing popped up again?

FLETCHER

(with a nervous glance at his crotch)

No! No -- it's just that I had a case I was certain would settle and it didn't. I have to go to trial this afternoon.

AUDREY

What about a continuance?

FLETCHER
I couldn't get one.

AUDREY
(dubious)
You couldn't get a continuance? You've
always been able to get a continuance.
(frustrated)
The only other time the buyers can meet
is ten-thirty, and I have a class. Can
you make it at ten-thirty?

FLETCHER
Yes, but I --

AUDREY
Fine. As usual, I'll drop whatever I'm
doing to accommodate you and your
sudden inability to get a continuance.

FLETCHER
(wounded)
What? You don't believe me?

AUDREY
(sarcastic)
Oh, you're right. How could I doubt
you? Certainly not because twice in
two days you just happen to cancel on
Max and me because something just
happens to come up at the last minute.

FLETCHER
Yeah, but this time it's different.

AUDREY
I see. And how is that?

FLETCHER
(he walked into it)
This time I'm telling the truth.

AUDREY
What?! You lied about last night?!
What were you really doing?

FLETCHER
Having sex.

Audrey slams the phone down. She can't believe he just
said that. Neither can Fletcher.

EXT. FULGHAM KINDERGARTEN -- MORNING

The Volvo pulls up in front of Max's kindergarten.

CUT TO:

The still-angry Audrey leads her son across the lawn. When they come to his classroom he turns to her.

MAX

Sorry, Mom. I guess my wish didn't come true.

AUDREY

What wish?

MAX

I wished that, for just one day, Dad couldn't tell a lie.

Max breaks away, heading toward his teacher. Audrey is deeply moved.

INT. FLETCHER'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Fletcher lies on the sofa in the fetal position, holding the blue pen. Suddenly the door opens.

FLETCHER

Greta, I need time to myself to --

He turns... and sees Miranda.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Aaaah!

The pen snaps in his hands.

MIRANDA

Fletcher. Fletcher, Fletcher, Fletcher. I must confess -- after last night's incident, I was... perturbed. So perturbed I was tempted to do whatever little things lie in my power to scuttle your chances of making partner.

Fletcher gulps.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

But then I thought, "No, that's not fair. Fletcher didn't mean to insult me."

(MORE)

MIRANDA (CONT'D)
 (straightening his tie)
 "It was just some massive, boneheaded
 misunderstanding, and Fletcher is very,
 very sorry."

Fletcher smiles. It looks like he's off the hook, until:

MIRANDA (CONT'D)
 Isn't that right, Fletcher?

FLETCHER
 (in agony)
 Uh -- no.

MIRANDA
 (stunned)
 No? No?! What are you saying? Have
 you no respect for me?

FLETCHER
 None. I mean, I'd *like* to respect you,
 and if it weren't for your mistreatment
 of the associates, your rudeness to the
 staff, and the fact that your work
 sucks, I would.

MIRANDA
 But -- what about last night?

FLETCHER
 I was afraid you wouldn't support my
 partnership if I turned you down.
 Plus, I like to fuck.

INT. HALLWAY OF LAW OFFICES -- MORNING

The door opens -- and a furious Miranda stalks off.

INT. FLETCHER'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Rubbing his slapped face for the second time this
 morning, Fletcher gasps:

FLETCHER
 I like to *what?! I must be losing my
 mind!*
 (a comforting thought)
 That's it! I'm losing my mind!

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Fletcher lies on a PSYCHIATRIST's couch.

PSYCHIATRIST

Let me get this straight. You can't lie -- and you're a lawyer?

The psychiatrist tries to control himself, but can't. He bursts into laughter.

FLETCHER

I'm touched by your sensitivity. Listen, you gotta help me. I'm due in court at one-thirty!

PSYCHIATRIST

So what's the big deal?

FLETCHER

What's the big deal?! Ask me how you look.

PSYCHIATRIST

How do I look?

FLETCHER

(apologetically)
Like a pompous fat man with a high tolerance for whining and an unhealthy interest in other people's toilet training.

PSYCHIATRIST

I see the problem.

FLETCHER

I mean, imagine if you had to tell the truth to your patients.

This really hits home.

PSYCHIATRIST

Wow.

FLETCHER

So am I crazy?

PSYCHIATRIST

"Crazy" is such a harsh word. I prefer "insane."

FLETCHER

I'm insane?!

PSYCHIATRIST

No, no. I was just saying I prefer the word. Telling the truth is not insane... though it's certainly out of step.

FLETCHER

Then why is this happening? Why, after all this time, do I suddenly have this compulsion to be honest?

PSYCHIATRIST

(shrugging)

Beats me.

FLETCHER

"Beats me"? "Beats me"? What about psychoanalyzing me? Was I breast-fed? Did I suck my thumb? How did I get along with my father?

PSYCHIATRIST

Well?

FLETCHER

No, yes, and pretty well, thank you, considering that he was pretty much hopeless.

(off psychiatrist's
raised eyebrow)

What I mean is, he was a great guy, just not exactly a huge success, unless you judge a man by how fast he can bait a hook.

(off psychiatrist's
raised eyebrow)

What I mean is -- look, I don't think it has anything to do with my dad, okay? He's been dead six years, and this curse started last night. So what else could it be?

PSYCHIATRIST

Well, then... maybe it's career-related. Perhaps years of standing up in a courtroom and forcefully advocating what you know in your heart to be wrong have created a cognitive dissonance, triggering a resurgence of your guilt complex and a shift in the traditional psychoanalytic paradigm.

FLETCHER

And in English?

PSYCHIATRIST
You're having a moral crisis?

Frustrated, Fletcher gets up.

FLETCHER
Thanks, Doc. Look, I'm due for a meeting with my ex, so --

PSYCHIATRIST
Listen, an inability to lie could be a blessing. Think of it as a sincerity shock treatment, an integrity infusion.

FLETCHER
(as he leaves)
It feels more like an honesty enema.

INT. BMW -- MOVING / EXT. STREET -- MORNING

Fletcher speeds away from the psychiatrist's office. He checks the car's digital clock: 10:22.

FLETCHER
Show up, sign a few papers, make nice with the buyers... how hard can it be?
(compelled to answer)
Like getting your teeth cleaned by Mengele.

He's so preoccupied that he doesn't notice the stop sign... the screeching brakes... the diving pedestrians. He pulls the blue pen from his pocket.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Gotta focus... gotta focus....

He speeds through a crosswalk, almost hitting an old man.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
The color of the pen is -- red!

But he hasn't regained the ability to lie -- he's referring to the red light he just ran, nearly colliding with a truck. The DRIVER sticks his head out.

DRIVER
What's your problem, schmuck?!

FLETCHER
(the truth)
I'm an inconsiderate prick!

Fletcher once again focuses on the blue pen.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 C'mon, you can do this! The color of
 the pen is -- RED!

But he's still not referring to the pen -- this time,
 it's to the flashing red light of a police car in his
 rearview mirror.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 (looking heavenward)
 Why me?
 (compelled to answer)
 Cosmic revenge.

Fletcher pulls over. A POLICE OFFICER strolls up.

POLICE OFFICER
 Do you know why I stopped you?

FLETCHER
 Depends on how long you were following
 me.

POLICE OFFICER
 Why don't we take it from the top?

FLETCHER
 (in agony)
 Here goes -- I didn't fasten my seat
 belt, I didn't glance in my rearview
 mirror, I didn't signal when I pulled
 away from the curb, I sped, I followed
 too closely, I ran a stop sign, I
 almost hit a Chevy Camaro, I almost hit
 a geezer, I sped more, I followed too
 closely more, I failed to yield, I
 changed lanes in the intersection, I
 changed lanes without signalling, and I
 changed lanes in the intersection
 without signalling while running a red
 light and speeding.

A long moment.

POLICE OFFICER
 May I see your driver's license?

FLETCHER
 No.

POLICE OFFICER
 And why is that?

FLETCHER
It's in my other pants.

POLICE OFFICER
I see. And where are your other pants?

FLETCHER
Last time I saw, hanging from my boss's credenza.

POLICE OFFICER
Do you expect me to believe that?

FLETCHER
No.

POLICE OFFICER
Do you think I'm an idiot?

FLETCHER
Yes -- but that's beside the point! My license actually is in my other pants, and they actually were hanging from a credenza! I wouldn't lie to you! I mean, I would if I could, but I can't!

POLICE OFFICER
I see. So you have no reason to try and hide your license from me?

FLETCHER
I didn't say that. I have other reasons. Seventeen reasons, to be precise.

(begrudgingly, off the officer's look)
Unpaid parking tickets.
(beseechingly)
Be gentle.

EXT. AUDREY'S HOUSE -- MORNING

A cab speeds up to the house. Fletcher runs out, joining an irate Audrey on the porch. But before he can explain:

AUDREY
You make the buyers reschedule... you make the Realtor reschedule... you make me reschedule... and still you have the gall to keep us waiting forty minutes! Do you want the sale to collapse?

FLETCHER

Yes... but that's not why I'm late.
See, I --

AUDREY

Don't screw this up, Fletcher.

She grabs the file from Fletcher and storms inside.

INT. AUDREY'S LIVING ROOM -- MORNING

They join the dry Realtor, MRS. PERKINS, who waits with a young couple, the nervous PAUL and the chirpy LINDA.

MRS. PERKINS

Oh, there you are, Mr. Reid. Here, have a cruller.

She hands him one from a tray.

FLETCHER

I'm so sorry I'm late. I --

MRS. PERKINS

(obviously lying)

It's no problem, believe me. I just had to cancel a showing and a meeting with a new client. It gave me more time to get to know this delightful couple. Linda and Paul DeMarco, this is Fletcher Reid.

LINDA

It's such a great house. It exudes happiness. Can't you just feel it?

FLETCHER

No.

LINDA

(slightly taken aback)

No? Why, weren't you happy here?

FLETCHER

Yes, ecstatic... until the divorce.

LINDA

Oh, I didn't know. So I guess this must be very difficult for you?

FLETCHER

Like a knife in my heart.

An awkward silence, until Mrs. Perkins fills the void.

MRS. PERKINS

It's always hard parting with a house, but I've never seen a couple better suited to a home. Wouldn't you agree?

FLETCHER

No." Actually, I'd say Audrey and I were better suited. But, of course, that ended in divorce.

Not wanting to lose a sale, Mrs. Perkins takes charge:

MRS. PERKINS

So, all that's left to do is sign.

She practically forces the papers on the DeMarcos. A little tentative, they nevertheless sign the three pertinent pages. Next is Audrey, who signs, then thrusts the pen in Fletcher's hand.

Fletcher signs the first two documents... but he finds himself unable to sign the third.

MRS. PERKINS (CONT'D)

(there'd better not be)
Something wrong, Mr. Reid?

FLETCHER

(strangled)
Yes.

Paul and Linda stare at him nervously; the Realtor and Audrey stare at him angrily.

LINDA

What? What's wrong?

FLETCHER

It's just this page -- headed "Disclosures." I can't sign.

PAUL

Why? What haven't you disclosed?

Fletcher gulps -- but there's no escape.

FLETCHER

Uh -- occasionally the sink stopper in the master bathroom will slide down when you try to make it stay up --

LINDA

(cheerful)
Oh! Well, if that's all --

FLETCHER

-- The third kitchen cabinet from the refrigerator won't close completely. In the guest bathroom sometimes the toilet doesn't flush all the way, especially during parties. Every August, like clockwork, the lawn dies. Our washing machine overflowed a couple years back, the study got flooded, and now every spring, mushrooms grow under the carpet. The neighbor's kids started a rock band, and they tend to practice between midnight and dawn. And the house at the end of the block has graffiti -- in some sort of Satanic scrawl.

EXT. AUDREY'S HOUSE -- MORNING

The DeMarcos drive away.

INT. AUDREY'S LIVING ROOM -- MORNING

Mrs. Perkins glares at Fletcher.

MRS. PERKINS

I'm a Realtor, you're a lawyer -- I thought we understood each other.

(shaking her head)

Believe me, this has been a real joy, but I think you should share that joy with another agent.

She grabs the cruller back from Fletcher and marches out.

Audrey turns to Fletcher. She is fuming.

AUDREY

Just perfect, Fletcher. Just perfect. In a life littered with lies you pick today to volunteer every little imperfection you can think of. Why didn't you tell them everything you love about this house?

FLETCHER

(weakly)

They didn't ask?

AUDREY

You just don't want me and Max to move!
You want to keep controlling everything
and everyone... and if what someone
else wants gets in the way, screw 'em!
Your idea of a level playing field is
one that slopes in your direction.

"
She storms out -- but Fletcher calls after her:

FLETCHER

(meekly)

Uh, Audrey... you think maybe you can
do me a small favor?

She turns, incredulous.

EXT. POLICE IMPOUND YARD -- MORNING

Audrey finishes paying the impound-yard cashier and joins
Fletcher, who is waiting alongside hundreds of towed
cars.

FLETCHER

Thanks, Audrey. I can't tell you how
much this means to me.

AUDREY

I can. One thousand, six hundred, and
fifty-four dollars. And eleven cents.

FLETCHER

Ow.

At this moment we hear a hideous scraping noise -- and a
TOW-YARD EMPLOYEE whips Fletcher's BMW into view and
parks... revealing a prominent new scrape on the door.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You scratched my car!

TOW-YARD EMPLOYEE

It was already there.

FLETCHER

(outraged)

Why, you -- you liar!

TOW-YARD EMPLOYEE

What if I am? What're you gonna do
about it?

FLETCHER

(angrier and angrier)

What'm I gonna do about it? I could take you to small-claims court, which would drain eight hours out of my life, and you probably wouldn't show up, and when I finally got the judgment you'd just stiff me anyway, so what I'm gonna do is piss and moan like an impotent jerk and then bend over and take it up the tail pipe!

TOW-YARD EMPLOYEE

You've been here before, haven't you?

The employee flips Fletcher the keys and heads off.

AUDREY

Well, if you're done with me, I'll be getting back to my job.

She starts off, when Fletcher calls after her:

FLETCHER

Audrey... I'm sorry.

AUDREY

Right. Just like you're sorry about last night, when you let your son down so you could have sex.

Fletcher is wounded. He never thought about it in those terms.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Look, what happened last night is none of my business. When it happened two years ago it was my business, but now I don't have to care anymore. See, that's the magic of divorce. But Fletcher, it does matter to Max. Everything you do matters to him... and everything you don't do.

FLETCHER

Audrey, trust me --

AUDREY

Trust you? How do you expect the people close to you to trust you? You have everything going for you... but the truth.

Fletcher has no answer. As Audrey gets in her car:

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Do you know what your son was doing at nine-fifteen last night? He was making a wish on his birthday cake. He was wishing that, for just one day, his dad couldn't tell a lie.

She drives away -- leaving a moved Fletcher behind. Pensive, he starts for his car, when a new thought strikes him. Excited, he grabs the passing tow-yard employee and shakes him while he says:

FLETCHER

Oh my God! That's it! An innocent kid -- a heartfelt plea -- a birthday wish! Sure, it's impossible -- but it makes sense!

The startled employee breaks away as yet another idea strikes Fletcher:

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

If he can wish it, he can *unwish* it!

INT. SUPERMARKET -- DAY

Fletcher hustles through the supermarket, muttering:

FLETCHER

Unwish... *unwish*... *unwish*....

Passing the bakery section, he seizes the first cake he sees, rips around a corner, nabs a big box of matches, then searches in vain for another item. In a panic he shouts to a passing STOCKBOY:

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Birthday candles!

STOCKBOY

We're out.

CUT TO:

Fletcher in line. He sets the cake, the matches, and five huge non-birthday candles down on the conveyor belt.

CHECKER

You have a cake, a box of matches and five candles.

FLETCHER

Yes.

CHECKER
That's seven items.

FLETCHER
Congratulations. I guess that tutor is really working out.

CHECKER
Didn't you see the sign?

She points up... at the "SIX ITEMS OR LESS" sign.

FLETCHER
Yep.

CHECKER
Well?

FLETCHER
I ignored it.

An IRRITATED OLDER CUSTOMER behind Fletcher speaks up:

IRRITATED OLDER CUSTOMER
I guess you think your time is more valuable than ours?

FLETCHER
Yes! Of course! What are you worried about, that you're gonna miss the bingo tournament back at the home?!

CHECKER
(firm)
Sir --
(holding up one candle)
-- what would you like me to do with this extra candle?

A moment.

EXT. SUPERMARKET -- DAY

Purchases in hand, Fletcher is being thrown out of the supermarket by the manager.

FLETCHER
She asked!

INT. FULGHAM KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM -- DAY

The perky Ms. Berry is reading a story to the kindergartners. Max brightens when he spots his father in the doorway, cake box under one arm.

" MAX
Dad!

Max runs over as Ms. Berry comes to the door.

 MS. BERRY
You must be Max's dad! I'm Ms. Berry,
Max's teacher!

 FLETCHER
How do you do? Listen, I need to talk
to Max --

 MS. BERRY
Say, aren't you a lawyer?

 FLETCHER
(wary)
Yes.

 MS. BERRY
Oh, we've been talking about work this
week and it would be wonderful for the
children to hear something positive
about lawyers!

 FLETCHER
Well, actually, I --

 MS. BERRY
Children! Mr. Reid is going to tell us
what it's like to be a lawyer!

Leading the kids in applause, she pushes Fletcher center stage. The children stare, rapt with attention.

 FLETCHER
Uh, hi. Uh, I'm a lawyer and I work at
a big law firm with a lot of other
lawyers and I do stuff in lawyer court.
Thank you.

He starts off, but Ms. Berry blocks his path.

 MS. BERRY
One moment, Mr. Reid. Maybe some of
the children have questions?

FLETCHER
 (horrified)
 Questions?!

JEFF
 What kind of lawyer are you?

FLETCHER
 Mostly I'm a divorce lawyer.

MELINDA
 What's a "divorce"?

FLETCHER
 It's sort of like a wedding, but
 instead of saying "I do" the couple
 says "I wish I didn't."

CRAIG
 So what do you do?

FLETCHER
 I help the people split up their
 families.

The kindergartners gasp.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 (hastily)
 It's not as bad as it sounds. Most of
 them would have split up anyway.

THEODORE
 Why do they come to you?

FLETCHER
 I get them money they don't deserve.

CAROLYN
 How?

FLETCHER
 I trick judges into thinking the good
 guys are bad and the bad guys are good.

ELLIOT
 Why?

FLETCHER
 I get paid a fortune.

GINGER
 Do you have fun, being a lawyer?

FLETCHER

I did at first, but not anymore.

Fletcher is surprised by his answer. The moment is broken by the flustered Ms. Berry:

MS. BERRY

Uh; Mr. Reid, perhaps we're getting a little... esoteric. Why don't you just tell us what you did today?

FLETCHER

Well, let's see. I got slapped, saw a psychiatrist, called a cop an idiot, infuriated my ex-wife, blew a huge deal, pissed off a real-estate ass--

MS. BERRY

Oh, my! Well, thank you, Mr. Reid, for that whole new look at lawyers.

(to class)

How many of us want to be lawyers?

Not one hand goes up.

MS. BERRY (CONT'D)

I'm glad to hear it. Let's move on to finger painting, shall we?

Free at last, Fletcher grabs Max's hand and heads out.

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- DAY

They're in the playground just outside the classroom.

FLETCHER

Monster-Max.

MAX

Dadzilla. You came to play catch?

FLETCHER

No. I'd like to, but I can't right now. Max, you remember that wish you made last night?

MAX

Uh-huh?

FLETCHER

It worked.

Max's eyes light up.

MAX
Really?

FLETCHER
Really.

MAX
You mean you have to tell the truth?

FLETCHER
Yes.

MAX
No matter what?

FLETCHER
No matter what.

Max grins -- then suddenly asks, in rapid succession:

MAX
Is wrestling really real?

FLETCHER
No.

MAX
Will sitting close to the TV set make
me go blind?

FLETCHER
Not in a million years.

MAX
If I keep making this face --
(makes a horrible face)
will it get stuck that way?

FLETCHER
Uh-uh.

MAX
If I go in the water right after lunch,
will I drown?

FLETCHER
Not unless you can't swim.

MAX
Why do I have to eat squash?

FLETCHER
Because your mom buys it.

MAX

Is there a Tooth Fairy?

FLETCHER

No.

MAX

Can I still get a dollar when I put my tooth under the pillow?

FLETCHER

Yes.

Relieved, Max moves on to even more serious subjects.

MAX

What were you like when you were a boy?

FLETCHER

Actually... I was a lot like you. But we were pretty poor. I didn't have the things you have.

MAX

Did you get to do a lot of stuff with your dad?

FLETCHER

Well, sure.

MAX

More than you and me?

FLETCHER

Yes, but... Max, you and I spend quality time together.

Max nods thoughtfully, then:

MAX

What's "quality time"?

FLETCHER

It's an excuse parents like me make when they feel guilty for not being with their kids enough.

(a moment)

Max, I need you to take the wish back. Say you didn't mean it.

MAX

(confused)

But, Dad, I did mean it. Wouldn't that be lying?

FLETCHER

Yes -- but sometimes lying can be... helpful. Like, say you forgot to do your homework, and your teacher yells at you, and you don't want to get in trouble so you say, "My dog ate it."

MAX

But I don't have a dog.

FLETCHER

I know, but --

MAX

And my teacher would never yell at me.

FLETCHER

I know, but --

MAX

And I'm in kindergarten. I don't have homework.

FLETCHER

All right. Bad example. Max, because of your wish, certain things might happen. I might lose my case, I might lose my promotion, I might even lose my job.

MAX

But Daddy, lying is wrong.

FLETCHER

(a difficult admission)
Max, I don't know how to get along in the grown-up world if I have to stick to the truth. Sometimes life is complicated. Not everything is black and white. Do you understand?

Max shakes his head "no."

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Will you help me anyway?

A moment -- then Max reluctantly nods.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

That's my boy!

Fletcher opens the box, revealing an expensive cake... which reads HAPPY BAR MITZVAH, SAM. He thrusts the huge candles into the cake, breaking one in two so the total is five, then lights them.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Now, do whatever you did last night...
only this time, make an un-wish.

Not really happy, Max turns to the candles on the cake.
He takes a breath -- and blows them out.

MAX

I did it.

FLETCHER

Great! Great! Now to test --

Fletcher spots an attractive female teacher across the
playground. We stay with Max as Fletcher hurries to her
and says something. A moment. Then she slaps him.

Puzzled, Fletcher returns to his son.

MAX

Did it work?

FLETCHER

(rubbing his sore cheek)
Not like I'd hoped.

MAX

Maybe because it wasn't true. Dad, I'm
sorry I got you in trouble.

FLETCHER

It's okay, Max. It's not your fault.

Nonetheless, Max's face shows that he feels responsible.

EXT. SKYSCRAPER -- DAY

A worried and preoccupied Fletcher is heading toward his
office building when a MACHO ATTORNEY passes by.

MACHO ATTORNEY

Yo, Fletcher! How's it hanging?

FLETCHER

Short and shrivelled.

Fletcher hurries up the steps when he spots a familiar
dweebish bore. He shields his face with his briefcase,
but Philip recognizes him anyway.

PHILIP

Fletcher! I'm still waiting for your call. I guess you must've lost my card --

FLETCHER

No --

PHILIP

Or my phone was busy --

FLETCHER

No --

PHILIP

Or you just forgot --

FLETCHER

No --

PHILIP

(cannot be discouraged)
Or something. So anyway, you got plans for tonight?

FLETCHER

Technically, no, but --

PHILIP

Good! Swing by around seven-thirty!

Philip starts off, when Fletcher calls after him resolutely:

FLETCHER

Philip... I don't want to come over to your house!

A long moment, then:

PHILIP

Fine! We'll go out! There's this new karaoke bar I've been dying to try. I'll pick you up at your office!

And he runs off. Frustrated, Fletcher hurries on.

INT. SKYSCRAPER LOBBY -- DAY

Fletcher is the last person to board a crowded elevator.

INT. ELEVATOR -- DAY -- MOVING

Fletcher stands in front, oblivious to the others, until he hears from a female CLERK a friendly:

CLERK
Hey, Mr. Reid.

Startled at first, Fletcher nods a greeting. But to his horror, the clerk asks a question:

CLERK (CONT'D)
How's it going?

Fletcher has no choice -- the uncontrollable torrent spills out:

FLETCHER
How's it going? How's it going?! In thirty-five minutes I'm starting a trial, and I can't lie! For some unholy reason, I'm forced to tell the truth, which means I'm going to lose this case and lose my partnership and quite possibly lose my job! Not to mention, I've totally let down my son... and now that I can't lie, my ex-wife no longer believes me! *That's* how it's going!

The others are stunned. After a moment, Fletcher weakly asks:

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
And you?

Mercifully the elevator stops. Fletcher speeds out, followed by a stream of the astonished others, until only one person is left --

Miranda. She grins. She's heard everything.

INT. HALLWAY OF LAW OFFICES -- DAY

Fletcher heads to his office. The gun-shy Jane, Thomas and Fred run for cover, but he doesn't even notice. He reaches Greta.

GRETA
You feeling any better, boss?

FLETCHER
Not till nine-sixteen. Any calls?

GRETA

Well, a Mr. Mooney called to ask if you can recommend anyone else for the San Francisco job. Apparently the guy you suggested turned it down.

FLETCHER

Oh; Christ! And I thought I was finally rid of Jerry!

GRETA

Jerry? Why are you trying to get rid of Jerry?

FLETCHER

I'm afraid of losing Max to him.

Greta is startled by his forthrightness... but less so than Fletcher, who hadn't realize how he felt. He hurries into:

INT. FLETCHER'S OFFICE -- DAY

He punches in a number.

FLETCHER

Jerry Anderson, please. It's important.... He's where?

Fletcher hangs up. As he grabs files for court, he barks out instructions to Greta:

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Call Mooney and ask him to hold the job offer open awhile longer. Then call the court and tell them I may be a few minutes late.

GRETA (O.S.)

What if they ask why?

FLETCHER

Hang up!

He races out the door --

INT. HALLWAY OF LAW OFFICES -- DAY

And runs directly into Miranda.

FLETCHER

Aaaah!

Miranda smiles like a cat that's trapped a mouse.

MIRANDA

Ah, Fletcher, so nice to bump into you.
Are you busy?

FLETCHER

Unbelievably.

MIRANDA

Good. Would you follow me, please?

Highly nervous, Fletcher follows Miranda down the hall.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

Fletcher, did you know that the
partnership committee is being headed
up by Mr. Allan himself?

(off his wary nod)

Say, you used to work directly for Mr.
Allan, didn't you?

(off his warier nod)

Tell me, what do you think of him?

FLETCHER

(helpless)

He's a pedantic, pontificating,
pretentious bastard, a belligerent old
fart, a worthless, steaming pile of cow
dung.

MIRANDA

(grinning)

How delightful!

She swings open a door, ushering Fletcher into:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

The room is filled with attorneys, including MR. ALLAN,
the founder himself. Fletcher freezes.

MIRANDA

Pardon me for interrupting your
meeting. Mr. Allan, you remember
Fletcher Reid.

Mr. Allan rises to shake Fletcher's hand.

MR. ALLAN

It's good to see you again, Fletcher.

An involuntary whimper from Fletcher.

MIRANDA

Oh, that's right. You used to work directly for Mr. Allan. Tell me, what do you think of him?

Fletcher gulps. This is it. His career is history.

FLETCHER

He's a pedantic, pontificating, pretentious bastard, a belligerent old fart, a worthless, steaming pile of cow dung.

The dead silence to end all dead silences. Then -- Mr. Allan bursts into raucous laughter. He is joined by everyone except Miranda, who looks on, stunned.

MR. ALLAN

Marvelous! Marvelous! That's what I love most about this firm -- the collegial atmosphere, the hearty good-fellowship!

Miranda is incensed.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT -- DAY

Fletcher scans the crowded court, spotting Jerry playing with a group of men in their thirties and forties, half shirts, half skins. After Jerry nails a jump shot for the shirts, Fletcher signals him.

JERRY

(surprised)

Fletcher! To what do I owe the pleasure?

FLETCHER

Necessity. Look, Jerry, I was wondering if we could talk....

JERRY

Sure. We should be done in about twenty minutes.

Jerry rejoins the game. Glancing at the clock, a desperate Fletcher comes to a decision.

CUT TO:

Fletcher is in the game, sans jacket, tie and shirt but with slacks and \$300 shoes. The skins have the ball, and as they work it around, Fletcher finds himself guarded by Jerry.

FLETCHER

I heard you're interviewing with Schirn and Masterson. Phenomenal opportunity. You shouldn't pass it up.

He passes the ball upcourt to a fellow SKIN.

JERRY

Really? So if you were me, you'd take it?

FLETCHER

(compelled to be truthful)

Absolutely not.

Just then, the skin misses a shot and Jerry races down on offense. Fletcher hurries to catch up to him.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

-- But I'm not you! Career-wise, this is your big break.

JERRY

You're right. But if I take it, I'd have to move, you know?

FLETCHER

Yes! I know! That's the point!

The shirts score. Fletcher slaps his head at his answer, again races to catch Jerry.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

What I mean is, think of it as a huge move up.

JERRY

You're right. But... well, the real problem is Audrey. Do I want to leave her for a job, even an incredible job that would make my entire career?

FLETCHER

(has to answer)

You'd be a complete moron. She's one of a kind. You'll never find anyone like her again.

Again the poor-shooting skin misses. Again Jerry runs. Again Fletcher hastens to undo the damage:

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

-- But you are just dating, and the job is a sure thing. I can honestly say, I want you to take this job!

Jerry is about to respond when he's tossed the ball and nails a three-pointer. Fletcher is given the inbound pass, and he and Jerry race downcourt.

Fletcher dribbles in place as he awaits Jerry's response, failing to notice his poor-shooting teammate.

POOR SHOOTER

Throw it here! I'm open!

FLETCHER

You can't wait for life to happen. Sometimes you have to grab it by the short-and-curlies and give it a yank.

Fletcher keeps dribbling as the poor shooter runs around frantically.

POOR SHOOTER

I'm open! I'm open!

Before Jerry answers, one of the shirts steals the ball from Fletcher and takes it downcourt.

POOR SHOOTER (CONT'D)

I was wide open! Why didn't you pass it to me?

FLETCHER

Because you've thrown up nothing but bricks, you spastic mook! You couldn't get a ball inside a net if you were Frankie Avalon!

(back to Jerry)

So, what do you think?

Finally Jerry makes up his mind.

JERRY

Fletcher, you're right. I can't pass this up.

Fletcher grins, luxuriating in his success.

INT. BMW -- DAY -- MOVING

Fletcher's mind is racing as fast as his car. As he punches in a number on his cellular phone:

FLETCHER

Now, to reclaim my role as King Dad....
 (off the busy signal)
 C'mon, Audrey! Who are you talking to?

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT -- DAY

A nervous but resolute Jerry is on a pay phone:

JERRY

Hi, Audrey, it's Jerry. Can you meet
 me at Phelan's for dinner at seven?
 There's something we need to talk
 about....

A congratulatory cheer goes up from his teammates. Jerry
 blushes.

INT. COURTROOM -- DAY

Dana Appleton and Mr. Cole sit before JUDGE STEVENS, a
 man of great dignity and authority, who is fuming. Still
 rank from the basketball game, Fletcher hurries in.

JUDGE STEVENS

Mr. Reid, you're thirty-five minutes
 late! Where have you been?!

FLETCHER

I had to make an emergency appearance
 at another court.

JUDGE STEVENS

Well... don't let it happen again.

Virginia takes her seat, leaving her two young children
 sitting dejectedly in the gallery with their nanny.

FLETCHER

(incredulous whisper)
 You brought your kids... to your
 divorce?

VIRGINIA

(by way of explanation)
 Sympathy.

FLETCHER

Well, it's working. I feel sorry for
 them already.

The judge bangs the gavel.

JUDGE STEVENS
Ms. Appleton, you may begin.

CUT TO:

Dana Appleton is questioning BRYSON, a private investigator. Fletcher watches with mounting anxiety, nervously drinking from a glass of water at his table.

BRYSON

(referring to his notes)

-- From March six through June twelve, I surveilled Mrs. Cole at the behest of Mr. Cole. During that period, I noted that Mr. Cole left between seven-forty and seven-fifty. Thereafter, Mrs. Cole would frequently have a male visitor arrive and stay for one to four hours. I was able to take several photographs of the male visitor.

He shows a photo -- of a strapping hunk straight from a Chippendale's calendar. Fletcher takes a huge drink.

DANA

I see. And do you know what Mrs. Cole and her male visitor did during their frequent... visits?

BRYSON

Well, they were pretty good about keeping the shades drawn -- but I sure was able to hear. I made an audiotape of one such... "session."

He hands her the tape. Fletcher refills his glass.

DANA

With the Court's permission, I would like to play the tape.

FLETCHER

Your Honor, I object!

JUDGE STEVENS

And why is that, Mr. Reid?

FLETCHER

(can't help himself)
Because it's devastating to my case.

JUDGE STEVENS

Overruled.

As Dana pops the tape into a player, the nanny leads the Cole children out of the courtroom. Fletcher anxiously downs the glass.

Periodically cutting to Virginia, Mr. Cole, Dana and the thirsty Fletcher, we hear Virginia and her visitor engaged in intense physical activity:

MALE VISITOR (O.S.)
C'mon, let's do it.

VIRGINIA (O.S.)
I'm ready, I'm really ready. God, I'm hot.

MALE VISITOR (O.S.)
Let me help you off with that. Lie down.

VIRGINIA (O.S.)
Wait -- we need protection.

MALE VISITOR (O.S.)
Okay, now. Roll over. I want to show you a new position.

VIRGINIA (O.S.)
Oh, I've never done it like this before.

MALE VISITOR (O.S.)
You can take it. Oh yeah. That's it. Now, pump, pump --

We hear labored rhythmic breathing.

MALE VISITOR (O.S.)
Yes, yes, yes --

As Dana fast-forwards the tape, Fletcher drinks directly from the pitcher. Dana resumes... with more labored breathing and:

MALE VISITOR (O.S.)
Yes, yes, yes --

Dana fast-forwards again, then resumes... with still more labored breathing, building with great intensity, and:

MALE VISITOR (O.S.)
All right, bring it on home -- yes!
Yes! Yes!

VIRGINIA (O.S.)
Yes! YES! YES!

The groans reach their incredible climax. There's a still moment... then:

MALE VISITOR (O.S.)

You were great! Let's shower up.

" VIRGINIA (O.S.)

I'll tell you one thing. We never did that at St. Bede's.

As the shy COURT REPORTER, the macho BAILIFFS and the non-sense judge all mop their brows, Dana shuts off the tape. She turns to Fletcher with a satisfied smile.

DANA

Your witness.

FLETCHER

No questions.

JUDGE STEVENS

No questions?

VIRGINIA

No questions?

FLETCHER

(afraid to ask any)

No questions.

DANA

(triumphant)

Petitioner rests.

JUDGE STEVENS

All right, Mr. Reid. You may proceed.

FLETCHER

(to himself)

How?!

Gathering his courage, he stands, downs the last of his water, and moves to the lectern. He's about to speak... when a wonderful feeling sweeps through him.

Fletcher holds up a finger indicating he needs a moment, then adopts an expression of intense concentration. After a moment, he grins.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Would the Court be willing to grant me a short bathroom break?

JUDGE STEVENS
It can't wait?

FLETCHER
Not unless you want to recarpet.

JUDGE STEVENS
(frustrated)
All right, but get back in here
immediately so we can finish this.

Fletcher beams. Then necessity compels him to race out.

INT. REST ROOM -- DAY

Fletcher stands before the urinal, taking the longest leak in legal history. We reveal TWO MEN are impatiently waiting behind him.

WAITING MAN #1
This bites. I'm gonna try the can
upstairs.

The two leave. Fletcher has an expression of pure animal relief... until he looks at his watch. It's only 4:15.

FLETCHER
What did I think? That I could piss
for forty-five minutes?!

He hits his forehead in frustration... and gets an idea. He hits himself again and again, harder and harder, smashing his head into the wall, poking himself in the eyes, yanking on his ears, finally knocking himself into the stall, where he continues his attack.

A THIRD MAN comes in, only to hear a commotion coming from behind the stall door.

MAN #3
What's going on in there?

FLETCHER (O.S.)
I'm abusing myself! Do you mind?!

The man's eyes go wide. He carefully leaves the room.

INT. COURTROOM -- DAY

The judge is boiling. Dana is steaming. Suddenly the doors swing open and the bailiff helps in the severely beaten Fletcher. The entire courtroom is shocked.

BAILIFF

I found him in the bathroom. It looks like he was attacked by an army.

JUDGE STEVENS

Who did this?

FLETCHER

(truthfully)

A madman, your Honor. A desperate fool at the end of his pitiful rope.

JUDGE STEVENS

What did he look like?

FLETCHER

(describing himself)

About five eleven, hundred eighty-five pounds, crazed look in his eye.

JUDGE STEVENS

Bailiff, find the maniac!

A hubbub rises. He bangs the gavel.

JUDGE STEVENS (CONT'D)

Under the circumstances, I have no choice but to recess this case until tomorrow morning at nine.

Fletcher smiles serenely -- until:

JUDGE STEVENS (CONT'D)

-- Unless, of course, you think you can still proceed?

Fletcher covers his mouth in a desperate attempt to avoid answering, but he can't repress the truth:

FLETCHER

I can proceed just fine.

JUDGE STEVENS

I admire your courage, Mr. Reid. I'll give you a few minutes to compose yourself, and then we'll get started.

Fletcher looks as if he has just been sentenced to death.

EXT. COURTHOUSE STEPS -- DAY

Eyeing her lawyer with some concern, Virginia approaches with her remarkably handsome lover, LAURENCE FALK:

VIRGINIA

Mr. Reid, you remember Laurence Falk,
the man from the tape.

FALK

How are you?

FLETCHER

I've slipped into the seventh circle of
Hell, thank you, and you?

Virginia exchanges an anxious look with Falk.

VIRGINIA

Shouldn't we go over our testimony?

FLETCHER

Well, basically the plan is I walk you
through the tape step by step, I ask
you questions --

VIRGINIA

And we give the explanation you came up
with.

FLETCHER

Exactly.

FALK

So all we have to do is lie. Sounds
simple enough.

FLETCHER

Doesn't it? And I'll finish up with a
dramatic series of questions, something
like... "Mr. Falk, isn't a true that
you and Mrs. Cole have never made lo--"

But Fletcher gags. He can't get the question out. The
others look concerned, but he waves them off.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Sorry. I'm fine. "Mr. Falk, isn't it
true that you and Mrs. Cole have never
made lo-- lo--"

To his horror, he gags again, unable to form the word.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Oh my God! I can't do it! I can't
finish the question if I know the
answer is a lie!

At this moment Miranda and Mr. Allan come up the steps.

MR. ALLAN

Don't let me interrupt, Fletcher. I just want you to know I'll be observing this afternoon. Miranda insisted I see you in action.

Fletcher shoots a hateful look at Miranda. She smiles.

MR. ALLAN (CONT'D)

I'm looking forward to it. Go get 'em!

Mr. Allan and Miranda head into the building, leaving Fletcher more desperate than before:

FLETCHER

C'mon! Gotta lie! Gotta lie!

(to Falk, with determination)

Did you and Mrs. Cole ever make lo--
forni-- bump ug-- roll in the h--
make the beast with two ba-- sodo--
Did you two ever fu-- fu-- Fu! I
can't even say "Fu--"! Now I'm really
scr--!

He begins to hyperventilate. Virginia turns to Falk:

VIRGINIA

Water! Get him water!

Falk hurries into the building as Fletcher hacks on:

FLETCHER

Fu-- fu--

VIRGINIA

Sit down! Get some air!

(slaps him on the back)

Try to relax! Breathe deeply!

Falk hurries out with a cup, hands it to Fletcher, who downs it in one gulp -- then spews it out again, screaming in pain.

VIRGINIA (CONT'D)

What?! What?!

FALK

I couldn't find any water, so I got him coffee!

Fletcher runs up and down the steps, frantically fanning his scalded mouth. The bailiff appears.

BAILIFF
Judge is taking the bench.

Fletcher's pain turns to terror.

INT. COURTROOM -- DAY

The judge is on the bench. Mr. Allan and a smug Miranda look on from the gallery.

JUDGE STEVENS
You may proceed, Mr. Reid.

Everyone turns to Fletcher in anticipation. In a voice severely affected by his burnt mouth, he says:

FLETCHER
Ya Honna, da repondint callz Horhenz
Fock!

Fletcher didn't actually utter the "f" word, of course, but it sure sounds like he did. There are scandalized looks all around.

JUDGE STEVENS
I beg your pardon?

FLETCHER
(louder)
Ya Honna, da repondint callz Horhenz
Fock!

JUDGE STEVENS
Madame Reporter?

COURT REPORTER
"Ya Honna, da repondint callz Horhenz
Fock!"

JUDGE STEVENS
Counselor, I must warn you --

FLETCHER
Fock! Fock! My whitnezz iz Fock!

MIRANDA
(satisfied, to herself)
I'd say your whole case is focked.

JUDGE STEVENS
Is there a "Horhenz Fock" here?

Falk stands.

FALK
I'm Horhenz... uh, Laurence Falk.

CUT TO:

Falk is on the witness stand. With great effort, Fletcher has forced his enunciation to near-normal.

FLETCHER
Mr. Falk, do you know my client, Virginia Cole?

FALK
Yes.

FLETCHER
In fact, you know her quite well, don't you?

FALK
(a bit apprehensive)
Yes....

FLETCHER
Mr. Falk, is your relationship with my client entirely platonic, not?

The "not" was involuntary. It takes Fletcher by surprise -- not to mention everyone else in the courtroom.

JUDGE STEVENS
Excuse me, Mr. Reid?

FLETCHER
If I might rephrase, your Honor.
(testing, to himself)
Is your relationship with my client entirely platonic, not? Is your relationship with my client not entirely platonic? Is not your relationship with my client entirely platonic?

(beaming with new confidence)
Mr. Falk, is not your relationship with my client entirely platonic?

FALK
(confused)
No. I mean, yes. I think.

FLETCHER

Yes, is your relationship with my client not entirely platonic, or yes, is not your relationship with my client entirely platonic?

FALK

What?

FLETCHER

How 'bout just answering the question you think I'm asking?

FALK

Yes, my relationship with your client is entirely platonic.

FLETCHER

And did you ever not make lo-- did you not ever not make lo--

(losing it)

You had sex with her every time you met, didn't you?

Falk looks nervously to Virginia. Defensive, he replies:

FALK

I didn't!

FLETCHER

(unable to stop)

Mr. Falk, you expect us to believe that a slab of beefcake like you is going to visit a hot number like my client every day for three months when her husband is at work and not do the gropey hokey pokey?

The judge looks to Dana. Mr. Allan looks to Miranda. Is Fletcher cross-examining his own witness?

FALK

(also losing it)

It's true! I swear! I know how it sounds, but it's true! I never laid a finger on her!

FLETCHER

No further questions.

DANA

Uh... no questions.

Miranda can't believe what she's just witnessed. She's even less able to believe Mr. Allan's reaction:

MR. ALLAN

Interesting strategy. Attack your own witness before the petitioner can. Take the wind out of their sails while building credibility with the judge --

To her enormous chagrin, Miranda sees that Mr. Allan is right: at the moment, the judge is with Fletcher.

MR. ALLAN (CONT'D)

I can't wait to see where he goes with this.

JUDGE STEVENS

(to Fletcher)

Call your next witness.

FLETCHER

I have no further witnesses, your Honor.

This elicits an audible gasp from the spectators, including a flabbergasted Mr. Allan. Virginia is horrified. She whispers frantically:

VIRGINIA

What are you doing?! What about the explanation for the tape?!

FLETCHER

I can't lie!

VIRGINIA

What?! Don't go ethical on me now, Reid!

FLETCHER

You don't understand. For reasons too bizarre to go into, until nine-sixteen tonight I can't lie -- and I can't ask a question that calls for a lie!

A long moment. Then:

VIRGINIA

So basically... I'm screwed.

FLETCHER

Yes. Totally. Completely. The only thing worse would have been if you and Falk had gone at it right here in court.

A light bulb goes off as Fletcher has the most brilliantly deceptive idea of his career.

JUDGE STEVENS

Well, in that event, I have no choice but to rule in favor of --

Dana and Mr. Cole beam, as does Miranda... until Fletcher shouts out:

FLETCHER

Stop!

(off judge's look)

-- if you would be so kind. Your Honor, although we have no further witnesses, my client and Mr. Falk would like to present a demonstration.

JUDGE STEVENS

Of what took place on the tape -- right here?!

FLETCHER

Right here. Right now.

The entire courtroom is stunned -- especially Virginia and Falk.

DANA

Objection!

FLETCHER

Your Honor, a great deal of money is at stake, not to mention my client's reputation. I think she and Mr. Falk are entitled to a little leeway.

DANA

"Leeway"? That's a new name for it.

JUDGE STEVENS

(worried)

Overruled. Clear the court of children.

Once again, the nanny herds the Cole children out. Fletcher quickly huddles with Virginia and Falk, who suddenly grin with understanding.

JUDGE STEVENS (CONT'D)

Mrs. Cole, you may proceed.

VIRGINIA

We'll need some room to lie down.

The judge nods tentatively. Virginia and Falk clear the respondent's table... then start stripping.

JUDGE STEVENS

What are you doing?!

VIRGINIA

We weren't wearing much when we did it.

JUDGE STEVENS

That's not necessary!

Virginia and Falk stop.

VIRGINIA

We usually use a lot of equipment --

JUDGE STEVENS

Oh my God.

VIRGINIA

-- But we'll just have to wing it.

She and Falk borrow two phallic-looking billy clubs from the bailiffs, then take out gloves.

With a smile at Fletcher, Virginia and Falk begin -- exercising. Falk leading, the two repeat each provocative word we heard on the tape... only this time they suit their workout to every sultry sound.

For example, when Virginia says "protection," they put on the "weight-lifting" gloves... when Falk says "roll over," we see them roll over to do push-ups... when he says "pump," we see them pump "iron" (the billy clubs).

When Virginia and her "personal trainer" are finished, Fletcher turns to the judge.

FLETCHER

Nothing further, your Honor.

With a stern look at the openmouthed Dana and Mr. Cole, the judge renders his decision:

JUDGE STEVENS

I find there is insufficient evidence of infidelity to invoke clause seven of the prenuptial agreement. Therefore, Mrs. Cole is to receive nine million dollars.

Commotion in the court. We pan around -- from the overjoyed Fletcher... to the stunned Dana and Mr. Cole...

to the astonished Mr. Allan... to the smoldering
Miranda... to the thoughtful Virginia.

MR. ALLAN

(to Miranda)

I've never seen anything like it! He's
taken a total loser and turned it into
a slam dunk!

Mr. Allan gives Fletcher the thumbs-up; simultaneously,
Miranda sneaks him the finger. Both digital displays
afford Fletcher satisfaction.

As the nanny ushers the Cole children back in:

JUDGE STEVENS

Now on the issue of custody, do we have
an agreement?

DANA

Yes, your Honor. The parties have
agreed to joint custody of their
children.

JUDGE STEVENS

Mr. Reid?

FLETCHER

Absolutely --

VIRGINIA

Not.

Fletcher freezes. Dana and Mr. Cole stare at Virginia...
as do her two children. Fletcher whispers to his client:

FLETCHER

What are you talking about?

VIRGINIA

We're going to contest custody.

FLETCHER

Why?

VIRGINIA

Payback. For trying to prevent me from
collecting nine million dollars.

FLETCHER

He was entitled to prevent you. You
committed adultery. Our case was a
lie, remember?

VIRGINIA

Which didn't deter you from presenting it -- brilliantly. Now that you've convinced the judge he lied about me, I'm going to hit him where it hurts.

At last the consequences of his actions begin to come clear to Fletcher.

FLETCHER

But -- but -- you said he was a good father....

JUDGE STEVENS

Mr. Reid? Do we have an agreement on custody or not?

With a distressed look at the children, Fletcher answers:

FLETCHER

No.

JUDGE STEVENS

In that case, please present a proposed custody ruling tomorrow morning at nine. Court is adjourned.

He bangs the gavel. We close in on Fletcher, who is torn by an emotion he hasn't felt in years: guilt.

INT. HALLWAY OF LAW OFFICES -- EVENING

Fletcher makes his way past secretaries and clerks, who take in his dejected appearance. He reaches Greta.

GRETA

How'd it go, boss?

FLETCHER

(without enthusiasm)

I won.

GRETA

(uncertain)

Congratulations?

FLETCHER

(flat)

Thanks.

The phone rings. She picks it up.

GRETA
 Mr. Reid's office.
 (to Fletcher)
 It's Mr. Allan. They'd like to see
 you.

This is it. With a glance at Greta, Fletcher makes the long walk. All eyes are on him as he enters:

INT. MR. ALLAN'S OFFICE -- EVENING

Fletcher joins the firm's top partners, including Miranda and a beaming Mr. Allan.

MR. ALLAN
 Fletcher, the committee has taken its vote. I am very pleased to extend an offer to you to become a partner.

Mr. Allan holds out his hand. A moment... *and Fletcher accepts it.*

As the two shake, they are surrounded by the others, who offer pats on the back and words of congratulation. Even Miranda begrudgingly offers her hand, which Fletcher accepts -- to find that she has passed him his wallet.

INT. HALLWAY OF LAW OFFICES -- EVENING

Head down, Fletcher hurries down the hall and disappears into his office, shutting the door behind him.

GRETA
 Oh, Jeez. Oh, Jeez.

She doesn't know whether to comfort her boss or leave him alone. Finally, the Florence Nightingale in her wins out. Grabbing a box of Kleenex, she opens the door --

INT. FLETCHER'S OFFICE -- EVENING

And finds a despondent Fletcher sitting at his desk.

GRETA
 Boss...? I'm sorry.

Fletcher nods, sadly.

GRETA (CONT'D)
 So... who got it? Wight? Moore? Fred
 Rand?

FLETCHER

Me.

GRETA

Come again?

FLETCHER

Me. I'm a partner. We're meeting at McCabe's later to celebrate, if you want to join us.

GRETA

Sounds like a blast. I don't get it, boss. You win a big case, and you look like your dog just got run over. You make partner, and you look like you just got run over. For a guy who's doing so well, you don't seem to be doing so well. I mean, isn't this what you want, more than anything else in the world?

FLETCHER

No, this isn't what I want more than anything else in the world.

Suddenly Fletcher is thunderstruck -- Greta's question has prompted an astonishing realization.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

My God! How could I be so stupid?

(compelled to answer)

Because I've been lying to myself so long, I don't even know what's true until a miracle comes along.

Fletcher grabs the phone and dials.

INT. AUDREY'S BEDROOM / FLETCHER'S OFFICE -- EVENING

Wearing a beautiful evening dress, Audrey is putting on her earrings when the phone rings. She picks it up. We intercut between the two locations.

AUDREY

Hello?

FLETCHER

Audrey! Thank God I got you. I need to talk to you right away. In person.

AUDREY

Fletcher, I'm meeting Jerry for dinner at seven.

FLETCHER
I'll be right over. Wait for me.

AUDREY
Are you okay?

" FLETCHER
For the first time in a long time.

INT. FLETCHER'S OFFICE -- EVENING

Fletcher hangs up and starts out, giving Greta a big kiss on the cheek as he passes --

FLETCHER
Greta, you're the greatest!

-- Leaving her puzzled but pleased. A second later, he pokes his head back in:

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
See? It must be true!

INT. BMW -- EVENING -- MOVING

Fletcher is singing to himself as he speeds through traffic, when a disturbing thought crosses his mind.

FLETCHER
Dinner with Jerry?
(discounting it)
No problem. He took the job and he's going to let her down easy, somewhere between the cucumber salad and the chicken Marseilles.

He resumes singing... until:

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
-- Unless he turned down the job. Oh, shit. Oh, shit.

He frantically dials his cellular phone.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Pick up... pick up.... Hello, Mr. Mooney? This is Fletcher Reid. It's about Jerry Anderson and the Schirn, Masterson job -- please tell me he didn't turn it down.

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

(relieved)

He didn't. Great. So he took it.

(distressed)

He didn't take it. I'm sorry, I don't understand.

INT. HEAD-HUNTING FIRM -- EVENING

Mooney explains:

MOONEY

Well, he accepted the job on a conditional basis. It seems he's gonna ask his girlfriend to marry him and move to San Francisco, and if she says "Yes," he's taking it.

(a moment)

Beg pardon?

INT. BMW -- EVENING -- MOVING

Fletcher is screaming at himself:

FLETCHER

Oh, shit! Oh, shit! And I talked him into it! I've got to see her before it's too late! Oh, shit!

He hits the gas.

EXT. STREET / INT. BMW -- MOVING -- EVENING

Fletcher is driving like a madman, weaving in and out of traffic... and passing a parked police car. The COP starts his pursuit... and Fletcher spots the flashing lights.

FLETCHER

Shit shit shit shit!

He quickly pulls over -- so quickly he jumps the curb. He rolls down his window as the officer approaches.

POLICE OFFICER

Would you step out of the car, please.

Fletcher obeys.

FLETCHER

Listen, I know I'm guilty and I've violated about fourteen laws, but I have an emergency --

Fletcher stops. He sees that the officer is pulling out handcuffs.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Wait a second -- what are those for?

POLICE OFFICER

Your license was suspended. Unpaid tickets.

FLETCHER

But I paid them! I paid them!

POLICE OFFICER

Not according to the computer.

FLETCHER

The computer's wrong! It hasn't been updated! Who are you going to believe -- a goddamn computer or an attorney at law?

(off the officer's look)

Listen, you've gotta believe me! I recently embraced the truth!

The officer smirks.

POLICE OFFICER

Turn around, please.

Fletcher turns as told, then reaches a decision -- and bolts, yelling as he runs:

FLETCHER

Sorry! Sorry! I don't have time!

He races across four lanes of traffic, narrowly missing a series of fatal collisions, calling back:

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I'll surrender later! I promise!

The police officer looks at the fleeing lawyer in disbelief.

EXT. HILLSIDE -- EVENING

Fletcher is running as fast as he can. Satisfied he's not being followed, he stops, catches his breath -- and

for the first time takes in his surroundings:
headstones. He is running through a cemetery.

He puts on a fresh burst of speed.

FLETCHER
Gotta call... gotta call....

He spots a pay phone by the mausoleum and fishes in his pocket for change. Suddenly his face goes white -- he doesn't have any. He looks heavenward:

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Noooo!

And he's off again. As he races past an elaborate gravesite, he grabs a huge floral display.

EXT. STREET -- EVENING

Fletcher runs past closed businesses, shouting:

FLETCHER
Change? Anyone have change?

He turns a corner -- and finally sees an open business. Beaming, he runs inside. We pan up to see the sign: "HELL'S HOLE."

INT. HELL'S HOLE -- EVENING

This is a bar most bikers would be afraid to enter. When the grinning Fletcher runs in, holding the floral display, the enormous TOUGH GUYS stop all activity.

TOUGH GUY
What're you lookin' at?

FLETCHER
(can't stop himself)
Two dozen cretinous, steroid-chomping sociopaths?

EXT. PARK -- EVENING

A roughed-up Fletcher is moving like a bat out of hell, checking behind him to see if he's still being chased. He isn't.

He continues, screaming to no one in particular:

FLETCHER
Change?! Change?!

He spots a man walking by.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
'Scuse me, sir. Do you have any --

The man turns... to reveal the same beggar Fletcher was rude to outside the courthouse.

BEGGAR
Change? Absolutely.

He continues walking.

FLETCHER
Could you spare some?

BEGGAR
Unquestionably.

The beggar continues on.

FLETCHER
All right, I get your point. But this is a crisis!

The beggar pulls out a quarter... but doesn't hand it over.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Look, I'll give you ten bucks.

The beggar holds up the quarter, pretending to admire it.

BEGGAR
It's so shiny and new.

FLETCHER
Twenty.

BEGGAR
Minted in Denver. Imagine that.

FLETCHER
Thirty-four. It's all I have.

A long moment as the beggar thinks, then:

BEGGAR
Nope. It's worth twice that to screw you.

He walks off, grinning.

FLETCHER
Jerkoff!

BEGGAR
Lawyer.

CUT TO:

Another area of the park. Fletcher continues his desperate search. Up ahead, near a pond, he spots a cluster of people. With renewed hope, he races up --

FLETCHER
Hi! Can I borrow a quarter to call my wife to stop her from getting married to the nicest guy you've --

-- But comes to a jolting stop when he notices the group is made up of tough-looking TEENAGERS.

TEENAGER #1
What's wrong?

FLETCHER
I'm afraid you're going to rob me.

TEENAGER #1
And why's that?

FLETCHER
Just because you're young, and the way you're dressed, and the fact that you look like a bunch of thugs.
(sheepish)
Sorry, I feel kind of stupid.

TEENAGER #2
Don't. This time you guessed right.

And he pulls up his shirt, revealing a gun in his waistband.

FLETCHER
Oh, shit!
(handing over his wallet)
Here! Thirty-four dollars! Enjoy!

TEENAGER #1
You have anything else worth taking?

FLETCHER
You had to ask, didn't you?

One by one he hands over the following:

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Watch, Cartier, twelve hundred bucks.
Cuff links, Tiffany's, four twenty-
five. Sports coat, Perry Ellis, three
sixty. Shoes, Cole Haan, three
hundred.

(beginning to unzip)

Silk undershorts, Calvin Klein --

TEENAGER #1

Keep 'em. That it?

FLETCHER

Well, I have the apartment keys, but by
the time you got there, I'll have
called the manager, so they aren't of
any value to you... unless, of course,
you kill me.

A moment, then:

TEENAGER #1

Pass. You've been very obliging.

They start off, when Fletcher calls after them:

FLETCHER

Uh, listen -- you think maybe you can
spare a quarter?

The toughs look at him... then pat their pockets. One
comes up with a quarter and tosses it -- but Fletcher
fumbles... and the quarter flies into the pond.

TEENAGER #1

I guess this isn't your day.

They head off, laughing.

INT. AUDREY AND MAX'S LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Max looks on sadly as Audrey, dressed beautifully for
dinner, gives a note to BRENDA, the baby-sitter.

AUDREY

If Mr. Reid calls, tell him I couldn't
wait any longer. These are the
emergency numbers, and this is where
I'm having dinner with Mr. Anderson.

She kisses Max goodbye, but his mind is somewhere else.
Audrey leaves.

EXT. PARK PAY PHONE -- NIGHT

Now soaking wet, Fletcher puts the hard-earned quarter in the phone and dials.

INT. MAX'S LIVING ROOM / EXT. PARK PAY PHONE -- NIGHT

As Max picks up the phone, we hear Audrey's car drive away. We intercut between the living room and the park.

FLETCHER

Max, this is Dad. Let me talk to Mom.

MAX

She just went to Phelan's with the boyfriend.

Fletcher slumps, stunned.

FLETCHER

Oh, no, no. I'm too late.

MAX

Is something wrong?

FLETCHER

Yes.

MAX

Is it because of my wish?

FLETCHER

Yes... and no. It's because of the wish, but it's not your fault. It's mine.

MAX

What happened, Dad?

FLETCHER

(compelled to answer)

Jerry is asking your mom to marry him, and I'm afraid if she says "Yes," I'll lose you both forever. But don't worry! Okay?

A moment. Then Max tells a lie:

MAX

Okay.

Fletcher hangs up.

FLETCHER
I've got to get there. At least I've
got to try.

He runs off.

INT. MAX'S LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Deeply worried, Max turns to Brenda, who is engrossed in television.

MAX
My dad is in trouble. I have to help.

BRENDA
It'll be okay, Max. Come over and
watch TV.

But it won't be okay. Max makes up his mind.

MAX
I'll be in my room.

INT. MAX'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Max goes to his bureau, picks up his plaster piggy bank
-- and smashes it.

INT. PHELAN'S RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

Audrey and a nervous Jerry make their way into the
restaurant, which is unexpectedly crowded.

JERRY
Uh oh.

AUDREY
Don't worry. As long as we have
reservations --

JERRY
We don't. I'm sorry, I.... Let me
handle this.

He approaches the MAITRE D'.

MAITRE D'
Yes, sir? Do you have reservations?

JERRY
(lying, but terribly)
Uh, yes, yes, I do... have
reservations.

MAITRE D'
Name, please?

A long pause.

JERRY
I don't have reservations.

MAITRE D'
Twenty minutes.

EXT. STREET -- NIGHT

Fletcher sticks out his thumb... but no one's picking up
wet hitchhikers tonight.

CUT TO:

Fletcher tries to flag a cab, but no one will stop for
the still-dripping man.

CUT TO:

Fletcher is at a bus stop when a bus roars up. A few
seconds later it pulls away... leaving the still-soaking
would-be passenger. He continues on.

EXT. SECOND BUS STOP -- NIGHT

Wearing his baseball uniform, Max is alone at another bus
stop when a huge bus roars up.

INT. BUS -- NIGHT

The DRIVER opens the front door -- to see the tiny Max.
With difficulty he climbs the steps into the bus.

MAX
Do you go by the big bridge?

DRIVER
Yep. Awful young to be riding alone,
aren't you?

Max takes a deep breath -- and lies again.

MAX
My dad told me to meet him.

DRIVER
(shrugging)
Eighty-five cents.

Max gives her all his money and heads down the aisle. The adults look curiously at this kid traveling alone, but Max isn't scared. He has something he has to do.

INT. PHELAN'S -- NIGHT

Audrey and Jerry are finally being seated.

EXT. SKYSCRAPER -- NIGHT

Fletcher comes to his building. He runs up the stairs.

INT. SKYSCRAPER LOBBY -- NIGHT

He heads for the elevators, passing the GUARD at the security desk.

SECURITY GUARD
Where do you think you're going?

FLETCHER
My office.

The dubious guard takes Fletcher in: no jacket, no shoes, dripping with pond scum.

SECURITY GUARD
You have any I.D.?

FLETCHER
(yelling in frustration)
No! Look, my name is Fletcher Reid,
and I need to talk to my secretary!
Just phone her, please!

SECURITY GUARD
Sorry.
(gesturing to pay phone)
But if you want to call....

EXT. SKYSCRAPER -- NIGHT

Fletcher is outside the building, completely dejected.

FLETCHER
I guess the truth has finally caught up
with me....

Just then, we hear a honk. Fletcher looks up, then grins
-- it's Philip, picking him up for the karaoke bar!

PHILIP
Seven-thirty! Perfect timing!

Fletcher runs up and hugs the astonished man.

INT. PHILIP'S CAR -- NIGHT -- MOVING

Philip is driving Fletcher to Phelan's.

FLETCHER
You're saving my life, Philip. I can't
tell you how grateful I am.

PHILIP
You know, it's funny, but for some
reason, I was beginning to think you
didn't like me. Isn't that silly?

FLETCHER
No.

PHILIP
What?

FLETCHER
No, it's not silly. I don't like you.
I find you boring in the extreme, and
you wouldn't know a good time if it
took roost up your bum.

PHILIP
Then why --

FLETCHER
It was easier than telling you the
truth.

PHILIP
I appreciate that.

FLETCHER
I'm sorry. Are you upset?

A moment, then:

PHILIP

No. To be honest, I don't like you either. You treat people like obstacles instead of human beings, and you cheat at charades.

FLETCHER

Then why --

PHILIP

You're a client. I figured if I didn't try to be your friend, you'd get a new accountant.

FLETCHER

Philip, I don't like you as a person, but I love you as an accountant. I'm not going to take my business anywhere else.

PHILIP

Really?

FLETCHER

Really.

PHILIP

So we don't have to like each other anymore?

FLETCHER

No.

PHILIP

All right. Sooner I get you to Phelan's, sooner I can dump you off.

The two grin at each other.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET CORNER -- NIGHT

A bus comes to a stop at a downtown intersection. Max steps out. As the bus takes off, Max waves goodbye.

He joins the stream of pedestrian traffic, a tiny but determined boy in a flood of grown-ups.

INT. PHELAN'S -- NIGHT

Jerry and Audrey are having dinner. He finally succeeds in getting up his nerve.

JERRY

Audrey, I'm not sure how to put this, but.... As you know, I, uh, got an offer from Schirn and Masterson. It's a phenomenal opportunity. My big break.

Audrey tenses. They're splitting up.

JERRY (CONT'D)

But if I take it, I'd have to move. And I've got to ask, do I want to leave you for a job, even an incredible job that would make my entire career? I mean, I'd be a moron. You're one of a kind. I'll never find anyone like you again. But we are just dating....

AUDREY

Jerry, what are you saying?

JERRY

(resolved)

Audrey, you can't wait for life to happen. Sometimes you've got to grab it by the short-and-curlies and yank.

Audrey is shocked. But before Jerry can clarify, we hear a vehicle skid into the parking lot. Everyone in the restaurant turns... to see Fletcher hop out of Philip's car and hurry to the window, searching for Audrey.

EXT. PHELAN'S -- NIGHT

Fletcher spots her and Jerry. He bangs on the glass. Mortified, Audrey excuses herself and starts out. Fletcher gives a "thank you" wave to Philip, who speeds off just as the enraged Audrey storms up.

AUDREY

Are you crazy?!

FLETCHER

No, and the preferred term is "insane."

AUDREY

Fletcher, we're having dinner!

FLETCHER

Did he ask you?

AUDREY

(of course)

Yes.

FLETCHER
No! What did you say?

AUDREY
I told him "Yes, sounds good."

"
FLETCHER
(anguished)
Yes? You told him yes?! Why did you
tell him yes?!

AUDREY
A girl's got to eat.

FLETCHER
I know teaching doesn't pay that well,
but I thought you could afford to eat!
If it's a question of money, I'll be
happy to --

He reaches for his wallet... only to realize where it is.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Uh, would you take a rain check?

AUDREY
What's it to you if I have dinner with
Jerry?

FLETCHER
(utter relief)
That's it? You're just having dinner?

AUDREY
Yeah, it could have been worse. It
could have been dessert.
(exploding)
What are you *doing* here?! And why do
you always assume that what you want
takes precedence over everyone else?

FLETCHER
(can't stop himself)
That's two questions. A, talking to
you before the boyfriend asks you to
marry him. And B, because I'm
incredibly self-centered.

AUDREY
(stunned)
Jerry is going to ask me to marry him?
How do you know?

FLETCHER
I talked him into it.

AUDREY
Why?

FLETCHER
I was trying to sabotage your
relationship.
(off her look)
But, Audrey, that's not why I'm here!
I finally realized something --

But before he can finish, Jerry runs up.

JERRY
Audrey, the sitter just called. Max is
missing.

INT. VOLVO -- NIGHT -- MOVING

A tense Audrey is driving, a worried Fletcher beside her.
She is completing a conversation on her cellular phone:

AUDREY
-- Anything you can do would be great.
Thank you.
(hanging up)
The dispatcher notified the officers on
patrol. And Jerry's checking the rec
center....

FLETCHER
(to himself)
Think, think -- you're five years old.
Where would you go if you had the
contents of a broken piggy bank?

INT. COMIC-BOOK EMPORIUM -- NIGHT

Fletcher and Audrey hurry through a huge comic-book store
filled with children and teenagers, looking for Max.

AUDREY
I don't understand it. Sure, he was
upset about last night, but not enough
to run away.

FLETCHER
He seemed a little down at school
today --

Audrey stops.

AUDREY

You saw Max at school? What did you say to him? What were you doing there?

Fletcher has to tell her the unbelievable truth.

"

FLETCHER

You know when you told me that Max had made a birthday wish that I couldn't tell a lie?

AUDREY

Yeah?

FLETCHER

It came true.

AUDREY

What?

FLETCHER

Max's wish. It worked. I was trying to get him to un-work it.

Audrey looks at him searchingly.

AUDREY

You're not kidding.

FLETCHER

I couldn't if I wanted to. For twenty-four hours, I cannot tell a lie.

EXT. FULGHAM KINDERGARTEN PLAYGROUND -- NIGHT

Fletcher and Audrey hurry through the playground. The slides and swings look lonely and ominous at night.

AUDREY

I'm sorry, Fletcher. It's a little hard to accept.

FLETCHER

You're telling me?
(an idea)

Test me. Go ahead -- ask me something I would ordinarily lie about.

AUDREY

That narrows it down. Let's see --
 (thinking for a moment)
 All right. When we first met, and you
 came up to where I was sitting with
 Sheila Weider, were you trying to pick
 me up... or Sheila?

FLETCHER

Sheila -- but only because she used to
 date my friend Mark Steen and I'd
 heard... this rumor about her.

AUDREY

That's one. Okay.... What do you
 really think about my parents?

FLETCHER

(apologetically)
 They deserve each other.

AUDREY

That's two. Let's see.... When you
 used to tell me I was the most
 beautiful woman you'd ever met, was I?

FLETCHER

No. You were eighth.
 (hastily)
 But the other seven didn't have your
 oomph! Hell, six wouldn't even talk to
 me!

Audrey nods, then takes a deep breath.

AUDREY

When we were married, you admitted you
 cheated on me once... after I
 confronted you with the evidence. How
 many times was it really?

This is extremely hard for him to admit, but:

FLETCHER

Twice. I'm sorry. It was this legal
 secretary that time the firm sent me to
 Chicago. I figured what you didn't
 know wouldn't hurt you. I was a jerk.

He cringes, as if awaiting sentencing. Instead:

AUDREY

I already knew it.

FLETCHER
You... you did?

AUDREY
Of course. Why do men think women are
so stupid?

FLETCHER
(truthful)
Because it allows them to rationalize
behavior they would never dream of
indulging in if they thought of them as
equals?

Audrey looks at Fletcher in amazement.

AUDREY
It's true. You *can't* lie.

Suddenly there's a ring. Audrey grabs her phone.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
Yes?
(a moment)
He's *where*?

EXT. PHELAN'S -- NIGHT

Audrey and Fletcher pull up, jump out, and run inside.

INT. PHELAN'S PRIVATE DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

They find Max in the elegant private dining room, eating hot dogs with the maitre d'. When he sees his mom and dad, Max runs to them and hugs them with all his might.

MAITRE D'
He came over on the bus. He had to
tell his mother something very, very
important.

Fletcher shakes the maitre d's hand warmly.

FLETCHER
Thank you. Thank you for your help.

MAITRE D'
My pleasure.

Fletcher picks up Max. As they start out with Audrey:

MAITRE D' (CONT'D)
Bye, Max!

MAX
 (peeking under Fletcher's
 arm)
 Bye, Tommy!

EXT. PHELAN'S -- NIGHT

Once outside, Audrey kneels by her son.

AUDREY
 Max, why did you come here?

MAX
 Dad told me Jerry was asking you to get
 married. I had to talk to you before
 you said "Yes."

AUDREY
 Why?

MAX
 I had to tell you I don't need a new
 dad, my old dad is fine. He spends all
 the time he can with me, and for my
 birthday he knew just what I wanted,
 and when we're together we have fun,
 like we went to see wrestling and then
 played catch and then talked almost the
 whole night, and me and Dad are just
 like Dad and his dad, except you know
 what?, all the time we spend is real
 quality time.

Fletcher is moved. He wishes he were the father Max
 described... but he knows better.

AUDREY
 We'll talk about this later. Let's go
 home.

FLETCHER
 Audrey, give me a second?

AUDREY
 (understanding)
 I'll get the car.

She heads off, leaving Fletcher with Max.

FLETCHER
 Max... everything you said was a lie.

MAX

It's okay, isn't it? Life is complicated. Not everything is black and white. Sometimes you have to lie, to get along as a grown-up.

Fletcher is deeply troubled to see his words adopted by his son.

MAX (CONT'D)

Besides, I had to lie so I could say all those nice things about you.

We close in on Fletcher's face, devastated by Max's innocent candor. Now he sees the results of his behavior... the ways he's hurt the people around him... and the kind of influence he's been on his son.

Audrey pulls up. Fletcher helps Max in, then leans in to her.

FLETCHER

I'll be by in awhile. There's some things I need to take care of.

(off her nod)

Oh, and can I borrow cab fare? See, my wallet --

She cuts him off by handing him some cash.

EXT. MANSION -- NIGHT

Now in clean, dry clothes, Fletcher is standing on the porch of a mansion when Virginia opens the door. Behind her is Laurence Falk.

VIRGINIA

Mr. Reid! I wasn't expecting to see you till tomorrow.

FLETCHER

Excuse me for interrupting your... workout. I need your signature.

He hands her a document. As she leafs through it, she becomes distressed.

VIRGINIA

What is this?

FLETCHER

The settlement agreement. The one you turned down.

VIRGINIA

Agreeing to joint custody? Giving me less money than the judge awarded? Why would I want to sign this?!

FLETCHER

Because it's the right thing to do?

VIRGINIA

Try again.

FLETCHER

Because if you don't, I'll come clean to the judge about our story, which means you'll probably get nothing and lose your kids to boot?

VIRGINIA

And you'll lose your license to practice law.

FLETCHER

Yep. Sign, you get one point eight mil, your kids keep their father, and I keep my career. Don't sign, you get nothing, and I lose my license. It's up to you.

A long moment as Virginia sizes up Fletcher. She hands back the document.

VIRGINIA

I don't believe you.

FLETCHER

Traditionally, a wise choice. I guess there's only one way I can convince you.

Fletcher walks back to the waiting cab. Just before he climbs in, Virginia calls:

VIRGINIA

Mr. Reid....

INT. MCCABE'S RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

Mr. Allan, Miranda and the other partners are here, along with many other employees, including Jane, Thomas and Fred Rand.

Other than the subdued Greta, everyone is celebrating raucously -- when Fletcher enters. A cheer goes up.

MR. ALLAN

Fletcher! I was just talking about your day in court! That poor bastard didn't know what hit him! And as if having to pay his cheating wife nine million wasn't enough, Fletcher nails the son of a bitch with a demand for full custody of the kids!

The other partners laugh in appreciation of Fletcher's audacity.

MR. ALLAN (CONT'D)

So how does it feel to finally achieve what every law student dreams of?

FLETCHER

Actually, Mr. Allan, this isn't what I dreamed of in law school. Back then I guess I was more interested in justice and helping people get at the truth. Pretty naive, huh?

The other partners smile knowingly.

MR. ALLAN

We all want to change the world, my boy. But then we grow up.

FLETCHER

You're right. Somewhere along the way we learn to compromise, to give up a little bit, and then a little bit more, until finally we forget why we went into law in the first place.

MR. ALLAN

What are you saying?

FLETCHER

I don't want to grow up.

Dead silence. Fletcher turns and starts out, leaving Mr. Allan and the other partners stunned. Greta looks at her ex-boss proudly. He gives her a small smile.

Fletcher reaches the exit -- where he finds his path blocked by Miranda. She wears a superior smirk. As others look on, she says:

MIRANDA

Well, well, well. After all that, you declined it. I'm surprised. I thought you had the courage of your lack of convictions. Why'd you do it?

FLETCHER

I desperately wanted to avoid turning
into a person like you.

Miranda's eyes go wide. As Fletcher moves past her and out, various employees -- including Jane, Thomas, Fred Rand and Greta -- break out in applause.

EXT. AUDREY AND MAX'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Fletcher knocks. Audrey opens the door.

AUDREY

You get everything done?

FLETCHER

Not quite.

INT. MAX'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Max has been tucked into bed. Fletcher and Audrey stand in the doorway, looking at him.

After a moment Audrey glances at Fletcher, then heads off. Fletcher enters Max's bedroom. He sits beside his son in the dark, gently stroking the boy's hair.

FLETCHER

Maxaroonie. Maximilian. Max Attack.
Pretty soon you won't let me call you
anything but "Max."

A moment. Fletcher takes in the toy-filled room.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Boy, you sure have a lot of stuff. I
guess I was stuff-deprived as a kid.
See, my dad had these warped
priorities. Like fishing. Every
summer, we'd get out on the lake and
throw our lines in and... nothing.
Didn't matter if everyone around us was
catching their limit. I always thought
it was a waste of time. I didn't
realize what he was giving me.

(a moment)

I wanted to give you everything, Max.
I....

He looks at Max -- to see his son is asleep. Fletcher smiles, kisses the boy.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I wish Dad could have known you, Max.

He silently leaves the room.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Audrey is sitting at the kitchen table when Fletcher enters.

FLETCHER

Audrey, everything Max said... it wasn't true. I'm not a good dad. I mean to be, but I'm not. A good dad spends time with his kid. A good dad doesn't put his problem on the shoulders of his five-year-old son. A good dad doesn't cheat on his kid's mother.

Audrey is affected.

AUDREY

Is that what you were going to say at the restaurant?

FLETCHER

No. I was going to say that I love you and I love Max and that you and Max mean more to me than anything else in the world and that I want to be a real father to Max again and that I want to be your husband or your boyfriend or your significant other or anything at all except your ex. That's what I was going to say.

AUDREY

(astonished)

I didn't know you felt that way.

FLETCHER

Neither did I. Something happened to me today, Audrey. It's as if I could see things through Max's eyes... or the eyes of the child I used to be. A career built on lies is worthless... Max deserves more than a dad whose footsteps he shouldn't follow in... and you're the only woman I ever loved.

She desperately wants to trust him -- but she's been burned before.

AUDREY

I wish I could believe you....

FLETCHER

But you can! The miracle, remember? I
couldn't say it if it weren't true.
Not" today.

Knowing that he has to be telling the truth, Audrey goes
into his arms. Fletcher envelops her, holding her as
close as he can, as if he will never let go.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Audrey, I love you and I'll never hurt
you again.

But Fletcher looks up -- and over Audrey's shoulder, he
sees the clock.

It's 9:22.

AUDREY

Promise me, Fletcher. Promise me now
so that I'll always be able to trust
you.

Fletcher faces the most important decision of his life --
*should he tell her and lose her, or should he keep silent
and hope to get her back?*

After all he's been through, he knows there's only one
choice.

FLETCHER

Audrey... it's nine-twenty-two.

AUDREY

(puzzled)
I don't understand.

FLETCHER

Max made the wish at nine-fifteen.
I've been able to lie for the last
seven minutes.

A moment as the import of what he's saying sinks in.
Then Audrey slowly breaks away.

AUDREY

So what you just told me... it's not --

FLETCHER

No, no, it's true! It's just that there's no wish to guarantee it anymore. But Audrey, I know what I feel in my heart.

AUDREY

Fletcher, I want to believe you. I always have. But I can't rely on a wish to come along every day. Max and I have to know we can depend on you tomorrow and the day after and the day after that. We can't count on magic.

Fletcher is shattered... because he knows it's true.

FADE TO:

EXT. LAW OFFICE -- DAY -- SIX WEEKS LATER

Fletcher and Fred, the ethical attorney with the bad ties, put up a REID & RAND shingle outside a modest law office.

EXT. AUDREY AND MAX'S HOUSE -- DAY

Under Jerry's supervision, moving men are carrying out the last boxes and loading them into a van.

INT. AUDREY AND MAX'S HOUSE -- DAY

Audrey and Max watch from inside the empty house. Audrey puts her arm around her quiet son.

INT. LAW OFFICE -- DAY

We're close on an earnest MAN in a neck brace.

NECK-BRACE MAN

-- And then I carefully checked my rearview mirror and very slowly pulled away from the curb -- when suddenly, from out of nowhere, I see this city bus cascading down the street, brakes shrieking, coming straight at me....

(shudders)

I have to tell you, I'm lucky to be alive. I can't sleep, I can't work, I can't... satisfy my wife. My whole life has been ruined.

We pull back... to reveal an expressionless Fletcher, who has been listening to this tale from behind his desk.

FLETCHER

Mr. Mattes, the bus never hit you.

NECK-BRACE MAN

Right. But I was so *afraid* of being hit that I scrunched down real hard, and that's how I injured my neck. So what do you think? A hundred grand? One fifty?

EXT. LAW OFFICE -- DAY

A disgruntled Mr. Mattes is being ushered gently but firmly out of the building.

INT. LAW OFFICE WAITING ROOM -- DAY

Fletcher shuts the door, turns to his secretary... Greta.

GRETA

Don't worry, boss. Your next appointment is legit.

He smiles at her. The phone rings. He picks it up.

FLETCHER

Reid and Rand.... Oh, hi, Mom. Sure, I can talk....

EXT. PARK -- DAY

Audrey and Max wait silently on a park bench. Max has his baseball and glove. Each time a person approaches, Max leans forward expectantly; each time the person passes, Max sits back, disappointed.

AUDREY

He's coming.

Max's eyes don't stray from the path.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Max, it's only three past --

Just then, Max spots Fletcher heading their way. He races for his father, jumps into his arms.

MAX

Dad!

FLETCHER

Maxaroon!

Audrey approaches father and son. She and Fletcher share a stilted smile, then she nods at the nearby duck pond.

AUDREY

Hey, Max, why don't you check out the ducks?

FLETCHER

See you in a minute, Maxinator.

Max heads off. The two watch, feeling awkward together.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

How's he doing?

AUDREY

Not too well. It's a lot of changes all at once. How're you doing?

FLETCHER

Well, you know, I.... Not great. This honesty thing is pretty hard.

AUDREY

(smiling)

So you don't lie anymore, huh? Not at all?

FLETCHER

I went cold turkey. I tried cutting down to one lie a day. I tried lying only with my meals. But I realized being mostly honest is like diving out of a plane with most of a parachute. Sooner or later, the truth has a funny way of hitting you in the face.

AUDREY

"To thine own self, be true."

FLETCHER

I guess.

AUDREY

Are you happy?

FLETCHER

(thinking for a moment)

No. Not yet. At least I'm happy I'm not making other people unhappy.

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 (a moment)
 Are you happy?

AUDREY
 Well, sure. Of course.

She looks off. A gentle breeze rustles the leaves in the trees. The day smells fresh, alive. The two share the moment.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
 Well, our flight leaves at six. How 'bout if I meet you at four?

FLETCHER
 (nodding)
 We'll be at my office.

AUDREY
 And I'm thinking maybe you and M should say your "See you later's" now. It's going to be tough enough on Max without you at the airport.

FLETCHER
 No problem.

AUDREY
 Thanks.

She starts off, then turns.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
 I want you to know, I appreciate your telling me the truth -- about its being nine-twenty-two. You didn't have to. But you did. You're making your own miracle, Fletcher.

Fletcher watches as Audrey leaves. Then he joins Max at the pond.

MAX
 So, you wanna play catch?

FLETCHER
 No.
 (off Max's
 disappointment)
 I had another idea....

EXT. BOAT -- DAY -- DRIFTING

Drifting in the center of the park's lake in a cheap rented dinghy, Fletcher and Max dangle their rented poles in the water.

Despite the beauty of his surroundings, Max is quiet, sad. Fletcher does his best to cheer him up.

FLETCHER

It's gonna be all right, Max. You're gonna like your new house, and you're gonna like your new school, and you're gonna like your new friends.

MAX

Dad?

FLETCHER

Yeah, Maxer?

MAX

(starts crying)
I don't want to go.

Fletcher's heart breaks.

MAX (CONT'D)

Why do we have to move? Why can't Mom and me live with you again?

FLETCHER

I made some big mistakes, Max. I lost your mom's trust, and people can't be together without trust.

MAX

But you're different now!

FLETCHER

You can't get trust back in one day, you've got to earn it. And I figured that out too late.

(off Max's sad look)

Max, this move is going to make your mom very happy. Jerry makes your mom very happy. And she deserves to be happy, doesn't she?

(off Max's nod)

And you got to admit it, Jerry's a pretty good guy, isn't he?

MAX

(begrudgingly)
Yeah.

FLETCHER

As long as your mom loves Jerry and Jerry loves your mom, you're gonna be fine. Believe me.

MAX

I do. Are you gonna be fine?

Before Fletcher can answer, something tugs at Max's line.

INT. LAW OFFICE WAITING ROOM -- DAY

Audrey enters.

GRETA

Hey, Audrey. They're not quite back yet.

AUDREY

That's all right. I'm a little early.

She takes in the office -- businesslike but homey, professional but personal, very different from the ostentatious austerity of Allan, Stewart & Konigsberg.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

This is... nice. Very nice.

GRETA

Thank you.

(a moment)

I think he's proud to be a lawyer again, Audrey.

Audrey takes this in, too.

EXT. LAW OFFICE -- DAY

Fletcher and Max walk together in silence, heading back to the office. Max carries the two fish he caught. Fletcher is empty-handed.

When Fletcher spots Audrey waiting inside, he stops just outside the door. He kneels beside his son.

FLETCHER

Listen, Max, I want you to do me a big favor when you get to the airport. I want you to tell a lie, just this one time, to help your mom --

INT. LAW OFFICE WAITING ROOM -- DAY

Audrey can see but can't hear as Fletcher and Max speak for a moment, Max nodding in agreement. Then they enter.

MAX

Mom! We went fishing! I caught two big ones!

He proudly shows his mother his catch. She smiles, glances at Fletcher's empty hands.

FLETCHER

(defensive)

Yeah, but you should've seen the one that got away. It was this --

He holds his hands twelve inches apart... then sheepishly moves them in eight inches.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

-- big.

AUDREY

(smiling)

Ready, Max?

With a glance at his dad, Max nods. Fletcher extends his arms to his son.

FLETCHER

One for the road, Monster?

Max and Fletcher hug each other hard.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Max... don't let the world change you. Change the world instead.

Max rejoins his mother.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Bye, Audrey.

She starts to answer, but can't. She smiles, sadly, and nods. As they leave Fletcher watches, thoughtful.

Noticing that Max has left his baseball and glove, he starts out... but Audrey has pulled away.

EXT. AIRPORT -- AFTERNOON

Jerry, Audrey and Max arrive at the airport.

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL -- AFTERNOON

Audrey and Max take seats near the boarding gate.

JERRY

I'll check us in.

He gives Audrey a quick kiss, then heads off. Audrey looks out at the plane, a little wistful. Max comforts her:

MAX

It's going to be all right. See, as long as you love Jerry and Jerry loves you, we'll be happy.

Audrey is surprised by her son's attitude. Taking a deep breath, Max tells the lie Fletcher asked him to:

MAX (CONT'D)

And, Mom -- I'm happy. I'm really happy.

Audrey looks at Max closely. She is near tears. When Jerry returns, she does her best to hide her feelings.

JERRY

We're all set.

EXT. LAW OFFICE -- EVENING

Fletcher and Greta lock up. With a sad smile at her boss, Greta starts off. Baseball and glove in hand, Fletcher goes to his car.

INT. BMW -- EVENING -- MOVING

A melancholy Fletcher drives. At a quiet residential street he turns... then stops in front of his old house. The windows are dark, uninviting. A "SOLD" sign sits on the lawn.

INT. AUDREY AND MAX'S HOUSE -- EVENING

A board creaks... and Fletcher comes into view, walking through the house one last time. The empty rooms mock his memories of how full of life this home used to be.

He looks out the window. A desultory breeze blows a couple of leaves by. Suddenly he comes to a decision.

EXT. AIRPORT -- EVENING

Fletcher parks in front of the terminal and runs in.

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL -- EVENING

He races to the gate --

In time to see the plane take off. He's too late.

EXT. AIRPORT -- EVENING

Deeply disappointed, Fletcher emerges from the terminal -- just as his illegally parked car is being towed away.

EXT. FLETCHER'S APARTMENT BUILDING -- EVENING

A cab pulls up. Fletcher gets out, still carrying the ball and glove. He starts up the walk... when he sees Max and Audrey sitting on the front steps.

AUDREY

(smiling)

See, Max, I told you he'd show up sooner or later.

Max runs to Fletcher and hugs him.

MAX

I'm sorry, Dad. I told her I was happy like you asked, but she knew.

FLETCHER

(to Audrey)

What happened? I saw your plane take off.

AUDREY

Well, I thought about what you said to Max. And I thought some more about nine-twenty-two.

(beat)

I like Jerry. I really, really like Jerry. He's so honest, so straightforward... but I don't love him. I wasn't being true to myself, or him.

FLETCHER

I'm sorry. Not really, but, you know?

AUDREY

I know.

(beat)

Truth kinda sucks, doesn't it?

-Fletcher nods. A long moment, awkward and yet wonderful.

FLETCHER

So, you want to go out?

AUDREY

I don't know, Fletcher. I mean, maybe, but -- I guess I'd just like to see how things work out, you know, give it some time, and then, you know, see how we feel.

FLETCHER

No, I mean, do you want to go out for some dinner?

AUDREY

Oh.

(beat)

Yeah. Sure. I'm starving.

MAX

Me too.

FLETCHER

Let's walk. It's a beautiful night.

And it is, too... now. As the three start off down the street, Fletcher tosses the baseball to a delighted Max, who tosses it back to Fletcher, who tosses it to Audrey. As they head away from us, we hear:

AUDREY

So you actually went to the airport?
You said you wouldn't.

FLETCHER

(a smile in his voice)

I lied.

We watch as father, mother and son continue down the street, tossing the ball as the sun sets. There may be better things in life... but at the moment it's hard to think of a single one. Honestly.

THE END