

THE RAINMAKER

From the Novel

by

John Grisham

Screenplay

by

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THE RAINMAKER

FADE IN:

MUSIC and MAIN TITLE -- "THE RAINMAKER", and CREDITS presented on ART cards.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - NIGHT

Over the group of buildings SUPERIMPOSE: "MEMPHIS STATE SCHOOL." THE VIEW begins a MOVE following some law students showing off as they stalk two coeds to the near street of pizza joints, Dairy Queens and "YOGI'S," a hangout painted in blues and grays, Memphis State colors

RUDY (V.O.)

It's no secret that there are too many lawyers in Memphis. They told us this when we started law school, said the profession was overcrowded....

A Cadillac pulls up, and BRUISER STONE, a broad man with long thick hair and sagging goatee steps out, scamp ed after by his driver, BUTCH.

RUDY (V.O.)

...not just in Memphis, but everywhere. That some of us would kill ourselves for three years, fight to pass the bar and still not be able to find employment.

INT. YOGI'S - NIGHT

VIEW AT THE BAR

RUDY BAYLOR, about 26 years old, smoking as he tends bar. He and some other students are employees; keep their own hours, handle their own tips and run the whole show for owner.

RUDY (V.O.)

...But poverty is my middle name: Rudy P. Baylor. I've waited on tables and delivered pizza to support this affluent
(MORE)

RUDY (V.O. CONT'D.)
lifestyle of mine. At least
until I lucked out and got a
part-time job working for one
of the city's better acts,
Prince Thomas.

MED CLOSE VIEW

PRINCE THOMAS, the owner. A ponytailed rumhead with a
massive body and even larger ego. He sits at his table
watching the big screen TV, occasionally looking over the
coeds.

RUDY (V.O.)
...He's petitioned the city to
allow joints such Yogi's to
stay open all night. The city
has in turn sued him for
various sins. He loves it.

PRINCE'S POV:

The door opens and Bruiser enters, followed by Butch. They
walk past the cute COEDS and a fraternity of law STUDENTS
grouped around two tables, important affluent students who
take themselves too seriously. They make Rudy's life
difficult by rapping on the table, calling for more beer in
Latin.

STUDENTS

Magus fermentum! Magus
fermentum!

RUDY (V.O.)
Name the vice, and Prince'll
organize a group and try to
legalize it -- with the help of
his lawyer, the notorious
Bruiser Stone.

Bruiser joins Prince at his table; they look like two bears
sitting on rocks, chomping on peanuts.

VIEW ON RUDY

Drawing pitcher after pitcher of beer, trying his best to
service the obnoxious "Barristers." The loudest is a
little squirrel named JACOB STAPLES, who sits with his
friends, including the blue-blood, F. FRANKLIN DONALDSON.

JACOB

Ruuuuddy, we're out of beer!

Rudy slams the pitchers in front of him and moves back the bar, muttering to the black guy working alongside his best friend in law school, BOOKER KANE.

RUDY

Little prick. Found more ways to cheat than any person in the history of this law school.

BOOKER

He'll make a million bucks soon.

JACOB

Ruuudy!

BOOKER

(looking at Bruiser and Prince)

You think Prince and Bruiser are discussing their corrupt empire?

RUDY AND BOOKER'S POV:

They fill in the dialogue for the two semi-gangsters murmuring to each other.

BOOKER (O.S.)

"...OK Prince, I control the skin trade, you got gambling and money-laundering."

RUDY (O.S.)

"I'm already skimming the cash receipts at Yogi's...maybe two grand a week."

BOOKER (O.S.)

"Isn't it weird that Yogi's shows a tax loss every year..."

Suddenly Prince looks right at them. He and Bruiser stand up and head for the basement steps.

PRINCE

You guys working or what?
Customers call!

The two disappear down to the basement, as Rudy hurries over with as many pitchers as he can carry.

STAPLES (O.S.)
Ruuuudy, you're falling behind!
(laughs at his in-joke)
...as usual.

CLOSE ON RUDY
'Accidentally' dumps a pitcher of beer on the squirrel,
then makes a big deal of cleaning it up. Booker comes over
and helps.

FRANKLIN
Say Rudy, you're going with
Brodnax and Speer, aren't you?

RUDY
Yeah, what about it?

FRANKLIN
(all smiles)
Come on Rudy, what about the
merger of Brodnax and Speer and
Tinley Britt?

Rudy stands shocked; some girls are watching intently --
Franklin and his buddies are all amused.

RUDY
I haven't heard.

F. FRANKLIN
You mean they haven't told you?
Jack here heard it around noon
today. I can't believe they
wouldn't tell you.

Rudy shrugs as if it's nothing and walks back to the bar
with Booker.

EXT. YOGI'S PARKING LOT - NIGHT

MOVING VIEW

Butch fumbles the car keys and staggers toward Prince's
Cadillac. Rudy and Booker are carrying huge bales of trash
to the dumpster behind Yogi's.

BUTCH
(pleading)
...I'm tellin' you boss, I
am capable of driving.

Bruiser and Prince squeeze into the rear seat of the Cadillac. Prince calls out to Rudy.

PRINCE

Hey Rudy, let Booker clean up; you drive us. We're gonna take Bruiser home.

BUTCH

I can drive, boss. Look.

VIEW ON BUTCH

He is totally unable to walk a straight line. Rudy picks up the car keys he's dropped for the tenth time, and gets into the front seat of the Cadillac.

INT. CADILLAC - NIGHT

Rudy starts the car. Bruiser and Prince take up the rear seat.

PRINCE

You know Rudy, Bruiser? Third year law at State -- already has a job lined up with a big firm in town.

RUDY

Brodnax and Speer.

Rudy looks in the mirror to see if Prince reacts and then drives off the lot, leaving a confused Butch looking for the keys -- and the Cadillac.

INT. CADILLAC - DRIVING - NIGHT

Bruiser looks at Rudy.

BRUISER

Rudy, what courses you taking?

RUDY

Sports law, Napoleonic code and Geezer law.

BRUISER

Geezer law? What's that?

INT. CYPRESS GARDENS SENIOR CITIZENS BLDG. - DAY

FULL VIEW

Despite its name, this place has not the slightest hint of flowers or greenery. Fifty elderly citizens sit, an equal mixture of blacks and whites, average age of at least seventy-five, some blind, a dozen or so in wheelchairs, many wearing hearing aids.

MOVING VIEW

Rudy, wearing a dark suit, sits at a folding table along with other law students -- each of them behind a card on which is their name. Booker Kane, the snobby F. Franklin Donaldson, and N. ELIZABETH ERICKSON, quite a gal, who wears pinstripe suits, silk ties and an enormous chip on her shoulder.

Standing at a podium is PROFESSOR SMOOT, an oafish egghead complete with crooked bow tie, bushy hair and red suspenders.

SMOOT

The four students who will be working with you today are....

MOVING VIEW ON THE STUDENTS

SMOOT (O.S.)

...Booker Kane, third year law student; Rudy Baylor....

VIEW ON THE SENIOR CITIZENS

Evaluating them with smiles on their faces.

...F. Franklin Donaldson, of Barristers Fraternity...and N. Elizabeth Erickson. Today's seniors have so many concerns
...(droning on)

VIEW ON THE STUDENTS

Rudy worked so hard and so late last night, he cannot keep from falling asleep.

CUT TO:

RUDY'S POV:

Wakening, he sees MISS BIRDIE, about 80 and spry for her age, tapping him. She whispers and pulls her chair close to him while extracting an envelope from her purse.

MISS BIRDIE
You -- you, you're the one I
wanted.

VIEW ON RUDY
Suddenly, waking up -- smiling at her sitting across from
him: a client.

MISS BIRDIE
You may call me Miss Birdie,
Rudy.

VIEW ON MISS BIRDIE
Eyes glancing about her -- a signal for him to keep
voice down and his head low. She gives him the envelope.

MISS BIRDIE
Read this.

VIEW ON RUDY
In his most professional manner, he opens the envelope.

RUDY
(reading to himself)
"Last will and testament of
Colleen Janice Barrow
Birdsong..."

CLOSE ON RUDY'S EYE
As he scans the will; then stops COLD.

INSERT ON THE WILL
"2,000,000 -- with a million in trust for each of her
grandchildren."

CLOSE ON HIS EYES
Look up.

HIS POV OF MISS BIRDIE
Smiling -- she nods.

CLOSE ON RUDY'S EYES
Back to the will. Scanning the words...stopping every
often at "\$2,000,000"...and then "\$4,000,000." He starts
sweating, every so often glancing up to Miss Birdie.

RUDY
This all adds up...I mean,
represents a very large Estate,
Miss Birdie. In excess of
many... (clears his throat)
millions of dollars.

MISS BIRDIE

Shhhhhh.

(quietly)

My former lawyer prepared
this... but he's dead now.

RUDY

It's a good thing, if I may say
Miss Birdie, that he is dead.
He committed malpractice when
he prepared this one.

MISS BIRDIE

Malpractice -- what do you
mean?

RUDY

This isn't as thick as it
should be, Miss Birdie. Rich
people don't use thin, simple
wills, they use thick dense
wills designed and implemented
by expensive tax lawyers in big
firms.

(stops and thinks)

You could save a ton of money
if you use a tax lawyer to plan
your estate.

VIEW ON MISS BIRDIE

Shaking her head.

MISS BIRDIE

I won't save a dime. That's
why I'm here. I'm mad at my
heirs, and I want to cut 'em
out of my will. Cut, cut, cut.
They get nothing, you
understand. Zero.

CLOSE ON HIS HAND

He crosses out the word "children." Then it doodles: "What
about a million for Rudy Baylor?"

VIEW ON RUDY

He leans forward, excited by the power of his pencil to
give and take away large amounts.

RUDY

Fair enough. Who gets the money?

MISS BIRDIE

Everything goes to the Reverend Kenneth Chandler. Do you know him? He's on television, out of Dallas, and he's doing all sorts of wonderful things around the world with our donations.

RUDY

A television evangelist?

He closes his eyes.

VIEW ON HIS PAD

Crossing out his doodles: "Me, me, give it to RUDY BAYLOR."

MISS BIRDIE

(rising)

Professor Smoot says y'all will be back in two weeks with everything all typed up real nice and neat. By the way Rudy, you have holes in your socks.

Rudy quickly pulls down his cuffs as she flutters to the end of the table, and puts her arm around an excitable old man conferring with Booker. The man is immediately calm and innocent again.

CLOSE ON RUDY

Glancing over the crowd toward Miss Birdie.

RUDY (V.O.)

Imagine those fellows at Brodnax and Speer if I walked in and brought with me a client worth over 20 million. I'd be an instant rainmaker, a bright young star with the golden touch.

HIS POV:

A couple staring at him. He's the only available lawyer, and they seem to be undecided about whether to try their luck. The woman's holding a bulky wad of papers secured by rubber bands. She mumbles something under her breath, and her husband shakes his head. Slowly they make their way to Rudy.

VIEW ON RUDY

Pulling himself together to address these new clients.

HIS POV

The woman, DOT, late 50's, takes Miss Birdie's chair. She is a thin, wiry woman with a hard edge. The man, BUDDY, around 60, sits across the table and keeps his distance. He wears thick glasses.

RUDY

Hi there, I'm Rudy Baylor.

DOT

I'm Dot and he's Buddy.

RUDY

Dot and Buddy.

(writes it down)

What is your last name?

DOT

Black. Dot and Buddy Black.
It's really Marvarine and
Willis Black, but everybody
calls us Dot and Buddy.

RUDY

So what can I do for you folks?

She takes the rubber bands off the thick roll of
correspondence.

DOT

We don't have much money. And
we need a lawyer.

RUDY

What's the problem?

DOT

(shoving letters, papers
at him)

It's a medical policy. We
bought it five years ago, Great
Benefit Life, when our boy was
seventeen. Now Donny Ray is
dying of leukemia, and the
crooks won't pay for his
treatment.

RUDY

Great Benefit?

DOT

Right.

RUDY

(scanning the policy)

Never heard of them....

DOT

Problem is, the transplant cost somewhere around a hundred-fifty thousand dollars. The insurance company's suppose to pay it because it's covered in the policy right there. Sumbitches said no. So Donny Ray's dying because of them.

RUDY

Who sold it to you? Who's the agent?

DOT

Just a slick little crook who knocked on our door and talked us into it.

Rudy picks up one of the sheaves of letters and read it.

RUDY

(reading)

"Dear Mrs. Black: On seven prior occasions this company has denied your claim in writing. We now deny it for the eight and final time. You must be stupid, stupid, stupid." Russell Krokit, Senior Claims Supervisor...

Rudy rubs the Great Benefit logo at the top in disbelief.

RUDY

I don't really understand this...

He thumbs through the correspondence; seven times the Blacks had written, and seven times the company denied them, the "stupid" letter being the eighth.

DOT

They think we're just simple,
ignorant trash with no money to
fight 'em.

Rudy is amazed by the letter; he folds it and places it on
top of the pile.

RUDY

It will take a few hours to
review all this.

DOT

Well, you need to hurry. Donny
Ray ain't got long. I wish you
could see him.

RUDY

Yeah, maybe later. I'll need
to keep all this. I'll be back
here in two weeks with an
advisement letter.

DOT

Please hurry Rudy. We need
help. My boy is dying.

They stare at each other and Rudy finally nods and mumbles
something. With Buddy in tow, Dot zigzags through folding
chairs. The crowd has thinned and people are slowly
leaving.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKER'S CAR - DAY

Booker and Rudy leave in Booker's car, an aged Pontiac.

BOOKER

Why do we want to be lawyers?

RUDY

Serve the public, fight
injustice, change society, you
know, the usual.

Booker pulls into the parking lot across from the Memphis
State Law School.

BOOKER

I'll be back around six. Let's
study for the bar.

RUDY
Sure. I'll be downstairs.

Rudy slams the door and jogs across the street.

INT. LAW LIBRARY - DAY

In a dark and private corner in the basement of the library, behind stacks of cracked and ancient law books and hidden from view, Rudy finds his favorite study carrel.

Checking to see that nobody is around, he takes a small can out of his briefcase and dabs shoe polish on his ankles to hide the holes in his socks.

VIEW MOVES CLOSER

Then he tries to concentrate, organizing his study. He looks through some of the papers, letters, wills he's just been given. A female LIBRARY WORKER walks by, dropping a message slip on his desk.

WORKER
Brodnax and Speer called.

Rudy glances at the slip of paper; then rushes to the pay phone, doesn't have change. He turns to the worker.

RUDY
This phone ate up my quarter.

He shrugs and she gives it to him.

CLOSE ON RUDY

Rudy, at the phone, turns his back and tries to hide in the shelves.

RUDY
Hello, this is Rudy Baylor.
I'm at law school and I have a
note to call Loyd Beck. Says
it's urgent.

VOICE (O.S.)
Rudy Baylor? In reference to
what?

RUDY
I'm the guy you just hired.
Who is this?

VOICE (O.S.)
Call back in an hour and Loyd
will handle you.

RUDY
Handle me? Do I still have a
position.

VOICE (O.S.)
Call back in an hour.
(slams phone)

EXT. BRODNAX & SPEER BUILDING - EVENING

Rudy parks his car, a beat-up Toyota, across the street from the eight-story building where Brodnax and Speer operates. He dashes across the street and enters the building.

INT. BRODNAX & SPEER BUILDING - EVENING

Rudy moves through the empty lobby. He sees a familiar face. It's RICHARD, one of the associates. He's sitting on a marble bench, staring blankly at the floor. Rudy walks over.

RUDY
Richard, it's me, Rudy Baylor.

Richard doesn't move, just keeps staring. His eyes are red, and he's either been crying or drinking. Rudy sits next to him.

RUDY
What's the matter, Richard?
Richard, are you all right?

RICHARD
Beck called us into the conference room, said the partners had agreed to sell out to Tinley Britt, ole "Trent and Brent", and that there was no room for the associates. Just like that. Gave us an hour to clean out our desks and leave the building. Truth is, they just wanted our clients.

RUDY
Just like that.

RICHARD
(handing him a letter)
Do you realize you've just lost
your first job before you even
started?

Rudy can't think of a thing to say.

RICHARD
(getting up)
Now I gotta go tell my wife.

He walks across the lobby and out of the building. Rudy waits, then angrily throws the letter on the floor and looks for something else to throw. There's a bust on a concrete pedestal by the door, a bad work of sculpture in bronze of old man Brodnax's fat face, and Rudy shoves it as he opens the door. The pedestal rocks.

GUARD (O.S.)
Hey!

The bust CRASHES into the plate glass wall as Rudy runs out the door.

EXT. RUDY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rudy pulls up to a decaying brick building with a sign on it reading "The Hampton." He parks near the dumpster. As he exits his car and shuts the door, there is a sudden movement near him. A MAN is quickly getting out of his BMW, slamming the door, coming straight for him. Rudy freezes.

MAN
Are you Rudy Baylor?

RUDY
Who are you?

The man jerks some papers from his rear pocket and thrusts them in Rudy's face.

MAN
(sincerely)
Sorry about this.

Rudy takes the papers. It's too dark to read, but he gets the message.

RUDY

You're a process server.

MAN

Yep.

RUDY

Texaco?

MAN

Yep. And the Hampton. You're being evicted.

Rudy glances up at the decrepit building with litter in the grass and weeds on the sidewalk. The man walks away, stops.

MAN

Oh, listen. Heard this weird call on my scanner. Some guy named Rudy Baylor trashed a law office downtown. Description fits you.

RUDY

And if it does?

MAN

The cops are looking for you. Destruction of private property.

RUDY

You mean, they'll arrest me?

MAN

Yep. I'd find another place to sleep tonight.

The man gets in his BMW. Rudy watches as he drives away.

EXT. BOOKER'S DUPLEX - NIGHT

Booker, wearing paisley bathrobe over his pajamas, meets Rudy, holding a can of beer, on the porch of his duplex.

BOOKER

What the hell's going on?

RUDY

I'm sorry.

They enter the house, Rudy still carrying his briefcase.

INT. BOOKER'S DEN - NIGHT

Booker sits on the edge of the coffee table, listening.

BOOKER

(disbelief)

You drank two six-packs?

RUDY

I gotta find a job, Booker.

BOOKER

You got bigger problems right now. We take the bar in three months, then we face the screening committee. An arrest and conviction for this stunt could ruin you.

RUDY

(feeling and looking sick)

Could I have a sandwich?

CHARLENE (O.S.)

(from kitchen)

How about some bacon and eggs?

RUDY

Oh great Charlene, thanks.

He lies down on the sofa. He instinctively feels around the cushions for loose change.

RUDY

Have you ever heard of Great Benefit?

BOOKER

Insurance is my specialty. We're talking about the scratch-and-sniff armpit of the industry. Let me see the policy.

Rudy takes the papers out of his briefcase and hands them to him. Booker flips pages. CHARLENE comes out in her nightgown, and starts setting the table.

BOOKER

What are their grounds for denial?

RUDY

Everything. First they denied just on principal. Then they said leukemia wasn't covered. Then they said the kid was an adult and thus not covered under his parents' policy. They've been quite creative, actually. Thanks, Charlene.

She brings out a heaping dish: eggs, bacon, muffins, juice. He nods gratefully and starts eating.

BOOKER

Typical debit insurance scam. Blacks call it 'streetsurance.' Cheap little policies sold door to door to low-income people. The agents who sell the policies come around every week or so to collect the premiums.

RUDY

So what do I do?

BOOKER

Sue the bastards.

RUDY

I'm not exactly licensed.

BOOKER

Not you. Use this case to get a job with a new firm.

RUDY

(stuffing his mouth)
That's not ethical.

BOOKER

I'll look the other way.
(shrugs)

Booker sits in a chair and studies the suit. Rudy's head is spinning as he eats more than he knew he could.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. YOGI'S BAR - PRINCE'S OFFICE - DAY

Every wall is covered with photos of Prince shaking hands with local politicians and other celebrity types. Prince's eyes are bloodshot and he's in a foul mood. He's meeting with an UNDERWORLD TYPE, but has been interrupted by a nervous Rudy.

PRINCE

You better talk to a lawyer,
kid.

RUDY

I can't afford a lawyer.

PRINCE

You want me to handle the cops?
I'll call Bruiser -- you swear
it's just some broken glass?

RUDY

You think Bruiser will help?

PRINCE

Bruiser will do anything I ask
him.

EXT. BRUISER'S STRIP - DAY

Prince's black Cadillac pulls up into a strip shopping center in an industrial section of town. Across the street is an all-night pancake house and next to it is "Club Amber," a gaudy topless joint with neon.

Prince and Rudy get out of the Cadillac.

PRINCE

Bruiser owns the entire unit,
not bad, eh?

Rudy follows him to a glass door in the center of the strip. The words "Law Office" are painted in black on the door. They enter.

INT. BRUISER'S OFFICE - DAY

No windows, no sunlight, lots of photos of unknown people clutch Bruiser and grinning. One wall is reserved for firearms; all sorts of rifles and guns and awards for shooting. Behind Bruiser's desk is a large, elevated aquarium with what appear to be miniature sharks gliding through the murky waters.

Bruiser's on the phone and waves at them to sit down. He snarls a few closing remarks and hangs up. Looks at Rudy.

BRUISER

Prince tells me the cops are looking for you -- I can handle that with a phone call. So old Brodnax and Speer crapped out on you? When do you take the bar exam?

RUDY

July.

BRUISER

Then what?

RUDY

I don't know. I'll look around.

PRINCE

Can't you use him around here, Bruiser? I can vouch for him. The boy needs a job.

Prince and Bruiser look at Rudy, who looks doubtful.

BRUISER

This is a great place to work. You'll learn what real lawyers do. (laughs)

PRINCE

See there.

BRUISER

But it ain't exactly a salaried position. No sir, I don't operate that way. I expect my associates to pay for themselves, to generate their own fees.

Rudy does not really want Bruiser as his boss.

RUDY

How does that work?

BRUISER

You draw a thousand dollars a month, and you keep one third of the fees you generate. If you don't cover your draw each month, then you owe me the balance. Understand? You can start generating fees right away. I'll show you how to find cases.

RUDY

Here's one.

Rudy whips out the letters and policies of the Black insurance case from out of his briefcase. As Bruiser looks the material over, Prince watches the sharks.

PRINCE

Those are real sharks in there. Live sharks in a lawyer's office. Get it? It's a joke.

RUDY

We should file suit right away because I've already shown the case to several other firms.

BRUISER

What about the clients -- they signed up?

RUDY

I'm on my way to see them -- they'll listen to me.

BRUISER

I'll introduce you to Deck Shifflet. He used to work for a big insurance company and reviews a lot of policies for me.

(shouting)

Deck!

RUDY

Great.

INTRODUCTORY VIEW

DECK SHIFFLET steps in, eating fried rice from a cardboard container.

BRUISER

This is Deck Shifflet. He'll show you the ropes.

Deck doesn't offer a handshake or smile. Hard to tell if he's forty or fifty, most of his hair is gone, and the few remaining streaks are heavily oiled and slicked across his wide scalp. He wears square, wire-rimmed glasses that are thick and dirty.

BRUISER

All right, get a lawsuit drafted against Great Benefit, put my name on it and we'll get it filed today.

Bruiser and Prince duck out. Deck carefully folds up the fried rice carton and saves it for later.

DECK

You have a case you wanted to talk about?

RUDY

It's an insurance case. Are you one of the associates here?

DECK

Sort of. Not really. You see I'm not a lawyer, yet. Been to law school and all, but I haven't passed the bar.

Deck looks over the insurance papers. The knot on his plain, red tie is as big as a fist.

DECK

Bruiser usually asks me to review insurance cases when they come in -- I worked for Pacific Mutual for eighteen years. Got sick of it. Went to law school.

RUDY

What happens if you have to go
to court?

Deck grins sheepishly like he's such a joker -- he's got
this weird laugh.

DECK

Well, I've gone a few times
myself, actually. Haven't got
caught yet.

(indicating papers)

The key thing here is to sign
up the clients first.

EXT. GRANGER SECTION OF MEMPHIS - DAY

Rudy in his Toyota drives slowly through streets lined with
cramped brick houses in this mixed neighborhood.

EXT. DOT & BUDDY'S HOUSE - DAY

Rudy pulls into the driveway of a small house, parks. An
old Chevrolet sits in the one-car garage. The grass and
shrubs are neatly trimmed.

MOVING VIEW

He gets out of the car, carrying a legal pad and pen. Two
Dobermans behind a fence next door snarl and bark at him.
He goes up to the screen door and taps.

Dot comes to the door, cigarette in hand, and glares at him
through the screen.

RUDY

It's me, Mrs. Black. Rudy
Baylor. We met last week at
Cypress Gardens.

She glares at him -- he takes a step closer.

RUDY

Remember? I'm handling your
case against Great Benefit.

She slowly unhooks the door and Rudy enters.

INT. DOT'S KITCHEN - DAY

She motions to the flimsy dinette table. He sits, starts taking papers out of his briefcase. Dot pours a diet cola over ice and leans with her back against the counter.

RUDY

Where's Buddy?

She nods at the window overlooking the back lawn.

Rudy looks.

HIS POV:

In a corner of the yard, overgrown with vines and shrubbery, is an old Ford Fairlane, white with two doors, both of which are open. Buddy is sitting in the car, mangy cats romping around the hood. He's wearing a red pullover and a cap with earflaps, and he slowly lifts a bottle in a paper bag to his lips and takes a leisurely nip.

DOT

(smiles)

Buddy, he ain't goin' nowhere.

(pause)

He ain't right. War injury.
Korea. Got a plate in his
head.

RUDY

That's -- awful.

VIEW ON PAD

He writes on a notepad, "plate in head."

RUDY

How's Donny Ray?

DOT

(shrugging)

Good days and bad. You wanna
meet him?

CUT TO:

INT. DONNY RAY'S ROOM - DAY

Rudy enters the small bedroom to meet DONNY RAY BLACK. Donny Ray is horribly gaunt and emaciated, but he stands, smiles and sticks out a bony hand which Rudy shakes. Dot gently eases him into a chair next to the bed.

RUDY
(avoids looking at him)
Nice to meet you.

DONNY RAY
Mom's said nice things about
you. She says you're suing
those bastards at Great
Benefit, gonna make 'em pay.

His voice is weak and raspy, but his words are clear.

RUDY
That's right.

Rudy opens the file and hands Dot the demand letter.

RUDY
This must be signed before we
can file suit.

DOT
What's in it?

RUDY
Oh, the usual. You guys hire
us as your lawyers, we handle
the case, take care of the
expenses, and we get a third of
any recovery.

DOT
Then why does it take two pages
of small print?

RUDY
(sounding like a
shyster)
Boiler-plate, means nothing.

Dot takes out a cigarette.

DONNY RAY
Don't light that!
(to Rudy)
No wonder I'm dying.

DOT
(putting unlit cigarette
in her mouth.)
And all three of us have to
sign it?

RUDY

That's right.

DOT

Well Buddy said he ain't comin' in.

DONNY RAY

Then just take it out there to him. Just get a pen and go out there and make him sign the damned thing.

Dot grabs a pen from the desk. She goes out the door and walks slowly across the patio and into the weeds. A cat on the hood sees her coming and dives under the car.

VIEW ON DONNY RAY AND RUDY

DONNY RAY

I know you think they're crazy. But they're good people who've had some bad breaks. Be patient with them.

They watch as Dot shoos away the cats. The doors are open, and Dot sticks the contract inside.

RUDY

They're nice folks.

DONNY RAY

I'm eighty per cent gone, okay. Funny how doctors use numbers--

He gasps for breath, clenching his fists as he has a seizure. Then he recovers.

POV ON FAIRLANE

A cat hisses loud enough for them to hear, and flies through the air, landing in the weeds. Dot reaches in, snatches the paperwork, then storms toward the house, cats diving for cover in all directions.

DONNY RAY

Whatever you get out of this case, please take care of them with it. I love them.

EXT. MISS BIRDIE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Miss Birdie's house is a white Victorian in an older area, with a sweeping porch. It needs paint, a new roof and some yard work. The drive is lined with disorderly hedges. Rudy parks his Toyota behind a dirty 1986 Cadillac and gets out.

The porch steps squeak as he steps to the front door, looking around warily. He taps gently on the screen door. No response. He taps again.

MISS BIRDIE (O.S.)

Who is it?

RUDY

Miss Birdie?

A light switches on, and Miss Birdie appears, wearing the same dress she wore at the Senior Citizens meeting. She squints through the door.

RUDY

It's me. Rudy Baylor. The law student you talked to yesterday.

MISS BIRDIE

(thrilled)

Rudy!

She quickly unlocks the screen door.

MISS BIRDIE

Come in, come in.

INT. MISS BIRDIE'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Rudy is seated at the kitchen table. Miss Birdie places two coffee cups on the table. There is no steam rising from them. Rudy tastes the coffee, grimacing. It is weak, bland and stale.

RUDY

I wanted to talk about your will. I had trouble sleeping last night because I was worried about your estate.

Miss Birdie's eyes become moist. She's touched by this.

Rudy takes a pen from his pocket and holds it as if he's ready for action.

RUDY

If you're not careful, Miss Birdie, the government will get a big chunk of your estate. Certain things can be done with the money now, some careful estate planning, and a lot of the taxes can be avoided.

MISS BIRDIE

All that legal gobbledygook.

RUDY

That's what I'm here for, Miss Birdie.

MISS BIRDIE

I suppose you want your name in the will somewhere.

RUDY

(trying to appear shocked)

Of course not!

MISS BIRDIE

The lawyers are always trying to put their names in my wills.

RUDY

There are all kinds of lawyers, Miss Birdie. But it's very important for estate planning purposes to know where the money is. Is it in stocks, bonds, cash, other investments?

MISS BIRDIE

(pause)

It's all in one place.

EXT. MISS BIRDIE'S HOUSE - EVENING

As Miss Birdie walks with Rudy to his car, he sees the detached garage. It's two floors, and the second floor appears to be a small apartment.

RUDY
(pointing)
Is that a little apartment up
there?

MISS BIRDIE
Used to be.

RUDY
Don't suppose you'd be
interested in renting it now?
(quickly)
I couldn't afford much, though.

MISS BIRDIE
I could make it very reasonable
if you'd assist me with some
chores around the place --
maybe a little weed-pulling now
and then?

RUDY
Fine, a little weed-pulling,
sure. Agreed.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. ST. PETER'S HOSPITAL - DAY

Deck's minivan pulls into the parking lot reserved for
doctors. Deck has a parking card that identifies him as a
physician. The GUARD knows him and waves them through.

RUDY (V.O.)
Bruiser would feed Deck
Shifflet with accident reports
from his buddies in the police
department, guys he grew up
with. St. Peter's Charity
Hospital, a zoo of a place that
Deck knows better than the
doctors do...

INT. ST. PETER'S HOSPITAL - MAIN LOBBY - DAY

Deck goes straight to the information desk in the main
lobby, which is packed with people. Rudy watches as he
speaks with the receptionist, and comes back with the room
number.

He leads Rudy to the elevator. He looks and acts just like a lawyer.

DECK
(whispering)
Don't act like a lawyer.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

They exit a crowded elevator, walking down the corridor. Deck seems to know exactly where the room is. He stops at 886, enters without knocking.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The room is semi-dark. One bed is occupied by a man watching TV. They walk to the other bed. In it is DAN VAN LANDEL, late 20's. There are bandages on his face. His jaw is wired, an arm is broken, a leg is in traction. Deck leans over him like a priest hearing confession.

DECK
Good afternoon, Mr. Van Landel.

No response. Rudy, uncomfortable, stays at the foot of the bed, checking the door, hoping no one comes in.

DECK
Can you hear me, Mr. Van Landel?

Van Landel blinks his eyes, trying to focus.

VAN LANDEL
(through clenched teeth)
Who are you?

DECK
(big smile)
Deck Shifflet, paralewyer. You haven't talked to any insurance company, have you?

VAN LANDEL
No.

DECK
Good. Don't talk to them. They're just out to screw you. Do you have a lawyer?

VAN LANDEL

No.

DECK

My firm handles more car wrecks than anybody in Memphis. Insurance companies are afraid of us. And we don't charge a dime.

He takes a one-page contract from a legal pad, and waves it in Van Landel's face. Van Landel takes it with his good arm, tries to read it.

VAN LANDEL

Can you wait for my wife?

Rudy clutches the bed railing, inadvertently hitting a cable which jerks a pulley that yanks Van Landel's leg up another inch.

VAN LANDEL

(loud groan)

Ahhhh!

RUDY

Sorry.

He quickly jerks his hands away. Deck looks at him like he'd like to kill him, then regains control.

DECK

Where is your wife?

VAN LANDEL

(still in pain)

Ahhhh!

RUDY

Sorry.

Van Landel watches Rudy fearfully. Rudy keeps both hands in his pockets.

VAN LANDEL

She'll be back in a little while.

DECK

I'll talk to her later, in my office. I need to get a ton of information from her.

Deck deftly slides his legal pad under the contract so the signing will be smoother, and uncaps a pen. Van Landel mumbles something, then takes the pen and signs. Deck takes the contract, and hands a business card to him.

DECK

(authoritative tone)

You have my number. Call me twenty-four hours a day. On the back is the number for Rudy Baylor here, and you can call him anytime. We'll handle the case together. Any questions?

(no response)

Good.

(pats Van Landel on his good leg)

We're gonna get you a bunch of money. Goodbye now.

Deck and Rudy make a quick exit.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

MOVING SHOT

As they walk down the hallway.

DECK

(proudly)

And that's how it's done, Rudy. Piece of cake.

RUDY

What if the guy had a lawyer?

DECK

There's nothing to lose, Rudy. That's what you must remember. We came here with nothing. If he ran us out of his room, for whatever reason, what have we lost?

RUDY

A little dignity, some self-respect?

DECK

(ignoring this)
You see, Rudy, in law school they don't teach you what you need to know. It's all books and theories and these lofty notions an honorable calling, governed by pages of written ethics.

RUDY

What's wrong with ethics?

DECK

Oh, nothing, I guess. I mean, I believe a lawyer should fight for his client, refrain from stealing money, try not to lie, you know, the basics.

They turn and enter another hallway.

RUDY

But it's unethical to solicit cases.

DECK

Right. But who cares? Better us than the next guy. There are a lot of lawyers out there.

INT. HOSPITAL CAFETERIA - DAY

Rudy and Deck are drinking coffee in the small cafeteria near the orthopedic wing.

DECK

I prefer this cafeteria because it's near the orthopedic wing, and hardly any lawyers know about it.

(as he checks out the patients)

I know all the hospital cafeterias in town.

He draws a map on a napkin, explaining as he sketches.

DECK

Here's some other hot spots in St. Peter's -- the main cafeteria, the grill near maternity on the second floor, the coffee shop near the front lobby. Nighttime is good, because the patients get bored in their rooms and like to wheel down for a snack.

EXT. MISS BIRDIE'S GARDEN - EVENING

Rudy is bent over the flower bed, pulling weeds. Miss Birdie stands behind him, pointing. He is hot and sweaty and his back hurts. The phone rings, and she goes to get it.

MISS BIRDIE (O.S.)

It's for you, Rudy. Some lawyer.

Rudy jumps up and runs into the house.

INT. MISS BIRDIE'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Miss Birdie hands Rudy the phone. As he talks, he watches her prepare with great care a processed-turkey sandwich for him.

BRUISER (V.O.)

Rudy, I've got a hot police report.

RUDY

(horrified)

About me?

BRUISER (V.O.)

Hell no! Big wreck by the river. An oil barge broke free from its tug, and struck a paddle wheeler which was being used for a high school prom. Maybe three hundred kids on board.

Rudy hangs up.

RUDY

Gotta run, Miss Birdie.
Something's come up. Gotta
meet with this lawyer about a
big case.

MISS BIRDIE

But what about the wedding --

RUDY

Sorry. I'll get to it later.

INT. DECK'S MINIVAN - NIGHT

Deck is driving Rudy in his ragged minivan. He drives very fast.

DECK

It's a huge disaster,
potentially the biggest ever in
Memphis.

RUDY

That's awful, but what in hell
are we supposed to do about it?

DECK

Bruiser is not gonna miss it.

RUDY

Fine. Let him get his fat ass
in a scuba suit and dive for
bodies.

DECK

Could be a gold mine.

An ambulance races by them. They chase it.

RUDY

Somehow I'm not feeling like a
hero.

EXT. RIVERSIDE DRIVE WATERFRONT - NIGHT

The street is blocked off by police cars, lights turning.
Fire trucks and ambulances are parked bumper to bumper.

MOVING VIEW

Deck and Rudy walk quickly around the yellow caution tape and join the crowd of onlookers near the edge of the water. Many of the people are huddled together in little groups sitting on the banks, watching and crying as divers and paramedics search for bodies. Stunned kids in wet tuxedos and torn prom dresses sit together, holding hands, staring at the water.

RUDY

I don't believe we're here
doing this.

DECK

(shakes his head in
disgust)
What'd they teach you in law
school?

RUDY

Not much, but they certainly
didn't teach us to chase
ambulances.

DECK

Then you better learn quick.
If not, you'll starve.

A POLICE LIEUTENANT steps to the front of a squad car as several reporters gather around him. The crowd becomes still and silent. Most of the people remain seated, clutching their blankets, lowering their heads in prayer.

LIEUTENANT

I'm sorry, but we have
identified the body of Melanie
Dobbins.

The silence is broken by gasps and groans from the family of the girl. They kneel and hug, and a woman's voice cries out. The lieutenant walks away, returning to the pier, where another body is being pulled from the water.

Deck motions to a spot closer to the families, but Rudy doesn't move. Deck slinks away into the crowd, disappearing quickly into the darkness.

CLOSE ON RUDY

Watching, becoming sick.

WHAT HE SEES:

MEN with somber faces easing or trying to sneak CLOSE to the grieving families. They have small white business cards which they attempt to give to family members or friends of the deceased. In the darkness they inch closer, eyeing each other warily.

Rudy turns his back to the scene and starts running, running away through the streets of Memphis.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL GRILL - NIGHT

LOOSE SHOT - SLOW MOVE IN

Rudy is sitting at a table in the corner, eating a sandwich and reading the newspaper. A cellular phone is on the table, along with his law books.

INSERT: NEWSPAPER

The front page is filled with stories and photos of the paddle wheel disaster -- he turns the page, and there is a big photo of Bruiser in a series about police corruption and tax evasion; something about an investigation pending.

He tries to study. He hears a SNEEZE o.s. and looks up.

HIS POV:

Two tables away is a young, pretty woman, KELLY RIKER, 19, in a wheelchair, the only other person in the grill. Her right leg is in a cast from the knee down. She has dark hair and brown eyes. She also has a big bruise on her jaw. She wears a hospital gown and appears frail.

An old man in a pink jacket, a VOLUNTEER, places a plastic glass of orange juice on the table in front of her.

VOLUNTEER

There you are, Kelly.

KELLY

Thanks.

He pats her on the shoulder, and leaves.

Rudy tries not to stare. He looks down at his books, then up slowly.

She lifts her drink, and he notices the bandages on both wrists. He also sees the wedding ring on her finger.

He tries to concentrate on his studying, but it's impossible. He looks up again to see her crying.

He walks over to her.

RUDY

Look, I'm not one to meddle,
but is there anything I can do?
Are you in pain?

KELLY

No. But thanks.

RUDY

Sure. I'm over there, studying
for the bar exam, if you need
anything.

(sitting down)

My name's Rudy Baylor.

KELLY

Kelly Riker. Nice to meet you.
Why do you come here?

RUDY

I'm studying for the bar exam,
and this is a quiet place.

KELLY

So you're gonna be a lawyer?

RUDY

Sure. I finished law school a
few weeks ago, got a job with a
firm. As soon as I pass the
bar exam I'll be ready to go.

She drinks from the straw and grimaces as she shifts her weight.

RUDY

(nodding at her leg)

How'd it happen?

KELLY

(pause)

A domestic accident.

RUDY

You're wearing a wedding band.

KELLY
(looking at it)
Yeah.

RUDY
So where's your husband?

KELLY
You ask a lot of questions.

RUDY
I'm a lawyer, or almost one.
It's the way we're trained.

KELLY
Why do you want to know?

RUDY
Because it's odd he's not
around.

KELLY
How old are you?

RUDY
Twenty-six. How old are you?

KELLY
Nineteen.

RUDY
That's awfully young to be
married.

KELLY
It wasn't by choice.

RUDY
Do you work?

KELLY
Off and on. What kind of
lawyer do you want to be?

RUDY
I want to help people.

KELLY
Lawsuits and stuff.

RUDY
Yeah, that's it.

KELLY

Divorces?

RUDY

I'd rather avoid them. It's
really nasty work.

His cellular phone beeps.

RUDY

Excuse me.

He goes over to his table and picks up the cellular.

RUDY

Hello?

INT. YOGI'S BAR - NIGHT

It's Bruiser; he's at Yogi's, drunk with Prince; it sounds
like a riot in the b.g.

BRUISER

(yelling)

How's the fishing?

Rudy smiles at Kelly, who's impressed by this call.

RUDY

(quietly)

I'm talking to a prospect this
very instant. Saw your picture
in the paper, Bruiser.

Kelly's volunteer arrives for the ride back to her room.
Rudy walks toward her table, covering the phone with his
hand.

RUDY

I enjoyed meeting you.

KELLY

(smiling)

Thanks for the drink, and the
conversation.

RUDY

(with Prince screaming
in his ear)

Tomorrow night?

KELLY

Maybe.

She deliberately winks at him. Rudy's knees tremble. The volunteer frowns at him and whisks Kelly away.

Rudy hits a button on the phone and cuts off Prince.

INT. BRUISER'S BLDG. - RUDY'S OFFICE - DAY

Rudy is seated at the desk in his small office, listening to Deck, who reads from his notes:

RUDY (V.O.)

There's nothing Deck loves more than a challenge, especially when it involves the gathering of dirt through hushed phone conversations with unnamed moles...

DECK

...Kelly Riker was admitted to St. Peter's three days ago, at midnight I might add, with assorted injuries. Cops found her beat to hell and lying on a sofa in the den. Cliff Riker was obviously intoxicated, highly agitated and initially wanted to give the cops some of what he'd been dishing out to his wife.

RUDY

Her wrists are bandaged.

DECK

(flipping pages)
Kind of sketchy on the wrists. At some point during the assault, he pinned her wrists to the floor and tried to force intercourse.

RUDY

What happened to him?

DECK

Spent the night in jail.
Bailed out by his family. Due
in court in a week, but nothing
will happen.

RUDY

Why not?

DECK

Odds are that she'll drop the
charges, they'll kiss and make
up, and she'll hold her breath
until he does it again.

NEW ANGLE

Deck exits. Rudy opens his law books and tries to study,
when the door suddenly bursts open and Bruiser charges in.

BRUISER

Just got a call from Leo F.
Drummond. Ring a bell?

RUDY

No. Should it?

BRUISER

He's a senior partner at Tinley
Britt. Marvelous trial lawyer,
all sorts of commercial
litigation. Rarely loses.
Drummond is going to represent
Great Benefit.

THE VIEW TIGHTENS

Bruiser seems worried. Rudy finds this amusing.

RUDY

What did he say?

BRUISER

He told me the judge will be
Harvey Hale, who, son of a gun,
was his roommate at Yale thirty
years ago, when they studied
law together.

RUDY

Sorry I asked.

BRUISER

So we have Leo F. Drummond and his considerable staff, and they have their favorite judge. You got your work cut out for you.

RUDY

Me? What about you?

BRUISER

Oh, I'll be around. But this is your baby.

He laughs and slams the door.

EXT. MISS BIRDIE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Rudy parks quietly behind the long Cadillac, and silently eases out of his car, checking if Miss Birdie is around. He notices a Pontiac with an Avis sticker in the driveway.

INT. MISS BIRDIE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Entering the house, Rudy sees Miss Birdie sitting on the sofa, arms crossed, staring at a sitcom on TV. A woman, VERA, 50, wearing tight shorts over tanned spindly legs, is rummaging through the refrigerator. At the kitchen table is a tanned man with permed, badly dyed hair, and gray lambchop sideburns. This is DELBERT, late 50's. Before him on the table are some papers he's been examining.

DELBERT

(seeing Rudy)

You must be the lawyer.

RUDY

I'm Rudy Baylor.

DELBERT

I'm Delbert Birdsong. Birdie's youngest.

Miss Birdie doesn't move or look up.

Vera takes a seat and scoots it close to Delbert. They eye each other knowingly. He picks at the corner of a piece of paper, adjusts his glasses, looks up at Rudy.

DELBERT

I come home to check on Momma,
and damned, she's got a
stinking lawyer living with
her. You been messin' with her
will?

RUDY

She's your mother. Why don't
you ask her?

VERA

She won't say a word.

RUDY

Good. Then neither will I.
Lawyer-client privilege.

DELBERT

(fiercely)

I hope you're not meddling,
boy.

INT. HOSPITAL GRILL - NIGHT

A tired Rudy drags himself into the grill. He sees his
favorite table is occupied by a DOCTOR and NURSE. He gets
coffee and sits nearby. The nurse is about 30, very
attractive and quite distraught. The doctor is 60.
Serious whispers. Then they abruptly leave; she's in
tears, he's cold and heartless.

Rudy moves to the table they vacated. He looks up at the
clock -- it's ten o'clock.

NEW VIEW

Kelly arrives, with a new guy pushing her wheelchair. She
glances coldly at Rudy, and points to a table in the center
of the room. He parks her there. Rudy looks at him. He
looks at Rudy.

It's her husband, the ballplayer, CLIFF RIKER. He has a
stocky body which bulges through a tight tee shirt and
tight jeans. He walks to the counter for drinks, and Kelly
very deliberately glances around the room, then at the last
moment gives Rudy a quick wink. Rudy almost spills his
coffee.

CLOSE ON CLIFF

Brings the drinks back, sits. They sip their drinks in
silence. They look at each other only when necessary.

CLOSE ON RUDY

Hiding behind a book. He hears Kelly say something inaudible that draws a hot response. Cliff's suddenly shaking and snarling words at her. She gives it right back. The volume increases.

RUDY'S POV:

Cliff suddenly slaps his cup and bolts to his feet. Soda flies across the room, spraying foam on the table floor, drenching Kelly. She gasps, closes her eyes, crying. Stomping and cursing, Cliff exits the grill.

VIEW ON RUDY

Gets to his feet, but Kelly shakes her head. He sits. The CASHIER has watched this and arrives with a hand towel. She gives it to Kelly who wipes Coke from her face and arms.

Rudy looks at her. The cashier leaves, and Rudy comes over.

KELLY

I'm sorry.

RUDY

It's okay.

KELLY

Will you take me to my room?

VIEW ON RUDY

His reaction.

KELLY

Fifth floor.

He rolls her wheelchair out of the grill.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Rudy wheels Kelly down the hall. He's in no hurry, he's enjoying helping her, and also the fact that men look at her as they roll along.

INT. HOSPITAL ELEVATOR - NIGHT

In the elevator, they're alone. Rudy kneels beside her.

RUDY

Are you okay?

KELLY

(nods)

Thanks.

The elevator stops. A DOCTOR gets in, and she quickly lets go of Rudy's hand. Rudy stands behind her wheelchair like a devoted husband. He wants to hold hands again.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

They exit the elevator, moving down the hall. A NURSE at the station looks twice at Rudy as they roll by.

INT. HOSPITAL - KELLY'S ROOM - NIGHT

They enter Kelly's private room. The lights are on.

KELLY

You have to help me.

CLOSE SHOTS

He carefully bends over her, and she wraps her arms around his neck, squeezing harder than necessary. Rudy squeezes her even tighter to him, gently maneuvers her up to the bed, taking as long as possible, making a fuss over her fragile leg, adjusting her just right. Their faces are inches apart when the same nurse that was at the station comes in. She points to Kelly's stained gown.

NURSE

What happened?

Rudy and Kelly are untangling and trying to separate.

KELLY

Oh, that. Just an accident.

The nurse reaches into a drawer and pulls out a folded gown.

NURSE

Well, you need to change.

(indicating Rudy)

Get him to help you.

KELLY

I can do it.

The nurse places the gown on the bed. She turns to Rudy.

NURSE

Visiting hours are over, hon.
You kids need to wrap it up.

She exits. Rudy closes the door and returns to Kelly.
They look at each other. He sits next to her on the bed.

KELLY

So what do you think of Cliff?

RUDY

He should be shot. Any man who
beats his wife with an aluminum
bat needs to be shot. File for
divorce.

KELLY

Divorce won't work. I've
already tried it. He'll kill
me. He tells me so all the
time.

She moves her foot and groans.

NURSE (O.S.)

Time's up. It's almost eleven-
thirty. This isn't a hotel.

Rudy just stands there, smiling at Kelly. The nurse finally
grabs his arm and ushers him to the door.

NURSE

(scolding, kidding)

Now go on.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - DAY

FULL VIEW

Rudy and 200 other people are seated at folding tables in
the huge ballroom.

RUDY (V.O.)

...Of the two hundred or so
people taking the bar exam this
outing, at least half are my
friends and enemies.

Rudy glances over at Booker, giving him the thumbs up.
He sees F. Franklin and his buddies in a corner on the other
side of the room, then quickly looks away. He nods at a
few other acquaintances from law school.

RUDY (V.O.)

I nod at a few acquaintances,
silently hoping they flunk the
exam because they're silently
hoping I collapse too. Such is
the nature of the profession.

The exams are passed out. Rudy takes a deep breath and
begins.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. RUDY'S GARAGE APT. - MORNING

Rudy is sitting in the small bare room, holding a mirror,
attempting to cut his own hair. He hears a POUNDING on his
door. He gets up, opens it.

WHAT HE SEES:

Miss Birdie standing there, holding a single white piece of
paper. Rudy lunges for it.

INSERT - THE PAPER

It's from the Tennessee Board of Law Examiners, and in bold
letters across the center of the page are the words,
"CONGRATULATIONS. YOU'VE PASSED THE BAR EXAM."

Rudy whirls around and looks at Miss Birdie, and for a
moment is angry, but his anger quickly yields to complete
elation.

MISS BIRDIE

We really need to get started
with that mulch.

Rudy looks out the door.

WHAT HE SEES:

A mountain of huge white plastic bags. Dozens of them.
Pine bark mulch, by the ton. Each bag weighs one hundred
pounds.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Police cars with red lights rotating. They retrieve a body
from a dumpster.

RUDY (V.O.)

Bruiser was in the papers again this morning, denying any knowledge of anything. The police found a dead body in a waste dumpster behind a topless joint. The deceased was a local thug who wanted to branch out into the bouncing boob trade. He stepped on the wrong turf and was decapitated...

A head wrapped in newspapers rolls out, startling the police.

INT. STEAK HOUSE - DAY

RUDY (V.O.)

Of course Bruiser wouldn't do a thing like that, but the cops seem reasonably confident that he knows precisely who did...

Rudy and Deck are living it up, eating steak dinners.

DECK

Yesterday, one of Bruiser's ex-partners testified before the grand jury. Looks like he's cut a deal.

RUDY

So?

DECK

There's a good chance he's singing on Bruiser. Maybe Prince Thomas.

He takes an enormous bite of his steak and chews it slowly while nodding at Rudy. Rudy waits until he swallows.

DECK

(continuing)

Something's about to go down, Rudy, I'm sure of it. Bruiser giving us a bonus for the Van Landel case -- what's behind his generosity? Tax evasion, jury tampering and now murder. I'm nervous, real nervous.

RUDY

Okay, but why? They can't arrest us.

DECK

I'm not worried about being arrested. I'm worried about my job.

RUDY

So what're you saying?

DECK

Let's bolt!

He's thought about this and has it all figured out.

DECK

We can rent a small office for five hundred a month. We'll operate on a shoestring for six months and see how it goes. We split the profits evenly. Everything's fifty-fifty.

Rudy's on the ropes but thinking fast. This is a shock.

DECK

How many files do you have?

RUDY

(thinks)

Three.

DECK

Get them out of your office. Take them home. But don't get caught, okay?

RUDY

Is someone watching us?

Deck jerks and glances, then carefully nods his head.

RUDY

Who?

DECK

Feds, I think.

(burps)

The office is under surveillance.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Rudy, wearing a suit, runs up the flight of steps, through the door of the courthouse.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

The courthouse is old and stately, with marble floors and walls, polished mahogany doors. Rudy slows to a jog, stops at the courtroom of the Honorable Harvey Hale. The brass sign on the doors reads "Circuit Court Division Eight."

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

MOVING VIEW

Down the red-carpeted aisle, past the rows of benches, through the gate, Rudy sees a group of men waiting and staring at him. They all possess the same appearance and dress -- short hair, dark suits, white shirts, striped ties, stern faces, contemptible smirks.

Up high, in a black robe, in a large leather chair, scowling at him, is JUDGE HARVEY HALE. A clock on the wall behind him gives the time as twelve minutes after nine. Judge Hale is tapping his fingers impatiently.

NEW VIEW

The room is silent. Rudy walks slowly to the gate.

RUDY

(weakly)

Excuse me, sir, but I'm here for the Black hearing.

JUDGE HALE

(voice booming through microphone)

And who are you?

RUDY

Well, my name's Rudy Baylor. I work for J. Lyman Stone.

JUDGE HALE

Where's Mr. Stone?

RUDY

I'm not sure. He was supposed to meet me here.

JUDGE HALE
(loudly, into the
microphone)
Why am I not surprised?
(to Rudy)
I suppose you want a
continuance.

RUDY
No sir. I'm prepared to argue
the motion.

Rudy eases through the gate and places the file on a table
to his right.

JUDGE HALE
Are you a lawyer?

RUDY
Well, I just passed the bar.

JUDGE HALE
But you haven't received your
license?

RUDY
No sir. We take the oath next
week.

INTRODUCTORY SHOT

One of men in the group to the left clears his throat.
Rudy turns to sees a distinguished gentleman, LEO F.
DRUMMOND, age 60, dramatically rise from his chair.

DRUMMOND
(slow and heavy)
May it please the court, for
the record, my name is Leo F.
Drummond of Tinley Britt,
counsel for Great Benefit Life.
And we object to this young
man's appearance in this
matter. Why, he doesn't even
have a license.

RUDY
(angry)
Your Honor, I'll have my
license next week.

DRUMMOND

That's not good enough, Your Honor.

RUDY

I've passed the bar exam, Your Honor.

DRUMMOND

Big deal.

Rudy looks directly at him and the group of lawyers with him, including F. Franklin.

RUDY

It is a big deal, Mr. Drummond. Your new associate, F. Franklin Donaldson, didn't.

F. Franklin cringes. Drummond scowls, and Rudy smiles in return.

JUDGE HALE

Sit down! Both of you.

They sit.

JUDGE HALE

One question, Mr. Baylor. Who will handle this case on behalf of your firm?

RUDY

I will, Your Honor.

JUDGE HALE

And what about Mr. Stone?

RUDY

I can't say. But this is my case, these are my clients. Mr. Stone filed it on my behalf, until I passed the bar.

JUDGE HALE

Very well. Let's proceed.
(looking at court reporter)
On the record.

INT. JUDGE'S OFFICE - DAY

Judge Hale has his robe off. He's standing behind his desk, waving at two chairs.

JUDGE HALE

Please come in. Have a seat.

Drummond and Rudy sit. He ponders.

JUDGE HALE

(to Rudy)

You did a superb job, but I'm inclined to grant the motion to dismiss.

He opens a drawer, and removes several bottles of pills. He carefully lines them up on his desk as Rudy and Drummond watch. He stops and looks at Rudy.

JUDGE HALE

Maybe you can refile it in federal court, you know. Take it somewhere else. I just don't want it clogging up my docket.

He counts pills, at least a dozen from four plastic cylinders.

JUDGE HALE

Excuse me while I visit the can.

He steps to a small door across the room. It locks loudly. Rudy sits in a dazed stillness, staring blankly at the pill bottles. Drummond rises and sits on a corner of the desk, looking down at Rudy, all warmth and smiles.

DRUMMOND

(low, trusting voice)

Look, Rudy, I'm a very expensive lawyer, from a very expensive firm. When we first get a case like this, we do some math and give our estimate to our client, and this is before we lift a finger.

He waits for Rudy to say something but Rudy just stares at his tie.

DRUMMOND

And so, Great Benefit has authorized me to offer you and your clients seventy-five thousand to settle. If you say no, then it's World War III.

The door opens and Judge Hale exits the bathroom. Drummond rises.

DRUMMOND

My turn now. May I?

JUDGE HALE

Of course.

Drummond enters the bathroom.

Judge Hale sits at the desk and gathers his bottles.

JUDGE HALE

High blood pressure.

(pause)

Not much of a lawsuit, kid, I'm afraid. Maybe I can lean on Leo to make an offer of settlement. That's part of my job, you know.

He laughs as if this is really funny. His face turns red and he coughs. Rudy watches him until he stops coughing.

RUDY

He just offered me the cost of defense.

JUDGE HALE

(tries to seem

surprised)

How much?

RUDY

Seventy-five thousand.

JUDGE HALE

(mouth falls open)

Jeez! Look, son, you're crazy if you don't take it.

RUDY

(playing along)

You think so?

JUDGE HALE

Take the money, son. I've been
doing this for a long time, and
you need to listen to me.

INT. DOT & BUDDY'S HOUSE - DAY

It's early. Rudy is seated at the kitchen table, drinking
instant coffee.

DOT

Donny Ray's fading fast.
Hasn't been out of bed for the
past two days.

RUDY

We went to court yesterday for
the first time.

Dot stares out the window. She doesn't seem to care.

RUDY

The insurance company has made
an offer to settle.

DOT

What kind of offer?

RUDY

Some money.

DOT

How much?

RUDY

Seventy five thousand dollars.
They figure that's how much
they'll pay their lawyers to
defend the case.

DOT

(her face tightens)
Sumbitches think they can buy
us off now, right?

RUDY

Yes, that's what they think.

-5

INT. DONNY RAY'S ROOM - DAY

Donny Ray lies on the bed with a sheet tucked tightly around his frail body. Rudy sits next to him. Dot sits the other side and holds Donny Ray's hand.

DONNY RAY

Do you want to settle, Rudy?
Some of the money is yours.

Rudy looks at Donny Ray, then at Dot. They are listening intently.

RUDY

They wouldn't offer this money
if they weren't worried. No --
I want to expose these people.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. RUDY & DECK'S BLDG. - DAY

Rudy parks in front of a building and gets out, looking at the second floor.

INT. RUDY & DECK'S BLDG. - DAY

Rudy opens a door at the top of the stairs and enters his new offices. Deck is waiting, already painting, smiling proudly.

DECK

Whatta you think?
(not waiting to hear
what Rudy thinks)

One room on each side. This one here is the largest, so I thought you'd need it.

He motions for Rudy to follow. They step through an open door and into Rudy's new office. Rudy is pleasantly surprised. It's about fifteen by fifteen with a window overlooking the street. It's empty and clean, nice flooring.

Deck bounces forward, spinning around, arms open wide.

DECK

See it with a coat of paint.
All floors are hardwood.
 (stomping his feet)
Ceilings are twelve feet.
Walls are plasterboard and easy
to paint.

RUDY

Just relax, Deck, I like the
offices. Good job.

DECK

 (suddenly looks at his
 watch)
Hey, I almost forgot.

He turns on the small black and white television.

DECK

Indictments came down an hour
ago, a hundred and something
different counts against
Bruiser and Prince. This
murder opened up a big can of
beans.

They watch the news broadcast.

INT. RUDY'S GARAGE APT. - NIGHT

Rudy is sleeping. The phone RINGS; he groggily picks it up.

RUDY

Hello?

BOOKER (O.S.)

Rudy, this is Booker. Harvey
Hale died last night.

NEW VIEW

This wakes Rudy up in a hurry.

RUDY

Judge Hale!

BOOKER (O.S.)

Heart attack. Fell dead by his
swimming pool.

RUDY

That's hard to believe.

BOOKER (O.S.)

Guess what newly-made judge was assigned the Great Benefit case in his place?

RUDY

Now how in the hell am I supposed to know?

BOOKER (O.S.)

Tyrone Kipler. 42 years old, Harvard, civil rights partner from Marvin Shankle's firm. He can't stand Trent & Brent, and he hates insurance companies, sues them all the time. You've got the touch -- you're a rainmaker.

INT. COURTHOUSE - JUDGE'S OFFICE - DAY

VIEW ON BOOKER

having just introduced Rudy to TYRONE KIPLER in the office that previously belonged to Harvey Hale. Hale's books and mementos are in the process of being boxed. His desk has been removed, and they sit in folding chairs.

KIPLER

And you think the Black case should be fast tracked?

RUDY

Yes sir. The issues are simple. There won't be a lot of witnesses.

KIPLER

How many depositions?

RUDY

I'm not real sure. Less than ten.

KIPLER

You'll have trouble with the documents. Happens every time with insurance companies.

(MORE)

KIPLER (CONT'D.)

I've sued a bunch of them and they never give you all the paperwork. It'll take us a while to get all the documents you're entitled to.

(making a note)

File a motion to fast-track the case. The defense will refuse. We'll have a hearing. When discovery is complete, I'll set it for a trial.

RUDY

(swallowing hard)

We'll be ready.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

FULL SHOT

Stately as a Roman site.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

MOVING VIEW TO DOT BLACK

Her hand shaking as she sits alone at the end of the table.

DRUMMOND (O.S.)

I want you to state your name.

The VIEW turns and REVEALS Leo Drummond. Charming, handsome and brilliant.

DOT

Dot Black.

Dot anxiously turns to Rudy, who gulps even as he is trying to assure her of his competence. He sits at his counsel table, the piles of motions and briefs are stacked neatly before him. Deck is sitting behind him, not at the table, making Rudy appear alone against:

VIEW ON TINLEY BRITT TABLE

Heavily populated. Aside from Drummond, there is a gaggle of Harvard and Yale-educated partners and associates, including F. Franklin Donaldson. Behind the lawyers are two hard-nosed corporate EXECUTIVES from Great Benefit.

VIEW UNDER THE TABLE

Dot's hands anxiously fidget with a pack of cigarettes.

DRUMMOND (O.S.)

And where were you born?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Dot continues her deposition, answering questions by Drummond.

DRUMMOND

You've been married to Buddy
for 36 years. Do you two still
sleep in the same room?

VIEW ON DOT

Turns to look at Rudy.

DOT

(whispered)

Nosy bastard.

KIPLER

Mr. Drummond, let's get to the
policy and other documents.
Mrs. Black, do you have the
policy?

Dot hands the policy to Drummond, who reviews it, then it
gets passed to the others. Each flips through the policy.

VIEW ON RUDY

Trying desperately to stay awake. Dot whispers something
to him. She takes out a letter.

DRUMMOND

Is this evidence, Your Honor?

DOT

(to Rudy)

The "Stupid Letter."

Rudy watches to see Drummond's reaction. Dot hands the
letter to him without commenting on its contents.

VIEW ON DRUMMOND

Reading the letter. His mouth falls open, and he wrinkles
his brow. His eyes squint. He reads it again. He's
stunned by what he's holding.

VIEW ON RUDY
Enjoying Drummond's shock.

Drummond lowers the letter and looks at Rudy, who gives him a sneering glare that says "Caught you, big boy." Then Drummond looks at Kipler.

Drummond recovers nicely, but the damage is done. He passes the letter to the next lawyer. They all watch him for a few seconds, then it hits.

KIPLER
Let's go off the record.

The stenographer stops and the video camera operator clicks off the machine.

KIPLER
Mr. Drummond, it's obvious to me that you've never seen this letter before. And I have a hunch it won't be the first or last document your client tries to conceal.

(leans forward and
points at him)
If I catch you or your client hiding documents from the plaintiff, I'll sanction both of you.

Drummond and his crew are still reeling.

DRUMMOND
Are you accusing me of hiding documents, Your Honor?

KIPLER
Not yet. Right now, I'm just warning.

DRUMMOND
I think you should recuse yourself from this case, Your Honor.

KIPLER
Is that a motion?

DRUMMOND
Yes sir.

Denied. KIPLER
Anything else?

Drummond is silent.

EXT. MISS BIRDIE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Rudy pulls into the driveway. Only Miss Birdie's Cadillac is there. He parks behind it and gets out.

He walks toward the house, doesn't see anybody. As he climbs the steps leading to his apartment he sees a note taped to his door.

VIEW MOVES CLOSER AS HE READS:

RUDY
(reading)
"My mother flew to Florida this morning. Me and my brother will look after her business from now on. We want you to stay here. Tend to the place and there's no rent.
Sincerely, Delbert Birdsong."

EXT. BUS TERMINAL - DAY

Deck drops Rudy and his small overnight bag off at the Greyhound bus terminal.

RUDY (V.O.)
I had to take six depositions
in Cleveland, Great Benefit's
headquarters. The law firm of
Rudy Baylor can't afford air
travel.

He drives off. The small terminal is bustling with early morning travelers, most of whom are old and black. Rudy buys his reserved ticket, paying \$139 in cash, and climbs on board the bus. VIEW MOVES UP to the placard in the bus window: "St. Louis - Indianapolis - Cleveland."

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - DAY

CLOSE ON RUDY
By the window, he looks up and sees Kelly's reflection as though she's smiling at him.

He turns -- but she is not there. He smiles to himself and looks back at her in the window. Suddenly, her IMAGE is knocked away by her husband slapping her and knocking her down.

EXT. CLEVELAND SUBURB - NIGHT

The American sprawl -- fast food, flashing billboards, shopping centers and cheap motels. A taxicab pulls up to the Plaza Inn. Rudy exits the cab and carries his bag into the motel.

EXT. CLEVELAND - GREAT BENEFIT BLDG. - DAY

The Great Benefit building is a huge five-story hodgepodge of square block buildings wedged together and seemingly built into one another. It's all very modern and unbelievably ugly.

Rudy walks up to the entrance, checks the address.

INT. GREAT BENEFIT BLDG. - DAY

A small foyer with plastic potted plants and a cute RECEPTIONIST, who's wearing a chic headset. On the wall behind her are the names of three companies: PinnConn Group, Green Lakes Marine and Great Benefit Life Insurance.

Rudy approaches the smiling receptionist.

RUDY

My name is Rudy Baylor, and I'm here for the depositions.

RECEPTIONIST

One moment, please.

(punches a button)

Mr. Baylor's here.

F. Franklin Donaldson immediately comes out of a door and limply shakes Rudy's hand.

F. FRANKLIN

Hello Rudy. How are you?

He leads Rudy down the hallway to an elevator.

INT. GREAT BENEFIT BOARDROOM - DAY

F. Franklin leads Rudy into a large, plush boardroom, with a shiny table in the center and at least fifty leather chairs around it. Around coffee and bagels is a cluster of about eight men in dark suits. They all instantly fall silent when they see Rudy.

Drummond recovers first.

DRUMMOND

Rudy, come on in.

Rudy, eyes tired and shirt wrinkled, nods to the defense lawyers, bright-eyed in clothes creased and starched. Then shakes hands with the four new acquaintances as Drummond introduces them. A familiar face from Memphis is introduced as Jack Underhall, one of the in-house lawyers for Great Benefit.

The court reporter is setting up, and they all sit at one end of the long table.

DRUMMOND

Now, Rudy, we thought we'd start with the deposition of our corporate designee, Jack Underhall.

RUDY

I don't think so.

He's nervous but trying to act cool.

DRUMMOND

Beg your pardon?

RUDY

You heard me. I want to start with Jackie Lemanczyk, the claims handler. But first I want the file.

DRUMMOND

We think it would be best to start with Mr. Underhall.

RUDY

I don't care what you think.
(taunting)
Shall we call the judge?

DRUMMOND

Uh, we, well, we, uh, have a
problem with Jackie Lemanczyk.

He glances nervously at the four Great Benefit men, who
have eased back towards the door, and are studying their
feet, shuffling and twitching.

RUDY

What kind of problem?

DRUMMOND

She doesn't work here anymore.

RUDY

(stunned)

Was she terminated?

DRUMMOND

She resigned.

RUDY

Where is she now?

DRUMMOND

She's no longer an employee, so
we can't produce her as a
witness.

RUDY

(can't believe it)

What a coincidence.

DRUMMOND

Our client is going through a
periodical downsizing.

RUDY

What about Russell Krokkit?

DRUMMOND

Mr. Krokkit left us for another
company.

RUDY

And Everett Lufkin, Vice
President of Claims?
Downsized?

DRUMMOND

No. He's here.

RUDY
Where's the file?

NEW VIEW

Drummond picks up a five-inch stack of papers and slides them across the table. They're neatly copied and bound with thick rubber bands. Rudy flips through the stack.

There's a long silence as everybody studies their notes.

RUDY
We need to call the judge.
(pointing to an
adjoining room)
In there.

Drummond follows Rudy into the room.

INT. SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Rudy gets on one phone, Drummond picks up the other. Rudy dials.

KIPLER (O.S.)
Hello.

RUDY
Judge Kipler, this is Rudy Baylor. I'm in Cleveland at Great Benefit.

DRUMMOND
Leo F. Drummond, Your Honor.

KIPLER (O.S.)
Yes, gentlemen, what can I do for you?

RUDY
Well, of the six witnesses specified in my notice, and in your order, two have suddenly disappeared. They've either resigned, been downsized or suffered some other equal fate, but they aren't here. Happened very late last week.

KIPLER (O.S.)
Who?

RUDY

Jackie Lemanczyk and Russell
Krokit no longer work here.
Pellrod, Lufkin, and Underhall,
the designee, miraculously
survived the carnage.

KIPLER (O.S.)

How about the file?

RUDY

I have the claims file, and
I've scanned it.

KIPLER (O.S.)

And?

RUDY

There's at least one missing
document.

He watches Drummond carefully. Drummond frowns hard at
him, as if he can't believe this.

KIPLER (O.S.)

What is it?

RUDY

The Stupid Letter. It's not in
the file. I haven't had time
to check everything else.

KIPLER (O.S.)

Are you guys in the same room?

RUDY & DRUMMOND

(in unison)

Yes sir.

KIPLER (O.S.)

Good. Mr. Drummond, leave the
room. Rudy, stay on the phone.

Drummond starts to say something, but thinks better of it.
Confused, he hangs up his phone and leaves the room.

RUDY

Okay, Judge, it's just me.

KIPLER (O.S.)
I think you should depose
Underhall and no one else.
When you're finished with him,
come home.

Rudy's taking notes as fast as he can.

 KIPLER (O.S.)
Lemme talk to Drummond now...

INT. DECK'S MINIVAN - NIGHT

Rudy is exhausted from his bus ride home and almost asleep.
Deck is driving. He's very nervous, his face twitching
more than usual, his head jerking at the slightest sound.

 DECK
Got a call from Bruiser. Said
to tell you the feds are
watching every move because
you're the only lawyer who
worked for both Bruiser and
Prince.

 RUDY
 (surprised; waking up)
You know where Bruiser is?

 DECK
No. I don't.

Rudy is staring at Deck, realizing there's more to this.

 RUDY
Why did he contact you?

 DECK
 (whispers)
Well, seems as if they left
some money behind. Now they
want it.

 RUDY
How much?

 DECK
Well, we never got around to
that, but it's a pile.

RUDY
And where is it?

DECK
What I figure is this: the money's hidden somewhere in town, probably close to us right now. The feds haven't found it by now, so they probably won't find it. Bruiser and Prince say the two of us can load the money in a U-haul truck, drive it to them and everybody's happy.

RUDY
No way, Deck. Forget it. Sounds great now, but we could spend time in jail.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

ANGLE ON DEFENSE TEAM
including Leo Drummond. Also present is Jack Underhall, the in-house lawyer for Great Benefit, and of course, Rudy.

KIPLER
I warned you about the documents, Mr. Drummond.

DRUMMOND
(sincerely)
There's no excuse, Your Honor.

KIPLER
Did you attempt to notify counsel for the plaintiff that the witness Jackie Lemanczyk no longer worked for your client?

DRUMMOND
I did. We couldn't locate him. We even called the airlines in an attempt to track him. No luck.

RUDY
(under his breath)
Shoulda called Greyhound.

Judge Kipler makes a big production out of shaking his head.

KIPLER

Everyone will appear here for depositions next Monday. No excuses, no delays, no continuances. Failure to do so will result in severe sanctions. And, speaking of sanctions, I hereby order the defendant, Great Benefit, to pay Mr. Baylor, as sanctions, the cost of his wasted trip to Cleveland. Mr. Baylor, how much is a round-trip plane ticket to Cleveland?

RUDY

Seven hundred dollars.

KIPLER

Is that first class or coach?

RUDY

Coach.

KIPLER

Mr. Drummond, you guys sent four lawyers to Cleveland. Did you fly first class or coach?

Drummond cringes like a kid caught stealing.

DRUMMOND

First class.

KIPLER

That's what I thought. How much is a first-class ticket?

DRUMMOND

Thirteen hundred.

KIPLER

How much did you spend on food and lodging, Mr. Baylor?

RUDY

Around sixty bucks.

Kipler is writing all of this down with great drama.

KIPLER
What'd you spend traveling? A
couple hours each way?

 RUDY
I guess.

 KIPLER
At two hundred bucks an hour,
that's eight hundred dollars.
Any other expenses?

 RUDY
Two hundred fifty to the court
reporter.

Kipler writes this down, adds it all up, checks his
figures.

 KIPLER
I order the defendant to pay
Mr. Baylor the sum of two
thousand four hundred and ten
dollars, as sanctions to be
paid within five days.

Drummond rises slowly, hands spreading out. He's burning,
but under control.

 DRUMMOND
I object to this.

 KIPLER
Your objection is noted. Your
client has five days.

Drummond waves his arms in frustration and retakes his
seat. Kipler raps his gavel. Rudy gathers his papers
quickly and leaves the courtroom.

INT. RUDY'S GARAGE APT. - NIGHT

The clock reads 3:20 A.M. and Rudy is sleeping. The phone
RINGS. Rudy, groaning, picks it up.

 MISS BIRDIE (O.S.)
Rudy?

 RUDY
Miss Birdie!
(MORE)

RUDY (CONT'D.)
(turns on the light)
How are you?

MISS BIRDIE (O.S.)
Well, they're being mean to me.

Rudy closes his eyes and falls back onto the bed.

RUDY
You're living with Delbert?

MISS BIRDIE (O.S.)
They're all waiting for me to
die, that's all. I signed a
new will that gives them what
they want...

RUDY
(falling asleep)
Why are you calling me at this
hour, Miss Birdie?

MISS BIRDIE (O.S.)
I can't stay here much longer
They've got me stuck back in a
little bedroom... Please bring
me home, Rudy. Oops...
somebody's coming. Gotta go.
(slams phone)

Rudy manages to fall asleep.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. MISS BIRDIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Rudy is sitting in a lounge chair on Miss Birdie's patio
like he owns the place, reading the Sunday paper, sipping
coffee and enjoying a beautiful day. The huge pile of
mulch bags remains untouched in the b.g.

Deck pulls up in his minivan, hurries over to Rudy. He's
carrying a small notebook.

DECK
(reading from notes)
...Miss Birdie's second husband
did indeed inherit millions
(MORE)

DECK (CONT'D.)
from an estranged brother in
Florida. His children, the
lawyers and the IRS devoured
almost all of the estate. Miss
Birdie got forty thousand, and
for some reason left it in the
trust department of a large
Georgia bank.

(hands him the files)
Sorry. Poof.
(his absurd laugh)

Rudy is disappointed, but not surprised.

RUDY
Deck you gotta do a big favor
for me.

DECK
I got to do nothing. What?

RUDY
Please Deck; take Miss Birdie's
car and drive to Florida; bring
her home.

DECK
That's kidnaping.

RUDY
Not if she's requested it. I
know it's a lot.

DECK
But the money is bogus.

RUDY
Bring her back here for me
Deck, will you please.

The portable phone rings and he picks it up.

RUDY
Hello?

INTERCUT: INT. DOT'S HOUSE - CLOSE ON DOT

DOT
I found Donny Ray about an hour
ago. He went to sleep last
night, and never woke up.

RUDY
I'm sorry, Dot.

VIEW ON RUDY
He hangs up, tears on his face.

EXT. DOT & BUDDY'S HOUSE - DAY

As Rudy pulls up to the Blacks' house, he sees that the whole neighborhood has come to mourn. Rudy smiles and nods and works his way through the crowd and into the house.

RUDY (V.O.)
Donny Ray had been declining fast, physically and mentally. We barely were able to get a statement from him on videotape...

INT. DOT & BUDDY'S HOUSE - DAY

The house is packed with people. The kitchen table and countertops are covered with pies and casseroles and Tupperware filled with fried chicken.

Rudy finds Dot. They hug each other gently.

RUDY
I'm sorry.

Rudy leaves her with a group of ladies from the neighborhood. He fills a paper plate with food and goes to the tiny patio, where he eats alone. Buddy is not in the Fairlane. Rudy eats slowly, and listens to the quiet chatter emanating from the house.

RUDY (V.O.)
There with his friends and family, I said the last of my many prayers for Donny Ray.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

There's the regular throng of stern-faced and darkly-dressed men sitting around Leo Drummond. Rudy is there. He's scared and shaking and weary.

KIPLER
 (to the court reporter)
We don't need a record for
this. Mr. Drummond, are you
aware that Donny Ray Black died
yesterday morning?

 DRUMMOND
 (gravely)
No sir. I'm very sorry.

Drummond is standing, looking at Rudy, then at Kipler.

 KIPLER
We're going to postpone these
depositions. Have your people
here next Monday, same time,
same place.

 DRUMMOND
Why not start tomorrow? Your
Honor, if you please, and I'm
not being argumentative, these
five gentlemen have gone to
great hardship to be here
today. It might not be
possible next week.

 KIPLER
Oh, they'll be here, Mr.
Drummond. They'll be right
here at nine o'clock next
Monday morning.

 DRUMMOND
Well, I think it's unfair, with
all due respect.

 KIPLER
Unfair? These depositions
could've been taken two weeks
ago, Mr. Drummond. But your
clients started playing games.

EXT. MISS BIRDIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Deck has been driving through the night. Prince's driver
Butch is delicately helping Miss Birdie out of her car.

MISS BIRDIE
I missed my house so much.
Thank you Butch, you're so
kind.

Rudy walks over to them.

MISS BIRDIE
Oh, I can breathe. There's no
place like home. I'll make you
boys something; are you hungry?
Is there something in my
refrigerator, Rudy?

She happily goes into her house. Deck turns to Rudy.

DECK
Listen, I asked Butch to take a
peek at our phones. He was
gonna search for more bugs, but
decided to wait for you.

RUDY
(puzzled)
More bugs?

BUTCH
Yeah, like little mikes hidden
around the office to pick up
everything the phones don't
catch.

RUDY
(to Deck)
Have you talked to Bruiser on
our phones?

DECK
No. I haven't talked to
Bruiser since the day he
disappeared.

By this lie he's telling Rudy to shut up in front of Butch.

RUDY
I'd like to know if there are
other bugs, you know. It'd be
nice to know how much "they're"
hearing out there.

INT. RUDY'S OFFICE - DAY

Deck and Butch carry on a banal conversation about an accident case while they gently overturn tables and chairs. They crawl around on all fours. They dig through wastebaskets and pick through files. They find nothing. It appears that only their phones have been bugged.

Rudy is going through the mail. To his surprise, there is not a single letter from Tinley Britt.

RUDY

What, no avalanche of paper
from Trent & Brent today?

There is a large square envelope, with his name and address handwritten. Rudy opens it.

INSERT

Inside is a printed invitation to attend a pre-Christmas sale of gold chains and bracelets and necklaces at a jewelry store in a local mall. It's junk mail. Rudy is about to throw it away, when he notices something. At the bottom, in handwriting, is the name: "Kelly Riker."

INT. MALL - JEWELRY STORE - DAY

The store is crowded. Rudy walks to the long glass display counter where Kelly Riker is helping a customer. She sees him and smiles. Rudy studies a dazzling array of gold chains. Nearby is the manager of the store, ROBIN.

KELLY

Can I help you, sir?

She stands two feet away. Rudy looks at her, and melts. They smile at each other.

RUDY

Just looking.

KELLY

Can I show you something?
(indicating chains)
These are on sale.

RUDY

Nice. Can we talk?

KELLY

Not here.

-7

She leans closer, unlocks the case, slides the door open and removes a ten-inch chain. She holds it for him to see.

KELLY

(softly)

There's a movie down the mall.
Buy a ticket. Center section,
back row. I'll be there in
thirty minutes.

INT. MALL - MOVIE THEATER - DAY

There are less than fifty people in the theater. Rudy sits in the back row, as the movie begins. After a moment, Kelly sits next to him. She crosses her legs, her skirt inches above her knees. Rudy can't help but notice.

RUDY

Are we safe?

KELLY

Safe from whom?

RUDY

Your husband.

Silence. They think about this for a moment.

RUDY

I think about you all the time.
Do you ever think about me?

They're staring at the screen but seeing nothing.

KELLY

All the time.

VIEW ON THE SCREEN

A guy and a girl are ripping each other's clothes off. They're falling onto a bed, pillows and undergarments flying through the air, then they embrace hotly and the screen starts shaking.

Kelly slides her arm under Rudy's and inches closer. They don't speak until the scene changes. Then Rudy starts breathing again.

RUDY

He allows you to work?

KELLY

I'd rather not talk about him.
How's the lawyer stuff?

RUDY

It's a struggle, but business
is growing. Lawyers starve,
and then if they're lucky they
make money. I'd rather not
talk about lawyers.

A long pause.

KELLY

Cliff wants it all the time.
He's becoming obsessed with
sex.

RUDY

Look, uh, I'd rather talk about
something else, okay?

KELLY

Okay. We're running out of
topics.

They release each other's hand and watch the movie for a
few moments. Then Kelly slowly turns and leans on her
elbow. Their faces are inches apart.

KELLY

I just wanted to see you, Rudy.

He touches her cheek with his hand. She leans over, kisses
him on the cheek, and is gone.

INT. CLUB AMBER - DAY

Rudy, Deck and Butch are seated in a corner booth, having
drinks and looking at the performers.

BUTCH

The bugging device is
manufactured in Czechoslovakia,
medium grade in quality, and
feeds a transmitter located
somewhere close by. It wasn't
planted by cops or feds.

DECK

Someone else is listening.

Rudy is stunned.

BUTCH
Who else would it be?

RUDY
I've got an idea. Go to a
pay phone...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PAY PHONE - DAY

Deck is at an outdoor pay phone.

DECK
(on phone)
Just checking in. You need
anything from downtown?

INT. RUDY'S OFFICE - DAY

Rudy on the phone, talking to Deck. He's sewing a button
on his jacket.

RUDY
Nah. Oh, guess who wants to
settle now?

DECK (O.S.)
Who?

RUDY
Dot Black.

DECK (O.S.)
(incredulous and phony)
Dot Black?

RUDY
Yeah, I stopped by this morning
to check on her, took her a
fruitcake. She said she just
doesn't have the willpower to
suffer through the trial, wants
to settle right now.

DECK (O.S.)
How much?

RUDY
Said she'd take a hundred and
seventy five...

INT. RUDY'S OFFICE - DAY

It's early morning. As Rudy and Deck enter, the phone is ringing. Deck grabs it in his office, then runs into Rudy's.

DECK
It's Drummond.

Rudy picks up his phone. We notice that it's connected to a tape recorder.

RUDY
(on phone)
Hello.

INT. DRUMMOND'S OFFICE - DAY

Drummond is seated in his plush office, on the phone with Rudy. Several of his associates sit quietly.

DRUMMOND
(warmly)
Rudy, how are you?

INTERCUT WITH RUDY'S OFFICE

RUDY
Fine, Mr. Drummond. And you?

DRUMMOND (O.S.)
Doing well. Listen, my client wants to settle, Rudy, and this is what I've been told to pass along. This is just settlement talk, no admission of liability, you understand.

RUDY
(winking at Deck)
Yep.

DRUMMOND (O.S.)
Let's say the claim was covered, just assuming, okay. Then my client should've paid out somewhere around a hundred and seventy-five thousand.

INT. DRUMMOND'S OFFICE

RUDY (O.S.)
If you say so.

DRUMMOND
Then we'll offer that much to settle right now. One hundred and seventy-five thousand! No more depositions. I'll have a check to you within seven days.

RUDY (O.S.)
I don't think so.

DRUMMOND
Look, Rudy. A zillion bucks can't bring that boy back. You need to talk some sense into your client. I think she wants to settle. There comes a time when the lawyer has to act like a lawyer and take charge.

INT. RUDY'S OFFICE

Rudy on the phone; disbelieving what he is hearing.

RUDY
I'll talk to her.

DRUMMOND (O.S.)
Call her right now. I'll wait here another hour.

RUDY
I'll get back to you, Mr. Drummond. Good day.

He hangs up, rewinds the tape in recorder and plays it aloud. Deck sits back in a chair and they listen for a moment. Then Rudy turns it off.

DECK
(sheer disbelief)
They bugged our phones.

They stare at the recorder.

DECK
(slowly)
I guess we should tell Judge
Kipler.

RUDY
I don't think so.

DECK
Why not?

Rudy picks up the juror cards on his desk. He looks at the
telephone.

RUDY
I have an idea -- a crazy idea...

DECK
(rubbing his hands
together)
I love it... I love it.

EXT. PAY PHONE - DAY

Deck's at the outdoor pay phone. It's cold and he stamps
his feet, trying to keep warm. He punches a number.

DECK
(on phone)
Rudy, Deck here. On these
prospective jurors, I finally
found Billy Porter.

INTERCUT:

INT. RUDY'S OFFICE - DAY

Rudy is at his desk, on the phone.

RUDY
And?

Deck is reading from a piece of paper. His delivery is a
bit unnatural, but to the uninformed, he sounds believable.

DECK
Caught him at the office. We
were dead wrong about him. I
gave him the facts in our case,
and, boy, did he get mad.
he'll make a great juror.

A pause as Deck rattles papers.

Rudy hangs up. His phone immediately rings. He picks it up.

RUDY

Hello?

BUTCH (O.S.)

Rudy Baylor, please.

RUDY

This is Rudy Baylor.

INTERCUT:

The same pay phone Deck called from. Butch is now on the phone, Deck next to him. They're huddled, trying to stay warm. Butch's delivery is even more stilted than Deck's was.

BUTCH

This is Billy Porter. Your man stopped by the shop today.

RUDY

Yes, Mr. Porter, thanks for calling.

BUTCH

(gruff)

What do you want?

RUDY

Yes, well, it's about the trial, you know, the one you got a summons for. I'm one of the lawyers.

BUTCH

Is this legal?

INTERCUT:

VIEW ON RUDY

RUDY

Of course it's legal, just don't tell anybody. Look, I represent this little old lady whose son was killed by a company called Great Benefit Life Insurance.

BUTCH
That sounds awful.
(pause)
I'll do what I can.

RUDY
Yes sir. Thanks, Mr. Porter.

He hangs up, satisfied.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Sixty-one prospective JURORS walk through the double wooden doors nervously, shuffling down the aisle, staring and gawking at the surroundings. Dot and Rudy sit together at the end of their table, watching them fill the rows of padded benches. A single legal pad is on their table, nothing else.

NEW VIEW

In sharp contrast, across the aisle the defense table is surrounded by five unsmiling men in black suits, all of whom are poring over piles of paper which completely cover the table. They look over at Rudy with sneers and scowls of contempt.

As the CLERK calls the names of the jurors, Rudy makes notes.

CLERK
Dermont King, Lawrence Perotti,
Hilda Hinds, RaTilda Browning,
Dean Goodlow, Billy Porter...

Judge Kipler enters the courtroom and everybody rises as court is opened.

KIPLER
(to the jurors)
Do you know any of the parties,
any of the lawyers, any of the
witnesses? Any of you have
policies issued by Great
Benefit? Any of you involved
in litigation? Any of you ever
sued an insurance company?

VIEW ON THE JURY POOL

There are a few responses. They raise their hands, then stand and talk to His Honor.

MOVING VIEW

Kipler is finished. It's time for Rudy to say his first words in a real trial. He stands, walks to the bar, gives the jurors a warm smile.

RUDY

Good morning. My name is Rudy Baylor, and I represent the Blacks.

(warmly, sincerely)

I won't waste time. In fact, I have only one question. Can any of you think of any reason why you shouldn't serve on this jury and hear this case?

(no response)

Thank you.

(to Kipler, loudly)

The panel looks fine to me, Your Honor.

He returns to his seat, patting Dot on the shoulder as he sits.

VIEW ON DRUMMOND

He's already on his feet. He tries to look calm and affable, but the man is burning.

DRUMMOND

(gravely)

Now, what I'm about to ask you is the most important question of the day. Please listen carefully. This is crucial.

His smooth voice begs to be trusted. His graying hair conveys wisdom and experience.

FULL VIEW

A long, dramatic pause. A deep breath.

DRUMMOND

Have any of you been contacted about this case?

The courtroom is perfectly still. Rudy glances at the defense table. Two of the defense lawyers are glaring at him. The others are watching the jurors.

DRUMMOND

This is very important. We need to know.

Nothing from the jurors, no movement anywhere. But they're watching him intensely, and he's making them very uneasy.

DRUMMOND

(coolly)

Let me ask it another way. Did any of you have a conversation yesterday with either Mr. Baylor here or Mr. Deck Shifflet over there?

Rudy lunges to his feet.

RUDY

Objection, Your Honor! This is absurd!

MED. CLOSE VIEW

Kipler is ready to come over the bench.

KIPLER

Sustained!

(yelling into his microphone)

What are you doing, Mr. Drummond!

DRUMMOND

Your Honor, we have reason to believe this panel has been tampered with.

RUDY

(angrily)

Yeah, and he's accusing me.

KIPLER

I don't understand what you're doing, Mr. Drummond.

DRUMMOND

(glaring at Rudy)

Perhaps we should discuss it in chambers.

INT. JUDGE'S OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE GROUP

Drummond and Rudy sit across the desk from Kipler. The other four defense lawyers stand behind them. Kipler is extremely perturbed, staring at Drummond.

DRUMMOND
This panel has been tampered
with.

KIPLER
How do you know this?

DRUMMOND
I can't say. But I know it for
a fact.

KIPLER
Don't play games with me, Leo.
I want proof.

DRUMMOND
I can't say, Your Honor,
without divulging confidential
information.

KIPLER
Nonsense! Talk to me.

DRUMMOND
It's true, Your Honor.

RUDY
Are you accusing me?

DRUMMOND
Yes.

RUDY
You're out of your mind.

KIPLER
You are acting rather bizarre,
Leo.

DRUMMOND
(smugly)
I think I can prove it.

KIPLER
How?

DRUMMOND
I would like to address certain
jurors individually.

CUT TO:

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Drummond is at the bar. The jurors are highly suspicious of him. He shifts weight from one foot to the next, rubs his chin and zeroes in on BILLY PORTER. Porter is in the front row.

DRUMMOND
(deep voice)
Mr. Porter.

Porter bolts upright, nods. His cheeks turn red.

DRUMMOND
Mr. Porter, I'm going to ask
you a direct question. I'd
appreciate an honest response.

PORTER
(angrily)
You ask an honest question and
I'll give you an honest answer.

This is a guy with a short fuse. Drummond is stopped for a second, then continues:

DRUMMOND
Yes, now, Mr. Porter, did you
or did you not have a phone
conversation last night with
Mr. Rudy Baylor?

Rudy stands, spreads his arms, looks blankly at Drummond as if he's lost his mind, but says nothing.

PORTER
(cheeks getting redder)
Hell no.

Drummond leans on the railing, both hands clutching the thick bar. He stares down at Billy Porter, who's less than five feet away.

DRUMMOND
Are you sure, Mr. Porter?

PORTER
I damned sure am!

Drummond is out of control now and over the edge.

DRUMMOND

I think you did.

Billy Porter charges from his seat and pounces on Drummond, grabbing him by the throat.

PORTER

(screaming)

Don't call me a liar, you
sonofabitch!

Drummond falls over the railing, his tasseled loafers flipping through the air. Women scream. Porter is on top of Drummond, who's grappling and wrestling and kicking and trying to land a punch or two. Two other lawyers dash from their seats and arrive at the melee first. Others follow, and the bailiff is quick on the scene.

VIEW ON RUDY

Stays in his seat, thoroughly enjoying the thrashing.

VIEW ON DECK

Smirking, grinning.

Kipler makes it to the bar about the time Porter is pulled off and Drummond gets to his feet and the combatants are safely separated. A loafer is found under the bench and returned to Drummond, who's brushing himself off while keeping a wary eye on Porter. Porter is restrained and settling down quickly.

VIEW ON CONSULTANTS

The jury consultants are shocked. Their fancy theories are out the window. They are utterly useless at this point.

KIPLER

Excused! Billy Porter from
jury duty.

Porter leaves in a huff, glaring at Drummond.

DRUMMOND

Formal motion to dismiss the
entire panel.

KIPLER

Denied.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

VIEW ON THE JURY BOX

Six black females, all mothers. Two black males, one a college graduate, one a disabled former truck driver. Three white males, two of whom are union workers. One white female.

RUDY (V.O.)

The jury of our dreams.

Rudy watches the defense team and the men from Great Benefit, and it's a scared bunch.

EXT. BOOKER'S DUPLEX - NIGHT

Deck and Rudy get out of the minivan and enter Booker's duplex.

RUDY (V.O.)

Deck's been fidgety and nervous lately. He's a proud member of Alcoholics Anonymous and he's stopped smoking too. But it's gambling that's got the hook in him. Booker, on the other hand, has memorized so many cases and statutes, he's turning into a professor before my eyes...

INT. BOOKER'S DUPLEX - NIGHT

Booker has been working madly, everything is cluttered and disheveled, piles of paper everywhere. The file of Rudy's case is arranged on the dining room table. Rudy and Deck sit in chairs opposite Booker, who is opening a box.

BOOKER

Copies of the various state investigations of Great Benefit. Also some manuals and stuff.

Rudy goes straight for the dark green manuals. One is for claims, the other for underwriting. At first, they appear almost identical to the ones he obtained in discovery.

VIEW ON DECK

Picks up one manual, looking through it. He discovers something.

RUDY

What?

DECK

The copy they supplied you
didn't have a section "U."
Look --

Neither of Rudy's manuals have a SECTION U. They were conveniently removed before they were given to him. It is a staggering discovery.

BOOKER

You got 'em nailed. They have great exposure here, Rudy. Nice work, Deck.

DECK

It's one of the best bad-faith cases I've ever seen, and I've looked at thousands.

(beaming)

There's more. They're tapping our phones. They must be scared.

BOOKER

They're terrified, but let's not get too carried away. They're on friendly territory down here. This county doesn't believe in punitive damages.

RUDY

So what are you saying?

BOOKER

Take the money and run.

DECK

Hear, hear.

RUDY

Can't do it. I don't want to. My client doesn't want to.

BOOKER

Good. It's time to bring those people into the twentieth century.

INT. JUDGE'S OFFICE - DAY

It is a tense group of lawyers in Kipler's office. Rudy is sitting next to Drummond, both of them looking across the desk at Kipler. Rudy's eyes are red from a fitful night, his head aches. Drummond looks tired, too.

KIPLER

Any preliminary matters?

RUDY

I can't think of anything.

Drummond shakes his head no. Kipler writes something on his legal pad.

KIPLER

How about settlement possibilities?

RUDY

(firmly)

Your Honor, on behalf of my client, I'd like to offer to settle this matter for one point two million.

MED. CLOSE ON DRUMMOND AND TEAM

This is met with the expected shaking of heads and clearing of throats and even a slight chuckle.

DRUMMOND

(acidly)

You wish.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

VIEW ON JUDGE KIPLER

KIPLER

Call your first witness, Mr. Baylor.

RUDY

I call Mrs. Dot Black.

Dot walks nervously to the witness stand, takes her oath and her seat and looks at the jurors. She's wearing a plain cotton dress, an old one, but she looks neat. She's scared to death.

RUDY

It's okay to be nervous, Mrs.
Black. The jurors are human.

She wipes her eyes, but keeps her composure. Rudy hands her the first seven letters of denial and she begins reading.

The jurors hang on every word.

Then Rudy hands Dot the final letter. As Dot reads it to the jury, Rudy watches their faces. Several are visibly stunned, others blink in disbelief. Still others glare at the defense table, where all members of the defense team are staring down in deep meditation.

DOT

"We now deny it for the eighth
and final time. You must be
stupid, stupid, stupid!
Signed, Russell Krokit, Senior
Claims Supervisor"

VIEW ON "ELMO" MACHINE

displaying the letter line by line, focusing in on "stupid,
stupid, stupid."

The courtroom is silent.

RUDY

Please read it again.

DRUMMOND

Objection.

KIPLER

Overruled.

Dot reads it again, this time with more deliberation and feeling.

RUDY

I tender the witness.

He sits down, and Drummond takes the podium.

DRUMMOND

Why did you happen to pick this particular policy? What did you have in mind when you bought it?

DOT

I just wanted coverage for my family, that's all. That's what the agent promised.

DRUMMOND

Why'd you sue Great Benefit for ten million dollars?

DOT

Ten million?

DRUMMOND

That's right, Mrs. Black. You've sued my client for ten million dollars.

DOT

Is that all?

DRUMMOND

I beg your pardon.

DOT

I thought it was more than that.

DRUMMOND

Is that so?

DOT

Yeah. Your client's got a billion dollars, and your client killed my son. Hell, I wanted to sue for a lot more.

Drummond's knees buckle slightly and he shifts his weight, but keeps smiling.

DRUMMOND

What're you going to do with the money if the jury gives you ten million dollars?

DOT
Give it to the American
Leukemia Society. Every penny.
I don't want a dime of your
stinkin' money.

DRUMMOND
Thank you.

He quickly goes back to his table, looking pale. Two of the jurors are actually snickering as Dot leaves the witness stand and takes her seat next to Rudy.

DOT
(whispering)
How'd I do?

RUDY
(whispering back)
You kicked ass, Dot.

KIPLER
Your next witness, Mr. Baylor?

RUDY
Mr. Everett Lufkin.

As the bailiff disappears to fetch him, there's a flurry of activity at the defense table -- papers being pushed around, notes being passed, files being located.

NEW VIEW

EVERETT LUFKIN enters the courtroom, looks around wildly, straightens his tie and follows the bailiff down the aisle. He glances nervously at his support group and makes his way to the witness stand.

Sitting down, he looks at Rudy, looks at the jury and tries to appear calm. He's about fifty-five, gray hair, nice features, quiet voice.

RUDY
Who is Jackie Lemancyzk?

LUFKIN
(slight twitch)
A former claims handler.

RUDY
Did she work in your
department?

LUFKIN
Yes.

RUDY
When did she stop working for
Great Benefit?

LUFKIN
(shrugs)
I don't remember the date.

RUDY
How about October third of last
year?

LUFKIN
Sounds close.

RUDY
And wasn't that two days before
she was scheduled to give a
deposition in this case?

LUFKIN
I really don't remember.

Rudy shows him the letter of resignation. Lufkin
acknowledges it.

RUDY
And she was the person
responsible for handling this
claim for your company?

LUFKIN
That's correct.

RUDY
And you fired her?

Lufkin pulls the letter close and reads for the jury:

LUFKIN
"I hereby resign for personal
reasons."

RUDY
So it was her idea to leave her
job?

LUFKIN
That's what it says.

RUDY
Did you know her well?

LUFKIN
Not really. She was just a
claims handler, one of many.

RUDY
And you're married, Mr. Lufkin?

LUFKIN
Yes, happily.

RUDY
With children?

LUFKIN
Yes. Two adult children.

Rudy goes to his table, gets a letter, hands it to him.

RUDY
Please read this to the jury.

LUFKIN
(looking at it)
We apologized for the letter.

RUDY
Don't you think it's a bit late
for an apology?

LUFKIN
Maybe.

RUDY
The boy's dead, isn't he?

LUFKIN
Yes.

Rudy goes back to his desk, and brings forward the claims
manual. He hands it to Lufkin.

RUDY
Mr. Lufkin, is this the entire
claims manual?

Lufkin flips through it quickly.

LUFKIN

Yes.

RUDY

I requested a copy from your attorneys, and this is what they gave me?

LUFKIN

Yes.

RUDY

Did you personally select this particular copy of the manual to send me?

LUFKIN

I did.

Rudy walks to his table. Under it is a small cardboard box filled with files and papers. He fumbles through it for a second, then abruptly stands up straight, empty-handed.

RUDY

(to Lufkin)

Could you take the manual and flip over to Section U, please?

He looks directly at Jack Underhall, the in-house counsel seated behind Drummond. Underhall's eyes close. Beside him, Kermit Aldy appears to be gasping for breath.

LUFKIN

(his voice higher)

I beg your pardon?

Rudy removes BOOKER's copy of the claims manual and places it on his table. Everybody in the courtroom stares at it. Rudy glances at Kipler who is thoroughly enjoying this.

RUDY

Section U, Mr. Lufkin. Flip over there and find it. I'd like to talk about it.

Lufkin takes the manual and flips through it again.

LUFKIN

(incoherent)

I don't have a Section U.

RUDY

I beg your pardon, I didn't hear you.

LUFKIN

Uh, well, this one doesn't have a Section U.

RUDY

Thank you. Now, did you personally remove the Section U from my copy, or did you instruct someone else to do it?

Lufkin gently places the manual on the railing around the witness stand, and very deliberately folds his arms across his chest. He stares at the floor. Seconds pass, as everyone waits for a response.

KIPLER

Answer the question.

LUFKIN

I don't know who did it.

RUDY

But it was done, wasn't it? Do you admit that Great Benefit withheld documents?

LUFKIN

I admit nothing. I'm sure it was an oversight.

RUDY

Mr. Lufkin. Isn't it true that someone at Great Benefit intentionally removed the Section U from my copy of the manual?

LUFKIN

I don't know. I, uh, well, it just happened. I guess. You know.

Rudy goes to his table, and gets two copies of Section U. He hands one to Drummond, giving him a nasty smile. Then he gives the second copy to Judge Kipler. He takes his time, so the jury can watch and wait.

RUDY
Well, let's talk about the
mysterious Section U. Would
you look at it, please?

Lufkin takes the manual, turns the pages.

RUDY
It went into effect January 1,
1991, correct?

LUFKIN
Yes.

RUDY
Did you draft it?

LUFKIN
No.

RUDY
Okay, then who did?

LUFKIN
I'm not sure.

Lufkin is staring at the floor.

RUDY
Let's skip paragraphs one and
two, and read paragraph three.

LUFKIN
(reading)
Paragraph three directs the
claims handler to deny every
claim within three days of
receiving it. No exceptions.

INT. RUDY'S GARAGE APT. - NIGHT

Rudy is sleeping. The phone RINGS. Groaning, he picks it
up.

KELLY (O.S.)
(whispering)
Rudy.

RUDY
(waking quickly)
What's wrong?

KELLY (O.S.)
I... I need your help.

RUDY
Where are you?

KELLY (O.S.)
I'm with a girlfriend.

RUDY
What's the address?

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Rudy enters a large apartment complex.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Rudy knocks on an apartment door. Robin, the jewelry store manager, cracks the door open with the chain in place.

RUDY
I'm Rudy Baylor.

She opens it and he enters.

INT. ROBIN'S APT. - NIGHT

Rudy steps into the den. He stands staring.

HIS POV:

Kelly sitting on the sofa, an ice pack to her head. Her face is swollen and her bottom lip is busted. She wears long tee shirt, nothing else, and there are large bruises on both thighs and above the knees.

Rudy bends over and kisses her on the forehead, then sits on a footstool across from her.

KELLY
(mumbling)
Thanks for coming.

She rubs the back of his hand. Robin sits beside her.

ROBIN
Doctor said she shouldn't talk, okay? He used his fists this time, couldn't find the baseball bat.

RUDY

What happened?

ROBIN

He wins as usual, neighbors call the cops. He goes to jail, she goes to see the doctor. Would you like a Coke or something?

RUDY

No, thanks.

ROBIN

I brought her here last night, and this morning I took her to an abuse crisis center downtown. Bottom line is she needs to file for divorce and run like hell.

RUDY

(to Kelly)

Did they photograph you?

She nods, tears running down her cheeks.

With Robin's assistance Kelly carefully gets to her feet, turns her back to Rudy, and lifts the tee shirt above her waist. There's nothing but solid bruises on her rear and the backs of her legs. The shirt goes higher and reveals more bruises on her back. The shirt comes down, and she carefully sits on the sofa.

Rudy gently wipes the tears from Kelly's cheeks.

RUDY

What are you gonna do, Kelly?

ROBIN

Are you kidding? She has to file for divorce. If not, he'll kill her.

RUDY

Is this true? Are we going to file?

KELLY

(nodding)

As soon as possible.

RUDY

Don't talk. I'll do it
tomorrow.

She squeezes his hand and closes her eyes.

ROBIN

She can't stay here. Cliff got
out of jail this morning, and
he's looking for her.

KELLY

I can't stay here.

RUDY

I'll take you.

He touches the bandage above her closed eye.

ROBIN

Look, Mr. Baylor, you don't
know Cliff, but I do. He's
crazy and he's mean and he's
wild when he's drunk. Please
be careful.

INT. RUDY'S TOYOTA - NIGHT

Rudy drives Kelly home with him.

EXT. MISS BIRDIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rudy helps Kelly into Miss Birdie's house.

MISS BIRDIE

You poor child.

(to Rudy)

This girl needs some rest.
Go.

RUDY

You know where I'll be if you
need me.

MISS BIRDIE

We'll manage just fine.

EXT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

Butch meets Deck and Rudy in the hallway. Rudy gives him the divorce papers.

BUTCH
I'll serve Cliff with this at work.

RUDY
Try and do it without embarrassing the boy.

INT. MISS BIRDIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Rudy hands Kelly a copy of the divorce.

RUDY
We just filed this.

She reads it. Miss Birdie brings her coffee and dotes on her like a daughter.

KELLY
When does he get it?

RUDY
Right about now.

KELLY
He'll go crazy.

RUDY
He's already crazy.

KELLY
He'll come after you.

RUDY
I hope he does. But he won't.
Men who beat their wives are
the lowest species of cowards.
Don't worry, I have a gun.
Bye, Kelly. I'll see you
tonight.

KELLY
Can you bring a pizza?

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

As Rudy enters, he sees Deck alone at the counsel table. The defense lawyers are telling jokes across the room.

He approaches Deck.

RUDY

How did it go?

DECK

Butch served the papers on Cliff as he was leaving for lunch. Butch didn't back down, said he was ready to rumble and Cliff left in a hurry. You'd better watch your back.

The jurors haven't come in yet. Kipler addresses Drummond.

KIPLER

Have you received the claims information?

DRUMMOND

(relieved)

Came in about an hour ago, Your Honor.

He hands Rudy a neat stack of documents an inch thick and hands Kipler his set.

KIPLER

Mr. Baylor, you'll need some time.

RUDY

Give me thirty minutes.

KIPLER

Fine. We'll seat the jury at nine-thirty.

Rudy and Deck dash out the courtroom door.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The jury is seated.

KIPLER

Your witness, Mr. Baylor.

RUDY
We'd like to continue with
Everett Lufkin.

Lufkin takes the stand, looking pretty haggard. Rudy hands him the official copy of the claims information.

RUDY
Can you identify this, Mr.
Lufkin?

LUFKIN
It's a printout of a computer
summary of various claims
information.

RUDY
Prepared by the computers at
Great Benefit?

LUFKIN
That's correct.

RUDY
When?

LUFKIN
Late yesterday afternoon and
last night.

RUDY
Good. Now, Mr. Lufkin, please
tell the jury how many medical
policies were in existence in
1994.

Lufkin hesitates, then starts to play with the printout. Everybody waits while he searches through the pages. The only sound is the shuffling of paper in Lufkin's lap.

LUFKIN
(barely audible)
It's really hard to tell. If I
had some time...

KIPLER
(loudly through
microphone)
You've had two months. Now
answer the question.

LUFKIN
(flipping more pages)

I... I...

It's obvious Lufkin doesn't know. He pretends to be so engrossed in the data he can't answer Rudy's question.

RUDY
Let me ask you this, Mr.
Lufkin. To the best of your
knowledge, is the information I
want contained in that
printout?

LUFKIN
Yes.

RUDY
So, it's just a matter of
finding it.

LUFKIN
(snarling)
If you'll shut up a second,
I'll find it.

RUDY
I'm not required to shut up,
Mr. Lufkin.

Drummond rises, pleading with his hands.

DRUMMOND
Your Honor, in all fairness,
the witness is trying to find
the information.

Rudy pauses, studying his notes. He winks at Deck, who eases from the courtroom.

RUDY
Just a couple more, Mr. Lufkin.
Did you suggest to Jackie
Lemanczyk that she should quit?

LUFKIN
I did not.

RUDY
How would you rate her
performance?

LUFKIN

Average.

RUDY

Do you know why she was demoted from the position of senior claims examiner?

LUFKIN

As I recall, it had something to do with her skills in handling people.

RUDY

Did she receive any type of termination pay when she resigned?

LUFKIN

No. She quit.

RUDY

No compensation of any kind?

LUFKIN

No.

RUDY

Thank you. Your Honor, I'm through with this witness.

KIPLER

Mr. Drummond?

DRUMMOND

Your Honor, we're going to keep Mr. Lufkin for later.

KIPLER

Very well. Call your next witness, Mr. Baylor.

RUDY

(loudly)

The plaintiff calls Jackie Lemanczyk.

MOVING VIEW

Deck enters the courtroom followed by JACKIE LEMANCYZK. She's 31, with badly dyed, chopped off red hair. Underhall and Aldy refuse to look at her, but Drummond's team watches every step.

She takes the oath and sits in the witness chair, shooting a hateful look at the boys from Great Benefit.

RUDY

State your name, please.

JACKIE

Jackie Lemanczyk.

RUDY

How long did you work for Great Benefit?

JACKIE

Six years.

RUDY

And when did your employment end?

JACKIE

October 3.

RUDY

How did it end?

JACKIE

I was fired.

RUDY

You didn't resign?

JACKIE

No. I was fired.

RUDY

Who fired you?

JACKIE

Everett Lufkin, Kermit Aldy, Jack Underhall and several others.

She nods at the guilty parties, and all necks twist toward the men from Great Benefit.

Rudy hands her a copy of her letter of resignation.

RUDY

This letter states that you're quitting for personal reasons.

JACKIE

The letter is a lie. I was fired so the company could claim I no longer worked there.

RUDY

Who made you write this letter?

JACKIE

The same ones. It was a conspiracy.

She looks at the jurors for the first time, and they are all looking at her. She swallows hard and starts talking.

JACKIE

The man sitting over there in the gray suit is one of the in-house lawyers. He told me I was leaving immediately, and that I had two choices. I could call it a firing, and leave with nothing. Or, I could write that letter, call it a resignation and the company would give me ten thousand dollars in cash to keep quiet. And I had to make the decision right there, in his presence.

(pause)

I took the cash and signed an agreement to never discuss any of my claims files with anybody.

RUDY

Including the Black file?

JACKIE

Specifically the Black file.

VIEW ON JACK UNDERHALL

He's fiddling with his shoelaces, seemingly oblivious to her testimony.

RUDY

Why did you see a lawyer?

JACKIE

I was wrongfully terminated. But before that, I was discriminated against because I was a woman, and I was sexually harassed by various executives at Great Benefit.

RUDY

Anybody we know?

DRUMMOND

Objection, Your Honor. This might be fun to talk about, but it's not relevant to the case.

KIPLER

Let's see where it goes. I'll overrule for now. Please answer the question, Ms. Lemanczyk.

JACKIE

(taking a deep breath)
I had sex with Everett Lufkin for three years. As long as I was willing to do whatever he wanted, my pay was increased and I was promoted. When I got tired of it and stopped, I was demoted from senior claims examiner to claims handler. It was either put out, or get out.

Jackie dabs her eyes with a tissue.

RUDY

Let's talk about the Black file. It was assigned to you.

JACKIE

That's correct. The initial claim form from Mrs. Black was assigned to me. Pursuant to company policy at that time, I sent her a letter of denial.

RUDY

Why?

JACKIE
Why? Because all claims were
initially denied, at least in
1994.

RUDY
All claims?

JACKIE
Yes. This was the way it
worked.

INT. DOT & BUDDY'S HOUSE - DAY

We SEE a vignette of the SALESMAN first selling the
insurance policy to Dot. Donny Ray is in b.g., long before
he was sick.

JACKIE (O.S.)
...The policy is sold door to
door in the poorer
neighborhoods, paid in cash
each week.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

VIEW MOVES CLOSER TO JACKIE, testifying.

JACKIE
The claim comes in, and is
assigned to a handler, just a
low-level paper pusher.

INT. GREAT BENEFIT OFFICE - DAY

A HANDLER, someone on the lowest rung of the employment
scale sitting in cramped spaces with hundreds of other
handlers, receives the claim and automatically processes
it.

JACKIE (O.S.)
The people in claims are the
poorest trained, least paid of
all. It's that way in every
insurance company -- the
glamour is over in investments,
not claims or underwriting...

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

VIEW MOVING CLOSER to JACKIE.

JACKIE

The handler reviews it, and immediately sends a letter to the insured denying the claim.

INSERT:

The claim gets stamped "Claim denied, pending further review."

EXT. DOT & BUDDY'S HOUSE - DAY

Dot returning from her mailbox reading the letter; past the Fairlane.

JACKIE (O.S.)

The claims handler then sends the file over to underwriting, and underwriting sends a memo back to claims which says...

INT. GREAT BENEFIT OFFICE - DAY

Office slightly more commodious. Paperwork comes in, again handled automatically.

JACKIE (O.S.)

"Don't pay this claim until you hear from us."

(EFFECT SHOT)

The VIEW moves from one cubby hole to another section of the offices, to still others, like chambers in an anthill, more and more REVEALING a labyrinth in which paper essentially goes nowhere, but rather back and forth.

JACKIE (O.S.)

Keep in mind, these people work for the same company in the same building, but rarely know each other. Nor do they know anything about what the other department is doing. This is very intentional... the departments are kept at war with each other.

INT. DOT & BUDDY'S HOUSE - DAY

Dot concerned as Donny Ray's condition deteriorates.

JACKIE (O.S.)

Meanwhile, the client is
getting these letters, some
from claims, some from
underwriting... most people
give up, and this of course is
intended.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON RUDY

RUDY

How long was this policy in
effect?

VIEW ON JACKIE

JACKIE

Twelve months. It was an
experiment, sort of a scheme.
It had never been done before
in the industry, and was
generally viewed...

VIEW ON THE DEFENDANTS
Squirming in their seats.

...by management as a wonderful
idea. Deny for a year, add up
the money saved...

VIEW ON THE JUDGE

...deduct the amount spent on
quick court settlements, and
there's...

VIEW ON JACKIE

Lucid; knows this stuff backwards.

... a pot of gold left.

RUDY

How much gold?

JACKIE
An extra forty million or so.

RUDY
How do you know this?

JACKIE
You stay in bed long enough
with these miserable men and
you hear all sorts of trash.
They'll tell everything.
They'll talk about their wives,
their jobs.

(voice shaking)
I'm not proud of this, okay? I
didn't get one moment of
pleasure from it.

RUDY
But you knew the claim should
be paid?

JACKIE
Everybody knew it, but the
company was playing the odds.

RUDY
Could you explain this?

JACKIE
The odds that the insured
wouldn't consult a lawyer.

Rudy steps back from the podium.

RUDY
Thanks.
(to Drummond, pleasant
smile)
Your witness.

VIEW ON DOT
In tears and sobbing quietly.

VIEW ON THE JURORS
They see her crying.

VIEW ON DRUMMOND
Walks slowly to a spot as far away from the jury as he can
stand and still be allowed to ask questions.

DRUMMOND

Now is it true, Ms. Lemanczyk,
that you have been committed
recently to an institution for
various problems?

JACKIE

No! That's not true.

DRUMMOND

I beg your pardon. But you
have been receiving treatment?

JACKIE

I was not committed. I
voluntarily checked into a
facility and stayed for two
weeks. I was supposed to be
covered by my group policy at
Great Benefit for twelve months
after my departure. They, of
course, are denying the claim.

Drummond stares down at his legal pad as if he didn't hear.

DRUMMOND

Is that why you're here?
Because you're angry with Great
Benefit?

JACKIE

I hate Great Benefit, and most
of the worms who work there.
Does that answer your question?

DRUMMOND

No further questions, Your
Honor.

He moves quickly back to his table.

INT. RUDY'S TOYOTA - NIGHT

Rudy's driving Kelly in the Toyota. They're frightened,
looking out the window.

KELLY

We can be in and out in less
than ten minutes, if he hasn't
changed the locks. I'll just
grab a few things.

EXT. SOFTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

They drive by the softball field. Cliff's team is on the field.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

The apartment complex consists of a few buildings around a pool and tennis court. Rudy parks the car, and Kelly gets out.

KELLY

Are you scared?

RUDY

Yes.

He reaches under the seat and pulls out a .38 revolver.

KELLY

Relax, he's at the ball field.
He wouldn't miss it for the world.

RUDY

If you say so. Let's do it.

They sneak through the darkness to her unit.

Her key fits, the door is open, they're inside.

INT. KELLY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

MOVING VIEW

A light in the kitchen and one in the hallway are already on. Clothing is strewn across two chairs in the den. Empty beer cans and corn chip bags litter the tables and floor. Kelly stops, looking around in disgust.

KELLY

I'm sorry.

RUDY

Hurry, Kelly.

He places the gun on a bar separating the den from the kitchen. They go to the bedroom, and he turns on a small lamp. The bed is unmade. More beer cans and a pizza box. A Playboy. Kelly points to the drawers in a small cheap dresser.

KELLY
(whispering)
That's my stuff.

Rudy removes the pillowcases, and starts stuffing them with lingerie, socks, and pajamas. Kelly pulls clothes from the closet. Rudy looks at her packed closet.

RUDY
You can't take everything.

She just hands him a load and he takes it to the den. They work quickly, silently.

There's a slight NOISE at the door. Someone's trying to get in. Rudy and Kelly freeze, looking at each other. She takes a step toward the door, when it suddenly bursts open, striking her and knocking her into the wall.

NEW VIEW
Cliff Riker crashes into the room, sees Kelly falling over a chair.

CLIFF
(yelling)
Kelly, I'm home!

Rudy's standing right in front of him, ten feet away, and Cliff's moving quickly, a blur. All Rudy can see is his yellow PFX Freight jersey, his red eyes, and an aluminum baseball bat.

ANGLE ON CLIFF
He swings the bat at Rudy's head.

CLIFF
You sonofabitch!

Rudy ducks just in time. The bat connects with a column on the bar, shattering it in a million pieces, and knocking over a pile of dirty dishes. Kelly screams.

The force of his swing causes Cliff to turn his back, and Rudy charges like a madman, knocking Cliff over the chair filled with hangers and clothes. Kelly screams again.

RUDY
Get the gun!

CLIFF
I'll kill you!

He swings agin, missing again as Rudy barely dodges another hit. Cliff jerks the bat around.

CLIFF

You sonofabitch!

VIEW ON RUDY

Before he can cock the bat, Rudy lunges at his face with a right hook. It lands on his jaw and stuns him just long enough for Rudy to kick him in the crotch.

VIEW ON CLIFF

Cliff explodes in an agonized cry, lowering the bat. Rudy grabs it and twists it away. He swings hard and catches Cliff directly across his left ear. The noise is sickening, bones crunching and breaking. Cliff falls to all fours, his head dangling for a second, then he turns and looks at Rudy. He raises his head and starts to get up. Rudy drives the bat down and it lands solidly across the top of Cliff's head.

Kelly grabs him.

KELLY

Stop it, Rudy!

He stops, glares at her, then looks at Cliff.

Cliff's flat on his stomach, shaking and moaning. They watch in horror as he grows still. He tries to move his head, which is bleeding heavily.

KELLY

(calmly)

Give me the bat, and leave.

RUDY

What...?

She takes the bat from his hands.

KELLY

I've been here before. Leave.
Go hide. You were not here
tonight.

Rudy just stares at the struggling, dying man on the floor. Kelly gently pushes him toward the door.

KELLY

Please go, Rudy. I'll call you
later.

RUDY

Okay, okay.

He steps into the kitchen, picks up the .38 and walks back to the den. They look at each other, then to the floor. He steps outside.

EXT. KELLY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rudy closes the door quietly, and looks around for nosy neighbors. He see no one. He sneaks away in the darkness.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Rudy sits low in his Toyota, watching the activity at the apartment building. There are police and paramedic vehicles, their red and blue lights illuminating the sky. A policeman is stringing yellow crime tape around the building. People stand around, watching.

A coroner's van arrives. Rudy looks at it, opens his car door and vomits. Then he wipes his mouth, and gets out of the car.

He eases into the crowd, overhearing:

SOMEBODY

He's finally killed her.

The flash of a camera inside the apartment streaks across the windows every few seconds.

SOMEBODY ELSE

No, it's him. He's dead.

Rudy moves around slowly, listening carefully.

There's a flurry of movement around the door and a paramedic backs out pulling a stretcher. The body is in a silver bag. They roll it carefully down the sidewalk to the coroner's van, then take it away.

MOVING VIEW

Kelly emerges with a cop on each side. She looks tiny and scared. She managed to change clothes, and now wears jeans and a parka. They place her in the backseat of a patrol car, and leave. Rudy walks quickly to his car.

INT. POLICE STATION INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Kelly, Rudy and a homicide DETECTIVE sit around a table.

RUDY

I'm her lawyer, and I insist on
being with her while she's
being questioned.

VIEW ON KELLY AND RUDY

Ignoring each other.

TILT DOWN, UNDER TABLE

Their feet touch.

MED. VIEW

The detective writes something on a sheet of paper and
hands it to Rudy.

RUDY

You can release her to my
custody.

DETECTIVE

(angrily)

No I can't. What kinda lawyer
are you?

RUDY

Then release her on
recognizance.

DETECTIVE

Won't work. We got a dead body
here. Bond has to be set by a
judge.

KELLY

I'm going to jail?

DETECTIVE

(much nicer)

If your lawyer here is worth
his salt, ma'am, he'll get you
out sometime tomorrow. That
is, if you can post bond.

He kicks his chair back and stomps toward the door.

DETECTIVE

You got five minutes.

They slam the door. Rudy and Kelly are alone.

RUDY

Don't make any moves, okay.
They're watching through that
window. And this place is
probably bugged, so be careful
what you say.

She doesn't say anything. Rudy continues in his lawyer
role.

KELLY

How much time could I get?

RUDY

You have to be convicted first,
and that's not going to happen.

She wipes her eyes, and thinks for a moment. She's
frightened.

KELLY

He has a large family, and
they're all just like him. All
heavy-drinking, violent men.
I'm scared to death of them.

The door opens, and two OFFICERS enter. This time they use
handcuffs, and Rudy watches them lead her down the hall.
Kelly strains around one of the cops to see him. He waves
slowly, and she's gone.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

RUDY

Your Honor, the plaintiff calls
Mr. Wilfred Keeley to the
stand.

WILFRED KEELEY bounces to the stand, eager to testify. He
appears vigorous and friendly. He wants to assure the jury
that he's in charge, and to be trusted. Rudy hands him a
copy of the financial reports.

RUDY

Are you the CEO of Great
Benefit?

KEELEY

I am.

RUDY

Would you agree that your company has a net worth of approximately four hundred and fifty million dollars?

KEELEY

That's a fair assessment. I'll agree with that.

RUDY

Thank you. Now, how much cash does your company have?

DRUMMOND

(standing)

Objection.

KIPLER

Overruled.

KEELEY

Well, that's difficult to say.

RUDY

Come on, Mr. Keeley, you're the CEO. You've been with the company for eighteen years. You came out of finance. How much cash you got lying around up there?

Keeley is flipping pages like crazy, and Rudy waits patiently.

KEELEY

It's impossible to say.

RUDY

Does your company have about four hundred and eighty five million in cash?

KEELEY

(short laugh)

I wish.

Rudy hands him a copy of the printout on the claims data.

RUDY

Can you tell the jury how many medical policies your company had in effect in 1994?

KEELEY

Well, I don't know. Let me see.

He turns pages, holds one up, then puts it down, takes another, then another.

RUDY

Does the figure of ninety-eight thousand sound correct, give or take a few?

KEELEY

Maybe. Sure, yeah, I think that's right.

RUDY

And how many claims on these policies were filed in 1994?

Same routine. Keeley flounders through the printout, mumbling figures to himself.

RUDY

(holds up a card)

Does the figure of 11,400 sound correct, give or take a few?

KEELEY

Sounds close, I guess, but I'd need to verify it, you know.

RUDY

How would you verify it?

KEELEY

Well, I'd need to study this some more.

RUDY

So the information is right there?

KEELEY

I think so.

RUDY
Can you tell the jury how many
of these claims were denied by
your company?

KEELEY
Well, again, I'd have to study
this.

RUDY
So this information is also
contained in what you're
reading?

KEELEY
Maybe. Yes, I think so.

RUDY
Good. Look on pages eleven,
eighteen, thirty-three and
forty-one.

Pages rattle and shuffle.

RUDY
(another card)
So of the 11,000 claims filed
in 1994 Great Benefit denied
over 9000, give or take a few?

Keeley is shocked at this outrageous suggestion.

KEELEY
Of course not. That's absurd.

RUDY
But you don't know?

KEELEY
I know it's not that high.

RUDY
Thank you.

He takes the printout from Keeley and hands him the Great
Benefit policy he was given by BOOKER.

RUDY
Do you recognize this?

KEELEY
Sure.

RUDY

What is it?

KEELEY

It's a medical policy issued by my company.

RUDY

Issued when?

KEELEY

(examining it)

September of 1995. Five months ago.

RUDY

Please look at page eleven, Section F, paragraph four, subparagraph c, clause number thirteen. Do you see that?

The print is so small Keeley has to pull the policy almost to his nose. Rudy chuckles at this and looks at the jurors. The humor is not missed.

KEELEY

Got it.

RUDY

Good. Now read it, please.

Keeley reads, squinting and frowning. When he's finished, he forces a smile.

KEELEY

Okay.

RUDY

What's the purpose of that clause?

KEELEY

It excludes certain surgical procedures from the coverage.

RUDY

Specifically?

KEELEY

Specifically all transplants.

RUDY

Is bone marrow listed as an exclusion?

KEELEY

Yes. Bone marrow is listed.

Rudy hands him a copy of the Black policy.

RUDY

This is a copy of the policy issued to Mr. and Mrs. Black. Would you please read page eight, section H, clause number twelve.

The minuscule print strains his eyes again, but he valiantly plows through it.

RUDY

What does this policy exclude in the way of transplants?

KEELEY

All major organs; kidney, liver, heart, lungs, eyes, they're all listed here.

RUDY

What about bone marrow?

KEELEY

It's not listed.

RUDY

So it's not specifically excluded?

KEELEY

That's correct.

RUDY

When was this lawsuit filed, Mr. Keeley? Do you remember?

KEELEY

(glancing at Drummond)
During the middle of last summer, as I recall. Could it be June?

RUDY

Yes sir. It was June. Do you know when the language of the policy was changed to include the exclusion of bone marrow transplants?

KEELEY

No. I do not. I'm not involved in the writing of the policies.

RUDY

I see. Would it be safe to say that the policy was changed sometime after this lawsuit was filed?

KEELEY

No. It might have been changed before the suit was filed.

RUDY

Was it changed after the claim was filed, in August of 1994?

KEELEY

I don't know.

RUDY

Did Everett Lufkin lie to the jury about the claims manual?

Keeley starts to say something, then catches himself.

KEELEY

I don't think I have to answer that question.

KIPLER

(sternly)

Answer the question.

Silence as Keeley glares at Rudy. Every single juror is watching him and waiting.

RUDY

Can't answer it, can you, because you can't admit a vice president of your company lied to this jury?

LATER.

A video system has been set up. The bailiff dims the courtroom lights, and the IMAGE of DONNY RAY BLACK appears on the monitor.

DONNY RAY

...I weigh a hundred and ten pounds. Eleven months ago I weighed a hundred and sixty. The leukemia was detected in plenty of time to be treated. The transplant would've saved my life, but we couldn't afford it. I would've had a ninety percent chance of being cured.

As he speaks, we see the reactions of our characters:

VIEW ON THE JURY

Moved and sympathetic.

VIEW ON DOT

Crying.

VIEW ON RUDY

Close to tears himself.

VIEW ON DRUMMOND AND HIS TEAM

Reacting.

VIEW ON THE GREAT BENEFIT EXECS

Squirming nervously.

The courtroom is very quiet for a long moment as the screen goes black and the bailiff goes for the lights. In the darkness, the soft sound of Dot's crying is all that can be heard.

The lights come on. Rudy stands.

RUDY

Your Honor, the plaintiff rests.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Rudy stands before the jury, tense and frightened.

RUDY

I'm just a struggling young lawyer, scratching to pay my
(MORE)

RUDY (CONT'D.)

bills, not too far removed from law school. And what if I do something wrong, say, lose my temper and pop somebody in the nose, breaking it? I will need to be punished so I won't do it again. Say, I have only ten thousand dollars. How much will it take to get my attention? One percent will be a hundred dollars -- that wouldn't bother me too much. What about five percent? Would a fine of five hundred dollars be enough to punish me for breaking a man's nose? Maybe, maybe not. What about ten percent? Ill bet that if I was forced to pay a thousand dollars, then two things would happen. Number one I'd truly be sorry. Number two, I'd change my ways.

He holds the entire courtroom spellbound.

RUDY

How do you punish Great Benefit? The same way you'd punish me or the guy next door. You look at the bank statement, decide how much money is available, and you levy a fine that will hurt, but not break. Same for a rich corporation. They're no better than the rest of us.

He's finished. He walks to his table. Deck is in the corner grinning from ear to ear. Rudy sits next to Dot, and waits.

Drummond gets up, walks to the podium.

DRUMMOND

Great Benefit made mistakes with this claim. Serious mistakes. Those dreadful denial letters. But my client also has over six thousand

(MORE)

DRUMMOND (CONT'D.)
employees and it's hard to
monitor the movements of all
these people, hard to check all
the correspondence. No
excuses, though, no denials.
Mistakes were made.

This is a grave admission, and the jurors absorb it.

DRUMMOND
But I'm amazed at Mr. Baylor's
suggestion that the jury should
consider awarding Dot Black a
percentage of Great Benefit's
net worth. It's shocking. What
good would that do? Our client
was wrong. Those responsible
for this injustice have been
terminated. Great Benefit has
cleaned up its act. So what
will a large verdict
accomplish? Nothing,
absolutely nothing. Please do
what is fair.

He takes his seat.

KIPLER
Mr. Baylor, your rebuttal?

Rudy stands. As he walks to the jury he's smiling.

RUDY
Thank you.

He slowly looks into the eyes of each juror as he steps
along the box.

RUDY
All big wealth comes from the
backs of the poor, one way or
the other. If you don't stop
Great Benefit, you could be
next.

He takes his seat next to Dot.

Kipler gives the jury their instructions. The jurors file
out, and court is adjourned.

INT. JAIL - VISITOR'S ROOM - DAY

Rudy and Kelly sit on opposite sides of a glass square and talk through telephones.

KELLY

You look tired.

RUDY

You look great. How are they treating you?

KELLY

I'm in a cell by myself, and safe, but I can't really sleep.

RUDY

I'm doing all I can.

Time's up. As he's leaving the visitor's room he is stopped by a uniformed female JAILER.

JAILER

Rudy Baylor?

RUDY

Yes?

JAILER

Are you the lawyer for Kelly Riker?

RUDY

Yes.

JAILER

Someone's here to see you.

She indicates behind him. Rudy turns.

MORGAN

My name's Morgan. I'm the D.A. for domestic abuse.

MORGAN WILSON is a stunning woman of about forty. She has a firm handshake and a smile that says, "I'm busy as hell."

RUDY

I'm Rudy Baylor, Ms. Morgan.

She's holding copies of the various files on Cliff and Kelly.

MORGAN

That poor kid. How big is she?

RUDY

Five-five or so. A hundred-ten pounds dripping wet.

MORGAN

How'd she beat him to death?

RUDY

She was scared. He was drunk. Somehow she got her hands on the bat.

MORGAN

Good for her.

(pause)

I've decided not to prosecute.

Rudy's reaction, very moved.

RUDY

She's still black and blue from the last beating.

MORGAN

That's my life.

(indicating the files)

We'll meet at nine tomorrow.

She exits; the jailer gives Rudy a readout.

RUDY

What's this?

JAILER

It's our phone records. We've had four calls about that girl in the past two hours.

Rudy can't read the printout.

RUDY

What kind of calls?

JAILER

Death threats.

The jailer opens a door and Kelly walks toward him, no handcuffs, a big smile on her face. He quickly escorts her outside.

INT. RUDY'S TOYOTA - DAY

Rudy is driving, Kelly sits up front.

RUDY

Cliff's family -- they...

KELLY

They're crazy. They'll kill me.

EXT. MISS BIRDIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Kelly goes inside, as Rudy watches.

INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

Rudy nervously paces around, gets a drink of water. Deck is there; Booker shows up.

RUDY

Glad you made it.

BOOKER

Are you kidding? I wouldn't miss it for the world.

He's nervous too. They poke along the marble hallways, going nowhere, not saying anything, just killing time.

Rudy hears his name being called. It's the bailiff, outside the courtroom doors, waving desperately.

RUDY

Oh my God.

BOOKER

Just be cool.

All three of them race for the courtroom.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

MED. VIEW

Drummond and his four associates are in their seats. Dot sits alone at the table. Everyone else is in place. The jury is filing into the box as Rudy walks through the gate in the railing and sits next to Dot. He studies the faces of the jurors. They reveal nothing.

KIPLER

Has the jury reached a verdict?

The FOREMAN is a young black college graduate.

FOREMAN

We have, Your Honor.

KIPLER

Please stand and read it.

MED. CLOSE VIEW

The foreman rises slowly. He's holding a sheet of paper that's visibly shaking.

VIEW ON DOT

Remarkably calm. She's already won her battle. Great Benefit admitted they were wrong. Nothing else matters to her.

VIEW ON RUDY

His hands shaking, his breathing labored. He's dizzy and faint. He scribble on a legal pad to hide his emotion.

INSERT:

The pad; his scribbling.

VIEW ON THE DEFENSE

All five are scribbling on their pads as well.

FOREMAN

(clearing his throat)

We, the jury, find for the plaintiff and award actual damages in the amount of two hundred thousand dollars.

There is a pause. All eyes are on the sheet of paper. So far, no surprises.

FOREMAN

And we, the jury, find for the plaintiff, and award punitive damages in the amount of fifty million dollars.

MED. VIEW

Everything is quiet for a few seconds. Then gasps and exclamations from the spectators.

INSERT:

Rudy has written \$50,000,000 on his legal pad.

He bites his lip, maintaining his composure. He turns to Dot.

RUDY
(whispering)
Congratulations.

She says nothing.

VIEW ON THE JURY
Looking at Rudy and Dot.

VIEW ON KIPLER
Inspecting the verdict.

VIEWS ON DECK, BOOKER, AND CHARLENE

VIEW ON RUDY
Nods and silently says thanks. He writes on his legal pad, "DONNY RAY BLACK," and his throat thickens and his eyes water, as he remembers him.

CUT TO:

INT. MISS BIRDIE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Rudy and Kelly are eating pizza, sitting on the couch, watching TV. Kelly's trying to be happy, but she's in physical pain. They hold hands and snuggle together. The news comes on. Rudy's attention shifts to the TV.

ANCHORMAN
History was made today in a Memphis courtroom. A jury in a civil case awarded a record fifty million dollars in punitive damages against the Great Benefit Life Insurance Company of Cleveland, Ohio. Rodney Frate has the story.

KELLY
But you just finished school!

MISS BIRDIE
Not bad for a yard boy.

RUDY
It's not that difficult. We had a great jury, and the facts fell into place.

KELLY

Yeah, right, like it happens every day.

RUDY

I wish.

Kelly takes the remote and mutes the TV. She wants to pursue this.

KELLY

(trying to smile)

Fifty million dollars. How much do you get?

RUDY

Get right to the point, don't you? One third. But the money's not in the bank yet.

Miss Birdie enters.

MISS BIRDIE

Now let that girl get some rest.

Kelly squeezes his hand tightly as he kisses her bruised cheek.

MISS BIRDIE

Rudy, I have decided I am going to put your name in my will.

RUDY

You are too kind to me, Miss Birdie.

(to Kelly)

I'll be back tomorrow.

INT. RUDY'S OFFICE - DAY

Rudy is reading the newspaper. Deck brings in a fax.

RUDY

Cliff's funeral is tomorrow morning -- his family is crying for justice.

DECK

Justice -- take a look at this:
(reading fax)

(MORE)

DECK (CONT'D.)

"Mr. Wilfred Keeley, CEO of Great Benefit, was detained yesterday afternoon at JFK as he was waiting to board a flight to Heathrow."

EXT. JFK AIRPORT - DAY

Keeley and his WIFE are taken back from their plane.

DECK (O.S.)

"Traveling with his wife, they claimed to be sneaking away for a quick holiday. However, they could not produce the name of a hotel anywhere in Europe at which they were expected."

INT. RUDY'S OFFICE - DAY

Rudy takes the fax.

RUDY

(reading)

"... At five P.M. today, Great Benefit filed for protection under the bankruptcy code in federal court in Cleveland..."

DECK

Poof.

They stare at each other, stunned.

DECK

Great Benefit is like a casino -- they just never pay off. They just go bankrupt and we don't get a penny. Shoulda taken the two hundred grand settlement.

The phone rings; Deck answers it, then hangs it up.

RUDY

What was that?

DECK
(matter-of-factly)
Some guy says he's gonna kill
you.

RUDY
Oh.

DECK
I talked to Bruiser last night.

RUDY
Where is he?

DECK
Bahamas.

RUDY
Is Prince with him?

DECK
Yep.

RUDY
So they made it.

DECK
Yeah. I don't know how. Some
things you don't ask. The
money's still here, you know.
Four million, cash. It's what
they skimmed from the clubs.

RUDY
Four million?

DECK
Locked in the basement of a
warehouse. Right here in
Memphis.

RUDY
And how much are they offering
you?

DECK
Ten percent. If I can get it
to Miami, Bruiser says he can
do the rest.

RUDY
Don't do it, Deck.

DECK

I don't blame you for leaving.
It all got twisted, didn't it,
Rudy. This legal profession --

RUDY

Be careful, Deck.

They embrace for an awkward second or two, and Rudy almost chokes up.

DECK

We made history, Rudy, do you
know that?

RUDY

We can always brag.

They shake hands, and Deck's eyes are wet. Rudy watches him shuffle and jerk out of the office.

EXT. DOT & BUDDY'S HOUSE - EVENING

It's nearly dark. Rudy knocks on the door. Dot opens it and smiles when she sees it's him.

INT. DOT & BUDDY'S HOUSE - EVENING

Dot and Rudy drink instant coffee in the kitchen.

RUDY

Great Benefit has gone belly-
up. Barring a miracle far off
in the distance, we won't get a
dime. You've put them out of
business.

Dot stares blankly. Then her eyes gleam and her entire face is happy as it sinks in.

DOT

One little woman in Memphis,
Tennessee, bankrupted them
sumbitches. With the help of a
great young attorney who
wouldn't give up.

(pause)

I'll go to Donny Ray's grave
tomorrow and tell him about it.

INT. RUDY'S TOYOTA - NIGHT

Driving.

RUDY (V.O.)

...It's no secret that there
are too many lawyers, not only
in Memphis, but everywhere...

Rudy and Kelly approach the interstate loop that circles
the city.

RUDY (V.O.)

... Now there will be one less
to worry about; I will allow my
license to expire. I will not
register to vote so they can't
nail me for jury duty. I will
never voluntarily set foot in
another courtroom...

RUDY

(pause)

Dear, what direction?

They both laugh.

KELLY

I'd like to see mountains.

RUDY

Me too. East or West?

She cuddles closer and rests her head on his shoulder. He
rubs her legs.

They cross the river and enter Arkansas, smiling and
giggling as the land flattens and the traffic lightens.

THE END