

THE FIRM

"Pilot"

Written by:

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Based on Characters From
the Novel "THE FIRM" by:

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THE FIRM

"Pilot"

ACT ONE

OVER BLACK:

We HEAR a man GASPING for air. As he desperately fights for oxygen, a TITLE CARD READS:

December, 2011

And we instantly SMASH CLOSE ON:

TWO WINGTIPS. A pair of black, expensive shoes hit the pavement, one after another. These shoes weren't made for running and neither was the:

BUSINESS SUIT the man is wearing. But he's quick, strong, athletic. From above, we REVEAL:

EXT. 23RD STREET - WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY

The man clutches a BRIEFCASE as he blows past the people around him. At top speed, he approaches the:

EXT. LINCOLN MEMORIAL - CONTINUOUS

It's crowded. Visitors snap photos. A GUIDE leads some TEENAGERS on a tour. As the man leaps down the steps, he COLLIDES with the Guide, sending both men flying. A few pages from the briefcase scatter.

The man scrambles to his knees. And now, the CAMERA ZOOMS IN for our CLOSE introduction to: MITCHELL McDEERE, thirty-five. He's sweating, intense, afraid.

ANGLE MITCH'S POV: in the distance, we can see TWO MEN IN DARK SUITS following. He should abandon his briefcase, but he doesn't. At great risk, he takes precious seconds to snatch up the pages. Then, moving quickly:

EXT. REFLECTING POOL - CONTINUOUS

Mitch races down the grass along the large reflecting pool. The Two Men are close behind. And then, Mitch sees a THIRD MAN approaching from the FRONT.

Mitch stops cold. He has nowhere to go. Finally, with no other option, he goes ACROSS THE REFLECTING POOL. He wades across, knee-deep in the icy water. The Three Men don't follow. Instead, they circle around the perimeter.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

We FIND Mitch as he reaches a nearby street. Without stopping, he spots a PICK-UP TRUCK as it passes. Mitch hurls himself into the open bed of the truck, landing inside with a thud. The truck drives on, allowing Mitch to get away. OFF the Three Men, watching him go, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. D.C. GAS STATION - DAY

On the cut, Mitch enters an old-school PHONE BOOTH. He's soaked from the knees down. He throws a few COINS in the slot and dials quickly. We INTERCUT:

EXT. CARVER MIDDLE SCHOOL - THAT MOMENT

ABBY McDEERE, early-thirties, answers. She's in a great mood. She walks toward the school, dressed for work.

ABBY

Abby McDeere.

MITCH

Abby--

ABBY

Mitch? Hey. What number are you calling me from?

MITCH

I'm at pay-phone. I can't explain, where are you--

ABBY

I was gonna call you. Don't forget, I have those parent-teacher conferences tonight--

ABBY (CONT'D)

I won't be home until nine--

MITCH

You're still at school?

MITCH

Abby. Listen to me. Code Red. You need to get out of there. We are in a Code Red--

ABBY

What? Why?

MITCH

We can't talk now. They could be listening.

ABBY
Who's listening? What are you
talking about--

MITCH
Baby, please. I'll explain later,
I promise. But right now, I need
you to lose your phone and follow
the emergency plan. You remember
what we said?

ABBY
Yes. You want me to go--

MITCH
Don't say it. Just go.

ABBY
Will you be there?

MITCH
As soon as I can. I have to meet
someone first. Someone who might
know the truth.

Abby scans the area. Is someone watching her? How much time
does she have?

ABBY
Mitch.

MITCH
I know. Abby... it's happening
again.

Abby absorbs his words. After a terrified beat, we RESUME
FULL ON MITCH. He hangs up the phone and exits the booth.
Resolved, he LOOKS UP TO SEE the:

EXT. FAIRVIEW HOTEL - DAY

The enormous hotel looms over the phone booth. The CAMERA
pans up to the 18th FLOOR. As Mitch walks toward the hotel,
still dripping wet, we:

CUT TO:

INT. FAIRVIEW HOTEL - 18TH FLOOR - DAY

The door to ROOM 1801. On the cut, DANIEL MOXON, mid-
forties, OPENS the door and ushers Mitch inside. Moxon wears
wire-rimmed glasses, his thinning hair neatly combed. At the
moment, he's beyond nervous. He SNIFFS when he talks, maybe
from a cold, or maybe it's an anxious tic.

MOXON
You're McDeere (*sniff*)?

MITCH
Yes. Mr. Moxon?

MOXON
Daniel (*sniff*). Were you followed?

MITCH
No.

Moxon realizes that Mitch is wet.

MOXON
What's this?

MITCH
(admitting)
I was followed, but I lost them.
Thank you for coming.

MOXON
(*sniff*). I shouldn't be here.
Five minutes. That's what you
said. Then I'm gone (*sniff*).

Mitch OPENS his briefcase. He removes a PHOTO and shows it
to Moxon. NOTE: we DON'T SEE the photo.

MITCH
Mr. Moxon, this is my client. Do
you know who this is?

MOXON
No.

MITCH
I think you do. I think you know
why I'm here.

MOXON
(slight panic)
You called my extension. Three
times. They know that. Don't you
think they know that? You came to
see me at the office--

MITCH
I'm sorry--

MOXON
Sorry? You show up, using my name,
asking questions (*sniff*)--

MITCH

Daniel. People are dead. And bottom line, the trail leads me to you and your company. I want to know the truth.

Silence. Then, weakly:

MOXON

They'll kill me. Hell, I'm already dead.

MITCH

Then let me protect you. I know people. The FBI.

And now Moxon looks right at Mitch:

MOXON

Do you have any idea how foolish you sound?

(then, weakly)

I've done things. Horrible things. I've tried to live with them. But I can't anymore.

MITCH

I'm listening.

He wants to talk. Mitch is close. But suddenly, there's a BANGING on the door. The door rattles on its hinges--

VOICE (O.S.)

Mr. McDeere. Hotel Security. Open the door please.

Moxon shoots a terrified look to Mitch.

MOXON

I thought you said you lost them.

MITCH

It's not security. Security would have a key.

VOICE (O.S.)

Mitch McDeere. Daniel Moxon. We know you're in there.

The BANGING increases. Someone is KICKING at the door--

MOXON

I can't help you. And you can't help me.

Mitch rushes to the HOTEL PHONE. He picks it up, dials for the FRONT DESK. But as he does, Moxon walks to the BALCONY DOOR, which we now realize is OPEN. Mitch looks up just in time to SEE Moxon reach the BALCONY.

MITCH

Mr. Moxon. Daniel, what are you--

And without another word, Moxon STEPS OFF THE BALCONY. One second he's there, and then he's gone. Mitch drops the phone and races to the ledge. He arrives just in time to see Moxon hit the ground, 18 stories below.

We quickly REVERSE ANGLE, to see Mitch staring over the ledge in shock. As the CAMERA ZOOMS UPWARD, racing toward his face at high speed, we finally SMASH TO:

THE FIRM

OVER BLACK:

A TITLE CARD READS: *ELEVEN YEARS EARLIER...*

FADE IN:

EXT. BOSTON - THE YEAR 2000 - DAY

We open on Boston in late DECEMBER. The film's iconic PIANO SCORE plays as we begin a quick Boston MONTAGE:

- * A Salvation Army SANTA CLAUS rings his bell.
- * STUDENTS brave the cold in Harvard Square.
- * A HOMELESS MAN in a RED SOX jersey begs for change.

The CAMERA FINDS a SNOW PLOW decorated with CHRISTMAS LIGHTS. Slowly, the massive machine rolls past the:

EXT. BOSTON COURTHOUSE - DAY

OFF the brick facade and towering windows, we PRE-LAP:

JUDGE HUFF (O.S.)

Counsel, your appearances please?

CUT TO:

INT. BOSTON COURTROOM - THAT MOMENT

JUDGE WALTER HUFF, sixties, with a calm voice and a shock of white hair (think Donald Sutherland) presides. The courtroom is almost empty but there's a festive, holiday air.

And now we FIND MITCH. The CAMERA PUSHES IN CLOSE as he steps forward:

MITCH
Mitchell McDeere for the defendant.

KEVIN
(also approaching)
Kevin Hanophy for the IRS.

MITCH
Your Honor, the defense has
received the IRS complaint and I
have a few motions to submit--

JUDGE HUFF
I'm sorry, counsel.
(then, happy)
It appears that yours is the last
case of the year. By law, I can't
accept your motions unless you're
simultaneously holding a glass of
eggnog.

Judge Huff turns to his LAW CLERK, a normally humorless
attorney who is suddenly wearing a SANTA HAT. He's pouring a
few glasses of eggnog for the group.

MITCH
My mistake.

As Mitch takes a glass:

JUDGE HUFF
McDeere. I don't believe you've
appeared in my courtroom before.

MITCH
No, Your Honor. My wife and I just
moved back to the area.

JUDGE HUFF
From?

MITCH
Memphis. I was working for a firm
there but... we needed a change.

The clerk hands a glass to the Judge.

JUDGE HUFF
Well on behalf of Boston, sir,
welcome home. I wish you and your
wife a Happy New Year.

As Judge Huff raises his glass, we HEAR A SCHOOL BELL RING
and it takes us to:

INT. BOSTON GRADE SCHOOL - DAY

Abby stands before a class of THIRD GRADE KIDS.

ABBY

Alright, let's quiet down. As you know, this is a special field trip for those who signed up over the break.

STUDENT

Mrs. McDeere? What's the name of the play again?

ABBY

It's called The Nutcracker and it's a ballet, not a play.

(then)

The busses are outside. So let's line up, single file.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOSTON COURTHOUSE - DAY

Mitch exits the courthouse, headed home. Kevin Hanophy exits right behind him:

KEVIN

Hey, Mitch...
(catching up)
Kevin Hanophy.

MITCH

(still moving)
Of the IRS...

KEVIN

Nah, it's the holidays. For the next two weeks, the only thing I represent is peace on earth and good football for all.

OFF Mitch and Kevin as they walk, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. BOSTON GRADE SCHOOL - DAY

On the cut, the doors open. A line of THIRD GRADERS walk excitedly to a YELLOW BUS. And suddenly:

We RACK FOCUS to a NEW ANGLE. Now, we are watching the kids from ABOVE. Instantly, we INTERCUT TO:

EXT. BOSTON ROOFTOP - THAT MOMENT

A terrifying sight: an UNKNOWN MAN, dressed in black, watches the schoolyard. He scans the area with a high-powered RIFLE. After a beat, he looks down at the PHOTO in his hand: it's a PICTURE OF ABBY.

INT. BOSTON GRADE SCHOOL - THAT MOMENT

Inside, Abby supervises the kids as they exit. Finally, she walks to the door. The tension escalates. We have the very clear sense that if she steps outside, she will be shot. We follow to the last moment, when suddenly:

ADMINISTRATOR (O.S.)

Abby?

Abby stops, turns in the doorway. A school ADMINISTRATOR is there with TWO LARGE MEN in suits.

ADMINISTRATOR (CONT'D)

These men are here to see you.

ABBY

Sorry, did we have an appointment?

FBI AGENT

(flashing a badge)

No, Ma'am. But we do need you to come with us.

We INTERCUT THE ASSASSIN, waiting on the rooftop. He can't get a clear shot. OFF Abby, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. BOSTON STREET - THAT MOMENT

Mitch and Kevin on the move. They walk on the sidewalk, alongside a row of parked cars at the curb:

KEVIN

So, any big plans for New Year's?

MITCH

Not really. Abby and I like to keep it simple. A little Szechuan Beef from Wong Boys, maybe a glass of champagne.

KEVIN

I didn't realize you and your wife were senior citizens.

MITCH
Doesn't sound like much, but...
it's kinda become a tradit--

BAM! He doesn't finish. Suddenly, the PARKED CAR beside them EXPLODES!

Glass shatters. Metal twists and burns. The blast rockets them into the air. As they fall to the ground:

ANGLE MITCH: all SOUND IS MUFFLED NOW. His face and torso are cut, his clothes are torn. Trying to focus, he crawls toward Kevin, who isn't moving.

Suddenly, a VAN screeches to a stop. In the blur, Mitch watches the door slide OPEN. TWO FBI AGENTS leap out:

FBI AGENT
Mr. McDeere, FBI--

But Mitch can't hear. For a tense beat, he's not sure who these men are. Finally, they grab him and we:

CUT TO:

INT. FBI VAN #1 - DAY

Abby rides with her two FBI Agents, concerned:

ABBY
I want to stop. I need to call my
husband.

FBI AGENT
No stops. Your husband's with
other agents. We're taking you to
him now.

CUT TO:

INT. FBI VAN #2 - DAY

Mitch rides with the other Agents. He's dazed:

MITCH
What happened?

FBI AGENT
Car bomb. It was detonated by
remote at the exact moment you
passed.

MITCH
Detonated by who?

FBI AGENT
Agent Tarrance will explain when we
get you inside.

The name hits Mitch. His jaw clenches.

MITCH
Tarrance is in Boston?

No response.

MITCH (CONT'D)
What about Kevin? Is he okay?

CUT TO:

INT. FBI BOSTON HEADQUARTERS - DAY

On the cut, an ELEVATOR SPRINGS OPEN. Abby rushes out,
followed by her Agents. Mitch is there, being treated by a
PARAMEDIC. Abby throws her arms around him:

ABBY
Oh, God.

MITCH
I'll be fine.

TARRANCE (O.S.)
You should be dead.

A tense beat. They turn to see SPECIAL AGENT WAYNE TARRANCE,
forties (Ed Harris in the film):

TARRANCE (CONT'D)
Hello, Mitch. Abby.

MITCH
Tarrance.

TARRANCE
What happened was a hit. The order
went out this morning. We just got
there a little late.

MITCH
You're saying there's a contract?
On me?

TARRANCE
Not just you. Both of you. Your
friend Kevin is dead. I'm sorry.
I need you to follow me.

Silence. OFF Mitch and Abby, we:

CUT TO:

INT. FBI BOSTON CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mitch and Abby sit opposite Tarrance and FEDERAL MARSHAL LOUIS COLEMAN, mid-thirties. The CAMERA CIRCLES Mitch and Abby as their world caves in:

TARRANCE

The order came from Joey Morolto himself. We have people inside who say there's paper with both your names on it.

MITCH

Then it's a mistake. What I gave you incriminated the firm. Bendini Lambert and Locke only.

ABBY

The firm was overbilling its clients. That has nothing to do with the Mob.

TARRANCE

That's true. But what you gave us was good. Maybe too good.

A beat.

TARRANCE (CONT'D)

Six days ago, two Bendini partners flipped. They cut a deal with the Department of Justice.

MITCH

Who?

TARRANCE

Oliver Lambert. Royce McKnight.

MITCH

Betrayed Morolto? No way. They're both loyal.

TARRANCE

They're both old, Mitch. They have nothing to lose, you gave us enough to put them away for life.

Mitch absorbs that. Then:

MITCH

What are they saying?

TARRANCE

Everything. A lot more than you ever knew. The truth about lawyers who got killed: Hodge and Kozinski, Robert Lamm, Alice Knauss. Plus a tutorial on Morolto's business.

ABBY

So why us? Why not go after them?

TARRANCE

Oh, they will. But this is the Mob, Abby. They deal in absolutes, base emotions. Anger, Revenge. You set in motion a chain of events that could cripple them.

MITCH

(impatiently)

So what now?

Another beat. Tarrance continues delicately:

TARRANCE

Well... obviously, you can't go home. You can't go to work. Your options are... limited.

(re: Coleman)

This is Louis Coleman. He's a Federal Marshal with the Witness Protection Program.

Mitch is up like a shot--

MITCH

We're out of here.

TARRANCE

Mitch.

MITCH

Come on, Abby, before this genius gets us killed--

TARRANCE

Just listen. Mitch, come on, you need to--

MITCH

What? I need to what, Tarrance? Trust you? Six days. Lambert and McKnight cut a deal six days ago, why weren't we told?

TARRANCE

We didn't know there was a threat to you until this morning.

MITCH

Exactly. If I learned anything in Memphis it's that you are always the last to know.

TARRANCE

That's not fair.

COLEMAN

Mitch. Hey, look, we don't know each other, but you don't want to walk out of here.

MITCH

We'll take our chances.

TARRANCE

And do what? The hit's been commissioned. You walk, we can't promise to protect you.

But Mitch is at the door.

MITCH

You know, Tarrance? How come the only time I believe you is when you can't promise me something?

And he's gone, with Abby close behind. OFF Tarrance, we:

CUT TO:

INT. FBI CORRIDOR - SECONDS LATER

Mitch heads out, followed by Abby:

ABBY

Mitch... will you wait--

MITCH

(escalating)

We don't need protection, Abby. We've come way too far--

ABBY

We need to talk about this.

MITCH

I'll figure it out. I just need time to think--

ABBY

I have to tell you something.

MITCH

We're okay. Maybe I can reason with Morolto, and Ray, he knows people, maybe they can get the contracts called off--

ABBY

I can't run.

MITCH

You can. We can. We did it before.

ABBY

Mitch, I'm pregnant.

WHOOSH. All the air leaves the room. Mitch just stares in silence. A moment ago, he was ready for anything. Now, he feels prepared for nothing. OFF him, knowing their life is about to change forever, we:

CUT TO:

INT. FBI BOSTON CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Tarrance and Coleman gather their things. But after a beat, Mitch and Abby return. Abby grips his hand tightly.

MITCH

(quietly)

Okay. We're listening.

OFF Tarrance and Coleman, we:

CUT TO:

INT. "AIRPORT INN" HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A small, unimpressive room. Mitch sits on a flimsy bed watching Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve. A KNOCK at the door. Mitch opens it, cautiously. Then:

MITCH

Great, thanks. Happy New Year.

Mitch takes a large PLASTIC BAG, closes the door. He yells to Abby and we INTERCUT:

MITCH (CONT'D)

You hungry?

INT. HOTEL ROOM BATHROOM - THAT MOMENT

Abby stands at the sink. The water runs, but she's frozen, staring into the mirror. She's been crying.

ABBY
(pulling together)
Yeah, uh... maybe try Room Service.
Does this place have Room Service?

MITCH (O.S.)
Doubt it. And probably not on New
Year's Eve.

Abby collects herself, exits to the main room:

ABBY
It's getting late. Maybe one of
the guards could--

And now she sees: the small TABLE in the room is DECORATED. Pillowcases double for tablecloths. Two crappy candles are lit. And there, in the center:

ABBY (CONT'D)
How did... that's not...

MITCH
Szechuan Beef from Wong Boys. I
bribed a Marshal, said it was a
tradition.

Mitch next produces a half-bottle of CHAMPAGNE. He pours two glasses. Abby looks wounded. Finally, Mitch realizes:

MITCH (CONT'D)
You... can't drink this, can you...

ABBY
I love you.

MITCH
Hey. Hey... we're okay.

But even Mitch isn't sure tonight. Abby sinks into him. Slowly, the CAMERA WIDENS. Mitch and Abby stand together, everything to each other, in the center of the stark room. OFF them, as Dick Clark celebrates a New Year, we:

SMASH TO BLACK.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

OVER BLACK, a TITLE CARD READS:

September, 2011

As the title card FADES, the number 11 is replaced by a white and pink BIRTHDAY CANDLE shaped like the number 10.

INT. MCDEERE KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

On the cut, Mitch LIGHTS the candle. It sits atop a stack of poorly-made PANCAKES. The birthday girl, CLAIRE McDEERE, ten years old today and dressed for school, looks unimpressed:

CLAIRE

This is my cake? Dad, you said on my birthday we could have cake for breakfast.

MITCH

And you can. That's a cake. A pancake is a cake.

CLAIRE

(over it)

You know, this isn't a courtroom, Dad.

MITCH

I know that.

CLAIRE

Oh yeah, then how come I just got screwed on a technicality?

Mitch smiles. Claire is sharp -- maybe even sharper than both her parents, which says a lot.

MITCH

It's seven a.m., Claire. You can have all the cake you want at your party tomorrow night.

CLAIRE

Yeah, well don't worry about it. I'm not even sure I'm going.

MITCH

(kidding)

I know, right? Presents, cake, all your friends celebrating your very existence? I wouldn't want any part of that either.

CLAIRE
I'm serious.

Claire blows out the candle. Mitch can see something is bothering her. He takes a seat.

MITCH
Okay, so what's the problem?

CLAIRE
I'm stressed out. I'm still new at this school, you know.

MITCH
It's been six months.

CLAIRE
Six months is nothing. I'm taking a big chance here, Dad. I invited all the popular kids.

MITCH
So?

CLAIRE
So it's risky. What if they don't come? I can't handle that kind of public rejection.

MITCH
Won't happen. Hey... you're an amazing kid. Why wouldn't they come?

CLAIRE
I don't know. I try to be cool, but... people don't give you the inside dirt when your Mom's a teacher.

And now Abby enters. She overheard that--

ABBY
Inside dirt? You're ten, Claire. What kind of dirt do you even have when you're ten?

CLAIRE
I don't know, Mom. They won't tell me, that's the point.

MITCH
(with a laugh)
I gotta run.

Mitch grabs his briefcase. He kisses Claire on the forehead, then gives Abby a kiss as he heads out.

ABBY

Hey, we need to talk.

She follows Mitch to the door, where Claire can't hear them. She's suddenly more serious.

MITCH

(knows why)

You went over the books again last night.

ABBY

It's not good, Mitch. It's been six months and we can barely pay for the office space.

MITCH

According to Claire, six months is nothing.

ABBY

You have eight clients, half of which still haven't paid, not that you even ask them to--

MITCH

They will, they just don't have the money right now.

Abby just gives him a look.

MITCH (CONT'D)

Okay, you're right. I only have eight good clients, but one of those eight is Althea Sanderson and she is a great client with a case that's about to settle. Guaranteed.

ABBY

(warmly)

Guaranteed by who?

MITCH

By me. Six figures by the end of the week, I promise. I gotta run.

And he's out the door. Abby just smiles. She loves everything about him, including his never-say-die optimism. Actually, she may love that the most. OFF her, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. MCDEERE HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

A small but beautiful home in Northern Virginia, just outside Washington D.C.

We PICK UP Mitch in his driveway. As he approaches his car, he spots an old PLYMOUTH with tinted windows parked opposite the house. The car screams "Government Vehicle." Mitch walks toward it with a smile:

MITCH

You miss me, Louis. It's okay, you can admit it.

And now, Louis Coleman exits the Plymouth. His Marshal's badge is on his belt.

COLEMAN

Nice place. How's Abby? Claire causing trouble on her birthday?

MITCH

Always.

The two men shake hands.

MITCH (CONT'D)

We're not in the Program anymore, Louis. I hate to break it to you, but I think it's time you start seeing other victims.

COLEMAN

You left the Program. That doesn't mean you're out of danger.

An awkward beat. They've had this discussion before. Coleman never wanted Mitch to leave Witness Protection.

MITCH

Let's not do this again.

COLEMAN

Come on, Mitch. You really think you're safe? You're not. I told you, Joey Morolto--

MITCH

Joey Morolto is dead. He died in prison six months ago. It's over, Louis.

COLEMAN

Why, because you say it is?

MITCH

Look around, man. It's been more than ten years. I don't see anyone out here but you and me.

COLEMAN

I'm a Federal Marshal. With all due respect, I'm worried about a lot more than what you can see.

Coleman takes an ENVELOPE from his jacket pocket. He removes a PHOTO and hands it to Mitch.

COLEMAN (CONT'D)

Your kid's not the only one who had a birthday this week. You know who that is?

ANGLE THE PHOTO: we SEE a polished YOUNG MAN in his mid-twenties, wearing a black suit. The man is shaking hands with an older man who looks like a Gangster.

MITCH

No.

COLEMAN

Joey Morolto Junior.

MITCH

(thrown)

I didn't know the old man had a kid.

COLEMAN

That's because he was only fifteen when his father went to prison.

(a beat)

Junior turned twenty-five this week. And as a birthday gift, they made him boss of the Family.

MITCH

Then I'm sure he has a lot more to worry about than me.

COLEMAN

I don't know. If it were me, the guy who sent my Dad to prison for life?... he'd be right at the top of my list.

MITCH

(calmly)

I gotta go. I have an Arraignment.

COLEMAN

Fathers and sons, Mitch. Trust
me, when you mess with that bond,
anything can happen.

But Mitch is gone, moving back to his car. He gives Coleman
a quick wave. OFF him, we go:

CLOSE ON: an ASHTRAY filled to the brim with CIGARETTE BUTTS
smeared with bright pink LIPSTICK. A woman's hand moves into
frame and tamps out another. Her bright pink nails match the
lipstick. Then REVEAL:

INT. LAW OFFICE OF MITCHELL MCDEERE - DAY

TAMMY HEMPHILL, late-thirties (Holly Hunter in the film).
Her hair is red today, a constricting black leather skirt
hugs her hips and a low-cut top strangles the rest. She
grooves slightly to a desk RADIO quietly playing jazz.

This is the Law Office of Mitchell McDeere, not nearly as
impressive as it sounds. It's a store-front, accessible to
anyone on the street. A plate-glass window streaks light
across the linoleum floor. The front room has a desk for
Tammy and a few chairs for clients.

MITCH

(enters, rushed)

Tell me we got an offer on
Sanderson.

Tammy pops two pieces of NICOTINE GUM in her mouth.

TAMMY

Not yet. Nice of you to show.
I've been calling.

MITCH

It's Claire's birthday. I had to
make her breakfast.

TAMMY

Yeah, well Judge Trott's gonna have
you for breakfast. His clerk wanted
you there at nine.

MITCH

The arraignment's at ten. Why so
early?

TAMMY

She wouldn't say, but it sounded
important. I told her you were on
your way.

Mitch goes to a stack of mail. He leafs through it aggressively.

MITCH

(honest, concerned)
We're in trouble, Tammy. I don't know. I thought I could make this work, but we're running on fumes. I need that settlement.

TAMMY

It'll happen, honey.

MITCH

We need it. Not just for us, for Althea and her family.

He sits on the desk, wheels turning.

MITCH (CONT'D)

I'm telling you. I'm on to something. Althea Sanderson didn't just have a heart attack, the stent they implanted in her chest was defective.

TAMMY

(no idea what that means)
A defective stent. Those sons of bitches.

MITCH

If I'm right, there could be thousands of plaintiffs out there. This could be the biggest tort case of the year.

TAMMY

Then they'll settle. I'm sure the last thing they want is a trial.

Mitch can only hope she's right.

MITCH

Where's Ray?

TAMMY

The other half of the brothers McDeere is in your office. Where he's staying. We're not speaking at the moment.

MITCH

Should I even ask why?

TAMMY
 (sharply)
 Oh, he knows why.

Mitch considers prying further, but doesn't. Instead, he makes a bee-line for the only other room they have:

INT. MITCH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

He OPENS the door to find RAY McDEERE, early forties, inside. Ray's quieter than Mitch, darker, more dangerous. His temper cost him 15 years in prison for Manslaughter in a bar fight, but that was years ago. His years in the Army as a language specialist left him fluent in French and German. He's smart and resourceful, but highly unambitious (a younger David Strathairn in the film).

Ray has his feet on Mitch's desk. He watches a TV MONITOR.

MITCH
 There he is. The hardest working private investigator in the city.

RAY
 (re: the TV)
 You're gonna love this.

Mitch knocks Ray's feet off the desk.

MITCH
 You want me to love something, Ray? Bring me something on Sanderson, a witness, a suppressed document, do some work.

RAY
 Okay, first of all, there are no documents. If the stent's defective a company like Gentech knows better than to leave a paper trail.
 (then)
 And for your information, I am working. I got the video on your lewdness case.

MITCH
 Eddie Deeb's?

RAY
 Man, what a prize this guy. He exposes himself to some kids from Saint Augustine at a pizza place after school. And what's his defense?

MITCH
(knowing it's crazy)
He says he had an allergic reaction
to the cheese in the pizza.

RAY
Some reaction.

Ray hits the PLAY button. We SEE Eddie Deeb in a booth at the pizza joint. He scopes out a few Catholic School girls, trying to control himself. Finally, he leaps up and drops his pants, gyrating as he exposes himself.

MITCH
(with a laugh)
I'll plead it out.
(then)
Hey, what's new with you and Tammy?

RAY
Nothing new. Same old fight.
She's upset because I didn't ask
her to marry me.

MITCH
When, today?

RAY
Ever. I told her, hey look, I got
a fear of commitment.

MITCH
You've been together more than ten
years, Ray. You went into Witness
Protection with the woman.

RAY
Exactly. I love her. I'm not
going anywhere. But the big M?
Nah, not my thing.

Mitch knows better than to argue with Ray. And he's late.
He grabs his trial bag.

MITCH
My arraignment's in half an hour.
I'm going to the pens first.

RAY
Later, bro.

OFF Mitch, heading out, we HEAR a PRISON DOOR SLAM SHUT and:

CUT TO:

INT. COURTHOUSE PENS - DAY

The courthouse jail. These are the "pens" -- a handful of cells adjoining the felony courtrooms. We FIND MITCH in one with SARAH HUGHES, late-twenties. Sarah has girl-next-door looks, but she's frayed, exhausted.

SARAH
(quietly)
You're a defense lawyer?

MITCH
(scanning his notes)
I'm your defense lawyer, Sarah.
Mitch McDeere. The court appointed
me as of last night.

Silence. Sarah looks tired.

SARAH
Look... I don't want to be rude,
but... why you?

The edge in her voice surprises Mitch.

MITCH
No reason. The court has a list of
local lawyers willing to take murder
cases. I guess my name was up next.
That okay?

SARAH
I can't pay you.

MITCH
Don't worry about that. The State
pays me a discounted rate.

SARAH
So you're a discount defense lawyer?

A tense beat.

MITCH
Yes. Let me tell you what happens
now, Sarah. When you go out there,
you'll be charged with murder, that
means the government will do every-
thing it can, will stop at nothing
to put you away for the rest of
your life.

Mitch closes his file, deadly serious now.

MITCH (CONT'D)

That's who you are. Me? I'm just a guy. A guy who knows first-hand what it's like when the government points its finger at you and makes up its mind. So I put my name on a list and here I am.

Another beat. Sarah just stares.

MITCH (CONT'D)

Now. I have questions. Questions like why would a twenty-seven year old insurance broker with a family, a one bedroom apartment, and a chip on her shoulder kill a seventy-one year old woman in her sleep.

SARAH

(from her depths)
I wouldn't. I didn't.

Mitch sizes her up, unsure.

MITCH

Okay. There's no argument on the merits today. The Judge'll hear me on bail and you'll be formally charged.

SARAH

Will he let me go home? At least until the trial?

MITCH

No. Not on a murder charge.

(a beat)

Let's just get through this and then we'll talk, okay?

Sarah nods. Mitch sits for a beat, then heads for the door. But before he goes:

SARAH

Mr. McDeere. Thank you.

CUT TO:

INT. JUDGE TROTT'S COURTROOM - DAY

On the cut, Mitch enters from a side door (to the pens). The room is crowded, filled with lawyers and family members there to watch the Arraignments -- the first time a client or loved one appears before a Judge after an arrest.

Judge Trott presides. He's mid-fifties, a lanky, kind-faced intellectual who was probably a weak and ridiculed child. He wears thin glasses, perched high on his nose. As a new case is called in, Trott spots Mitch:

JUDGE TROTT

Mr. McDeere. So nice of you to join us. And only forty minutes after I ordered you to.

Mitch faces him, awkwardly.

MITCH

Sorry, Your Honor. It's my daughter's birthday.

JUDGE TROTT

Ah, well. Then as a gift to her, I'll refrain from holding her father in contempt.

MITCH

She's ten today, Judge. I promise, she holds me in enough contempt for both of you.

Trott smiles slightly.

MITCH (CONT'D)

I just spoke to my client inside. We're ready when you are.

JUDGE TROTT

Actually, counsel, I wasn't calling about Ms. Hughes. I was calling to assign you a new defendant. Step up, please.

Mitch approaches the bench. What follows is sotto:

MITCH

Your Honor, with the greatest respect, I'm gonna ask you not to do that.

JUDGE TROTT

I haven't even told you what it is.

MITCH

(delicately)

I know. But I just got assigned a new homicide case last night and... to be honest, I don't really have the bandwidth for another.

Judge Trott's eyes narrow.

JUDGE TROTT

In other words, you'd like to reserve that bandwidth for a fully paying client.

MITCH

Yes.

JUDGE TROTT

Times are a little tough, huh?

MITCH

I just started my practice a few months ago.

JUDGE TROTT

And so far, I've been impressed with what I've seen. That's why I thought of you specifically for this.

Mitch nods, but doesn't respond. After a beat:

JUDGE TROTT (CONT'D)

Tell you what. Meet with the client. Afterward, if you don't want the case, I'll assign it to someone else, I promise.

MITCH

Your Honor.

JUDGE TROTT

That's the best deal you're gonna get, counsel. One meeting and let me know your decision.

MITCH

Yes, sir. And where can I find this new client?

JUDGE TROTT

I just called the case into the record. He's standing right there.

A surprised beat. Mitch turns back to the defense TABLE. But there's no defendant present. Instead, all Mitch sees are COURT OFFICERS gathered in the area. But then:

The Court Officers step aside. And finally, through the maze, Mitch sees ANTHONY HEYWOOD, African-American, only THIRTEEN years old, at the table.

Anthony looks scared. He was arrested yesterday, and he's been in custody ever since. Most shockingly, his t-shirt and hands are still spattered with some BLOOD.

Afraid, Anthony looks back to the gallery, where his father (LAVELL HEYWOOD) watches in fear.

OFF Mitch, thrown, we finally:

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. COURTHOUSE PENS - DAY

Mitch is now with Anthony Heywood. The Court Officers have cleared the surrounding pens to give them some privacy. From the start, Mitch has trouble reaching Anthony:

MITCH

Anthony, my name is Mitch McDeere.
I'm an attorney. First of all, are
you okay? Are you hurt or... do
you need anything--

ANTHONY

I want to talk to my Dad.

MITCH

Of course. I can arrange that, but
first we need to talk for a minute.
You're...

(re: the court file)
...thirteen, is that right?

Anthony nods only slightly.

MITCH (CONT'D)

So... eighth grade. You go to
Calvin Coolidge Middle School... is
that where this happened?

ANTHONY

(quiet, in shock)
I have blood on my shirt. I need a
new shirt.

MITCH

I'll get you one. The police,
they'll take the one you're wearing
as evidence.

Another nod.

MITCH (CONT'D)

Can you... Anthony, I think maybe
I can help you. But to do that, I
need to know a little bit about
what happened.
(off his silence)
The police... they say you hurt one
of your classmates.

ANTHONY

Nathan's dead.

MITCH

Nathan. That's right, Nathan Williams. Did you know him? Were you friends?

Anthony shakes no.

MITCH (CONT'D)

You knew him, but you weren't friends?

He shakes yes, but says nothing more.

MITCH (CONT'D)

Okay, let's try this another... the knife. Tell me about the knife. Was it yours?

Anthony looks away, trying not to re-live what happened. But he can't escape it. Finally, he opens up a little:

ANTHONY

We were fighting. I didn't want to, but... when I tried to walk home after school he was waiting.

MITCH

Why?

ANTHONY

I didn't do anything. We were just talking, I swear.

MITCH

Who was talking?

ANTHONY

Me and Hannah. She's a girl in my class. Nathan likes her. He told me to stay away from her, but we were just talking.

MITCH

Okay. So Nathan... he wanted to fight.

ANTHONY

He started pushing me, you know, telling me things. So I hit him... and he had a knife...

The emotion overwhelms him. He's horrified.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

I got it away and I stabbed him. I didn't want to...

(weakly)

I didn't even do anything....

His voice trails off. OFF Mitch, drawn in by him, we:

CUT TO:

INT. COURTHOUSE CORRIDOR - DAY

Mitch is now with Lavell Heywood, forty. He's not a big guy, but there's a power to him. His hands are worn from years of work with a roofing company. He rubs his eyes.

LAVELL

A girl. He killed that boy because he was fighting over a girl?

MITCH

He says it was a misunderstanding. Anthony didn't want to fight. He was protecting himself.

LAVELL

Then why'd they arrest him? If it was self-defense...

MITCH

Mr. Heywood, can I ask... does your son have a knife? A pocket knife, ever seen him with one?

LAVELL

No.

(then, admitting)

But if he does, he knows better than to let me catch him with it, I promise you that.

A beat. There was a menace to that -- a tone that gives some insight into what Lavell is like when he's angry.

LAVELL (CONT'D)

Look, I do what I can, but I can't be on him all the time. His mother doesn't want him. I've been doing this alone most of his life.

MITCH

And you've had problems?

LAVELL

Some. Anthony's a good kid. He just doesn't know what he is yet. He's not the smartest or the best looking, or the toughest... Kids, there's no time to figure things out anymore. People need to know what to make of you.

(a beat)

Anthony's just a little lost.

Mitch absorbs that.

LAVELL (CONT'D)

So what happens now?

MITCH

The next step is a hearing. The prosecution wants to charge your son as an adult.

LAVELL

He's thirteen. Can they do that?

MITCH

Legally, they can try. It's my job to convince the Court to treat him as a Juvenile.

(then)

I won't lie to you, sir. That decision's critical. As a Juvenile, the court's goal is to rehabilitate a child. As an adult, the goal is to punish a criminal.

LAVELL

On a murder charge, that means twenty-five to life.

MITCH

Yes.

A somber beat. At this, a COURT OFFICER approaches:

COURT OFFICER

Counselor. Your arraignment's up. Judge wants you back.

Mitch nods, waves him off.

LAVELL

(simply)

Mr. McDeere, can you help my son?

MITCH

I'll try. I work with my brother
Ray, he's a private investigator.
I'll ask him to start right away.

OFF Lavell, grateful for any hope, we PRE-LAP:

COURT OFFICER (O.S.)

Docket ending 9-2-2. The People
versus Sarah Hughes. Defendant is
charged with murder.

CUT TO:

INT. JUDGE TROTT'S COURTROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mitch returns to the defense table. Sarah stands nervously
before Judge Trott. The prosecutor, DIANE RUCKEYSER, mid-
thirties, jumps in with gusto:

RUCKEYSER

Diane Ruckeyser for the People.
Good morning, Your Honor.

JUDGE TROTT

(not bright or shiny)
Ah, Ms. Ruckeyser. Bright and
shiny as always.
(then)
Before we begin... Mr. McDeere. I
take it you spoke to our young Mr.
Heywood?

MITCH

I did, Your Honor.

JUDGE TROTT

And?

MITCH

I'm in.

JUDGE TROTT

Wonderful. So shines a good deed
in a weary world.

At this, Judge Trott looks into the gallery. He sees Lavell
Heywood returning to a seat in the courtroom.

JUDGE TROTT (CONT'D)

Mr. Heywood....

Mitch turns to face Lavell as the Judge calls to him:

JUDGE TROTT (CONT'D)

You're a lucky man, sir. You'll find a lot of good human beings in this courthouse, and a lot of very talented lawyers. What you won't find are many people who are both.

ANGLE MITCH'S POV. He looks into the gallery toward Lavell Heywood. And suddenly, someone catches his eye. At the back of the courtroom, watching by the doors, is ANDREW BECKETT, mid-thirties. Andrew is balding, with a kind face (think Anthony Edwards). Andrew NODS to Mitch.

JUDGE TROTT (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I think you've got one here in Mr. McDeere. Trust his advice.

Mitch NODS BACK to Andrew, surprised to see him. Andrew gestures for Mitch to meet him outside when he's done. Mitch nods yes, then turns back to the Judge. OFF Andrew, slipping out of the courtroom, we go:

CLOSE ON: TWO GLASSES OF premium SCOTCH. A YOUNG WAITRESS places them on a silver tray and we REVEAL:

INT. CHADWICK HOTEL - DAY

An opulent bar and restaurant near the courthouse. The waitress delivers the drinks to Mitch and Andrew, now part of the lunch crowd. As the waitress departs--

ANDREW

(charming, likeable)

I used to enjoy the fact that the Scotch I drank was older than the waitress who delivered it. Now I just feel old myself.

MITCH

(with a laugh)

You're thirty-five, Andrew.

ANDREW

I'm just saying. Eleven years ago, we were third years at Harvard Law ready to conquer the world.

MITCH

And now?

ANDREW

Now we're "suits" with thinning hair who can't stay awake for the eleven o'clock news.

MITCH
 Speak for yourself.
 (then)
 And your hair's not thinning. You
 have to have hair for it to be
 thinning.

Andrew laughs, taps his glass against Mitch's:

ANDREW
 Good to see you Mitch. How's Abby?

MITCH
 She's great. We've only been in
 town a few months.

ANDREW
 So I hear.
 (off Mitch's surprise)
 Hey, Washington may be the center
 of the free world, but it's also a
 pretty small town. A new firm
 opens up, word gets around.

Mitch considers that. Then:

ANDREW (CONT'D)
 So.. catch me up. Last thing I
 remember, you told every major firm
 in New York to fuck off and took a
 job down South.

MITCH
 Yeah, that didn't work out.

ANDREW
 So where you been?

MITCH
 (covering)
 You know, we moved around a lot.

ANDREW
 And criminal law? Dude, you were a
 tax genius. What's that about?

MITCH
 (simply)
 Things change, Andy.
 (then)
 So what about you? I could make a
car payment for the price of this
 Scotch. I guess business is good.

ANDREW

It is. Actually, that's why I arranged this little reunion.

A beat. The idea that this was more than a chance encounter surprises Mitch.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

I'm a partner over at Kinross and Grant. Maybe you know us. We're a small shop, only forty lawyers.

MITCH

What kind of work?

ANDREW

All civil. All high-level. Corporate litigation, bankruptcy, tax, I-P, Labor, Anti-trust. We handle strictly blue chips and we are one-stop shopping for whatever they need. Except...

MITCH

Except?

ANDREW

Except criminal. These days, someone we represent's always in trouble with somebody. SEC, IRS, the U.S. Attorney--

MITCH

And you're coming to me?

ANDREW

Up to now, I've been farming those cases out. My partners think maybe it's time to start a criminal division in-house.

(then)

I asked around. You've made quite an impression in just a few months. And I'd rather give the spot to an old friend--

MITCH

(delicately)

I don't think so, Andy.

ANDREW

Why not?

MITCH

I just went out on my own. I'm not really looking to join a firm.

ANDREW

And I respect that. But we're a good group.

(with charm)

Hey, at least come see the place. You can't drink my Scotch and call me bald and then pass.

OFF Mitch, with a laugh, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. CALVIN COOLIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

On the cut, Ray exits his car outside the shabby public school. The building itself looks exhausted: a worn brick structure with a huge black-top yard in front. A ten-foot tall chain-link FENCE surrounds the lot. A sign attached says: Calvin Coolidge Middle School, No Visitors Without Authorization."

Undaunted, Ray walks to a DOOR in the fence and enters. He strides across the empty yard, arriving at the center where police have taped off a small CRIME SCENE. Nathan Williams' blood has been washed away, but still stains the pavement.

Suddenly, we SMASH TO A FLASHBACK. In quick flashes, Ray envisions the killing just as Anthony described. The two boys fight in the empty yard. As Nathan falls, we:

RESUME on Ray. He takes out his digital CAMERA as:

MANUEL (O.S.)

Excuse me. Hey. You can't do that.

Ray turns to see MANUEL REYES, the school SECURITY GUARD approaching. Manuel, forties, wears a uniform. He's tough but not athletic; the type who shaved off his beloved Fu-Manchu years ago in an effort to clean up his act.

MANUEL (CONT'D)

No reporters, man. I'm supposed to send all you guys to the office.

RAY

(going with it)

Seriously? I just need one good shot. The story's gotta be in by five.

MANUEL

Can't help you, Chief. As it is,
I'm lucky I still have a job after
what happened.

RAY

Yeah, okay, sure, no problem.
(extends his hand)
Ray McDeere.

MANUEL

Manny Reyes.

Manuel shakes his hand. As he does, the CUFF of his shirt rises to expose a small TATTOO in the web of his thumb and forefinger. The NUMBER 63. Ray knows it instantly.

RAY

Sixty-three.

Manuel pulls his hand back.

MANUEL

Year I was born.

RAY

They believe that? The school. I mean, I assume that's what you told them to get this job, but we both know it isn't true.

Manuel just stares.

RAY (CONT'D)

The six-three. It's a police precinct up in Riverside Heights. It's also the street gang that runs that area.

(off his look)

I did time inside at Brushy Mountain. I knew a lot of good people with that tattoo.

A tense beat.

MANUEL

I left that behind a long time ago.
What'd you go in for?

RAY

Manslaughter.

Silence. The two men hold a look. Manuel's thrown, but he doesn't flinch. Instead, he deadpans:

MANUEL

Did the guy deserve it?

RAY

Hell yes. Doesn't mean I don't regret it. But shit happens when you're young and stupid.

That finally softens Manuel.

MANUEL

I heard that. So... you're not a reporter?

RAY

Private investigator for the defense. Any chance you could tell me what happened?

MANUEL

Cops said not to talk about it.
(then, admitting)
Truth is, I didn't see it go down. I was over at the food truck getting some coffee. When I turned around, they were already running.

RAY

Who was running?

MANUEL

Both of them. Anthony Heywood, the one they arrested, and Dougie Breen.

RAY

Two kids. You're sure?

MANUEL

Course I'm sure. I see the same kids every day. I turned around in time to see Nathan fall. Those two took off like a shot.

A stunned beat. Ray looks over to the FOOD TRUCK. As he envisions what happened, we SMASH TO A FLASHBACK. Ray sees Manuel turn back to the yard. At that moment, Nathan goes down and TWO BOYS bolt away. Then RESUME on Ray.

RAY

Thanks.

OFF Ray, and this new account, we:

CUT TO:

INT. LAW OFFICE OF MITCHELL MCDEERE - LATE AFTERNOON

Mitch and Ray are back at the office. Tammy is on the PHONE at her desk, writing notes quickly. Ray hands Mitch a JUNIOR HIGH-SCHOOL YEARBOOK with a PHOTO circled. A young-looking, lanky, DOUGLAS BREEN smiles for the camera.

MITCH

Two kids?

RAY

His name's Douglas Breen. Same age and grade as your client.

MITCH

You talk to him?

RAY

I tried. He only lives a few blocks from the school so I walked over to the house.

MITCH

How'd you get the address?

RAY

Let's just say the school Security Guard and I bonded.

(then)

I talked to Dougie Breen's father. He said the U.S. Attorney warned him someone from the defense might come by.

MITCH

So the prosecution knows he exists.

RAY

Definitely. I asked for an interview, but the father refused. Gave me a speech about his legal rights. It took a lot of self-control not to hit him.

MITCH

The question is, if he was also running why didn't they arrest him with Anthony? They must be using him as a witness.

RAY

Bottom line, bro, the question is, why'd your thirteen-year old client lie to you?

Mitch knows he's right.

MITCH

I don't know. He never mentioned Breen. There must be a reason--

At this, Tammy HANGS UP THE PHONE. She interrupts, waving her pen like a cigarette--

TAMMY

We got a problem. First of all, that conversation lasted forty-two minutes and I'm not equipped to go that long without a cigarette.

(then)

Second, that was the Vice Principal at Coolidge Middle. He gave me the history on Anthony Heywood.

MITCH

He's thirteen. How much "history" can he have?

TAMMY

Oh, this boy's got a file. No serious violence, but he's known to have issues.

RAY

Who doesn't?

TAMMY

He's barely passing his classes. Profanity, threats to students, last year, he threw a social-studies book at a female teacher.

MITCH

(dreading the answer)

And what about the victim?

TAMMY

Nathan Williams? Good student, good kid. Maybe not an angel, but from what I hear, everyone loved him. The V-P called his death a "heartbreaking loss."

Great. Not what Mitch wanted to hear. In frustration--

MITCH

Look, I met with Anthony Heywood. He looked me in the eye and said it was self-defense.

RAY
Then maybe it was.

MITCH
Or maybe this kid's sharper than I
gave him credit for.

After a beat, Mitch leaps up. As he grabs his coat--

MITCH (CONT'D)
Let's find out. Tammy call the
pens, tell them I'm on my way. If
this kid's lying, I'll know by
tonight.

OFF Mitch, as he blows out the door, we:

CUT TO:

INT. COURTHOUSE PENS - EVENING

We're back in Anthony's cell. Official business is done for
the day, so it's quieter. Mitch stares at Anthony for a long
beat, then another. Finally:

MITCH
Let me explain something, Anthony.
I'm a defense attorney. That means
I'm here to defend you.

ANTHONY
I know.

MITCH
No, I don't think you do. Because
if you did, you'd be helping me, not
lying to me.

A tense beat.

MITCH (CONT'D)
You told me this was a fight. Just
you and Nathan in the yard. What'd
you think? I'd just take your word
for it? I wouldn't even try to
check that out?

ANTHONY
It's true.

MITCH
(quiet power)
It's not true. I know about Dougie
Breen.

Silence. Anthony says nothing.

MITCH (CONT'D)

I know he was there. He's a witness against you. So you tell me, when the Prosecutor puts him up on that stand, how am I supposed to defend you when I have no idea what he's gonna say?

Anthony looks away. Then, low--

ANTHONY

I didn't [*muffled response*].

MITCH

I didn't catch that.

And now Anthony looks right at Mitch:

ANTHONY

(stronger)

I said I didn't think he'd say anything.

Wow. His words reverberate in the stark cell.

MITCH

Everyone deserves a defense, Anthony. And I will defend you at this hearing tomorrow. But to do that, I need to know what I'm walking into.

Anthony considers that. He suddenly seems older, more calculating.

ANTHONY

I wasn't fighting Nathan. Nathan had nothing to do with this.

MITCH

Then why is he dead?

A reluctant beat. Then:

ANTHONY

Dougie and I got into it after school. It was personal. Nathan just happened to see it jump off and had to get involved.

MITCH

Involved how?

ANTHONY

He pulled me off Dougie. Told me to leave him alone. I told him to mind his fucking business.

(then, remembering)

But he wouldn't. He said he was making this his business. So...

His voice trails off.

MITCH

The knife. It was yours, wasn't it?

But Anthony never even hears the question. He's off in his own mind, re-living the murder. After a long beat:

ANTHONY

I warned him. But Nathan had to be Nathan.

(then)

Man, and that kid was supposed to be smart. Yeah, look how smart he was.

He's chilling. In part, a remorseless killer. But also a frightened teenage boy trying to justify an unspeakable act so he can live with himself.

OFF Mitch and Anthony, in silence, we:

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. MCDEERE KITCHEN - NIGHT

We're back at the McDeere house, a genuinely warm and inviting place. Abby stands at the kitchen counter making dinner. Claire is at the table doing homework. After a beat, Claire looks up at her mother:

CLAIRE

Hey, Mom. If you had a dollar and you had to split it between all your friends, would you want a hundred pennies or a single bill?

ABBY

Why?

CLAIRE

What do you mean, why? It's a game, just go with it.

ABBY

I don't know.
(then)
I'll take four quarters.

CLAIRE

(exasperated)
No, it's... you know, I really think sometimes you want me to have mental problems.

ABBY

Excuse me?

CLAIRE

It's a choice, Mom. You have to take pennies or a dollar.

ABBY

Well, it's ridiculous. I don't want to have only one friend. But I don't need a hundred either. I want four.

CLAIRE

(ignoring that)
Yeah, well I'd take the pennies. I think I want to be a people person.

Abby gets a kick out of that.

ABBY

Okay, people person, books away,
dinner's ready. I'll go get your
father.

With a smile, Abby heads for the HOME OFFICE and we:

CUT TO:

INT. MCDEERE HOME OFFICE - THAT MOMENT

A small den, converted into the McDeere home office. Mitch sits at a COMPUTER SCREEN. He has LEGAL TEXTS and a YELLOW PAD in front of him, but he's not working.

ANGLE THE COMPUTER: on the screen, we see the website for KINROSS AND GRANT, Andrew's law firm. The site is modern and polished. A sleek conference table gleams in photos of a beautiful library. Suddenly:

ABBY (O.S.)

I think we're raising a politician.
Either that or a Cruise Director.
Your daughter wants to be around
people.

Instantly, Mitch SWITCHES THE SCREEN to conceal the law firm's page. He goes back to the books on the desk.

MITCH

Hey.

ABBY

Tell me you got the settlement
offer on Sanderson and we're rich.

MITCH

Not yet.

ABBY

How's it going? You worried about
the hearing tomorrow?

MITCH

(quiet, reflective)

I've represented plenty of guilty
clients, Abby, but never this young.
You should've seen him. This kid
had absolutely no remorse.

ABBY

He's thirteen, Mitch. Even if he
felt it, he probably wouldn't know
how to express it.

Abby goes to Mitch, drapes her arms around him.

ABBY (CONT'D)

If it helps, there's a lot of new research for teachers saying teenage brains are undeveloped.

MITCH

(re: the papers around)
I've got it. An immature pre-frontal cortex. Some say it lowers impulse-control, judgment, empathy, risk-assessment--

ABBY

But you're not buying it.

MITCH

Honestly?

(a beat)

Anthony Heywood stabbed his classmate in the neck with a pocket knife. That didn't happen because his brain was undercooked.

ABBY

Maybe not. So what now? Whatever problems he has, Mitch, they won't get better in the adult system and you know that.

MITCH

So every kid's redeemable. You really believe that?

ABBY

Yes. And so do you.

A quiet beat. Mitch isn't so sure tonight. Finally:

MITCH

The worst part is, to make their case, the prosecution has to put Dougie Breen on the stand.

ABBY

So?

MITCH

So... to do my job, I have to destroy a thirteen year old boy who's telling the truth.

OFF Abby, we go:

CLOSE ON: the frightened face of DOUGIE BREEN. He's thirteen, slight, smart but not a classic nerd -- the kind of kid who's lousy at baseball, but loves it and memorizes the stats. Then PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

INT. JUDGE TROTT'S COURTROOM - DAY

Dougie sits in the WITNESS BOX, which looks massive around him. All parties are present, including Mitch and Anthony at the defense table. U.S. Attorney Diane Ruckeyser questions Dougie on direct. The room is rapt.

DOUGIE

It was just supposed to be a joke.
You know, a way for me to get back
at Anthony.

RUCKEYSER

And when you say Anthony, who
exactly do you mean?

DOUGIE

Anthony Heywood. He's sitting
right there.

RUCKEYSER

May the record reflect that the
witness has identified the defendant,
Anthony Heywood.

(then)

And Douglas, how do you know
Anthony? Is he a friend of yours?

DOUGIE

No. We're in the same class,
but... I'm not really cool enough
to be his friend. He pretty much
only knows who I am because it's
his mission in life to harass me.

MITCH

Objection.

RUCKEYSER

The witness can characterize his
relationship with the defendant--

MITCH

The witness can do that without
sarcastic comments about my client's
mission in life.

JUDGE TROTT

Objection sustained.

Ruckeyser decides to move on.

RUCKEYSER

Douglas, you said you were trying to "get back at" Anthony. Please tell us what you mean.

Dougie's reluctant. Finally, after a moment:

DOUGIE

We read this book in English... Native Son. We all had to read it and write an essay about it. A few days before, I heard Anthony saying in the hall how he really liked it. How it was the first book he ever wanted to read.

RUCKEYSER

Go on.

DOUGIE

The day we got our essays back... Anthony got his and I saw his face. I mean, he never gets good grades, but usually he doesn't care. This time, he was mad. When class was over, he crumpled it up and threw it away.

RUCKEYSER

And what did you do?

DOUGIE

I got it from the garbage and... it was stupid, I know, but I put it on the bulletin board in the hall.

An awkward beat.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)

He got an F. Everybody was laughing, but I didn't think anyone knew it was me. But then... when I left school, Anthony was waiting...

RUCKEYSER

What did he do?

DOUGIE

He didn't say much. He just started hitting me. I was on the ground and... he was kicking me... that's when Nathan came.

RUCKEYSER

Nathan Williams. He was also in your class?

DOUGIE

(getting more emotional)

Yeah. Nathan pulled him off me, told Anthony to stop. I could hear them yelling... and then Anthony had a knife.

(a beat)

I saw him stab Nathan... and then he ran.

A tense beat. Ruckeyser lets his testimony ring. Finally, she yields the floor.

RUCKEYSER

No further questions.

Mitch rises. Behind Ruckeyser in the gallery, he can see RICHARD and KAREN WILLIAMS (Nathan's parents), overcome by grief. This won't be pleasant. After a long silence:

MITCH

You hated Anthony, didn't you, Dougie?

(off his silence)

Come on. You weren't cool enough to be his friend and you resented that.

(then)

You wanted to humiliate him. That's why you posted that essay. To get revenge.

RUCKEYSER

Objection. Does counsel have a question?

MITCH

Here's my question. How much did you hate him, Dougie? How much do you hate him now? Enough to lie to this court?

DOUGIE

I'm telling the truth.

MITCH

(stronger)

The truth is, you were on the ground when Nathan attacked my client.

ANGLE THE CROWD: in the gallery, Richard and Karen Williams stiffen at the suggestion.

RUCKEYSER

Objection. There's no testimony the defendant was attacked.

MITCH

The testimony's unclear, Your Honor, that's my point.

(to Dougie)

You said Anthony was kicking you, correct?

DOUGIE

Yeah.

MITCH

So you were covering up, weren't you? Using your arms to protect your head and body?

DOUGIE

I guess.

MITCH

So you never saw what happened.

DOUGIE

(pushing back)

I heard Nathan come over. He told Anthony to stop.

MITCH

You heard Nathan, I understand that. I also understand you heard someone say the word stop.

DOUGIE

It was Nathan--

MITCH

What did he say, Dougie? What were his exact words?

Dougie just stares.

MITCH (CONT'D)

You don't know. The fact is, Nathan's the one who threatened my client--

DOUGIE

I never heard that.

MITCH
 (stronger)
 Which doesn't mean it didn't
 happen.

RUCKEYSER
 Objection. Argumentative--

MITCH
 (powering on)
 What about the knife, Dougie? You
 said you looked up just in time to
 see Anthony stab Nathan?

DOUGIE
 That's right.

MITCH
 But you never saw Anthony pull that
 knife, did you?
 (off his silence)
 The fact is, Nathan pulled that
 knife. Nathan's the one who took a
 simple fight and turned it into a
 deadly encounter--

DOUGIE RUCKEYSER
No. Objection.

MITCH (CONT'D)
 My client was lucky enough to grab
 that knife away and use it in self-
 defense--

RUCKEYSER
 Your Honor, this is outrageous--

And now, Mitch turns it up another gear:

MITCH
 Outrageous? The People are seeking
 to treat my client, a thirteen-year-
 old boy, as an adult--

RUCKEYSER
 Because this was an adult act of
 violence--

MITCH
 Your Honor, this is a child. If he
created the situation, if he sought
 it out and killed because he wanted
 to or enjoyed it, they might have
 an argument here--

RUCKEYSER

He was beating a classmate--

MITCH

He was responding to a public humiliation. And this so-called murder was in self-defense--

RUCKEYSER

That's crap. Nathan Williams is the victim here, Your Honor. His parents are here in the courtroom and they deserve--

RUCKEYSER (CONT'D)

--better than to sit here and hear their son being slandered--

MITCH

My client's father is also here in the courtroom and he deserves--

JUDGE TROTT

Alright!

(then, to Mitch)

That's enough, counsel. You've made your point.

Silence. Mitch stands down. In the stillness, he turns to see Richard and Karen Williams, devastated by his cross.

JUDGE TROTT (CONT'D)

I'm reserving judgment on the status of the defendant. You'll have my decision in the next few days. In the meantime... on the issue of bail...

The mention of bail surprises Mitch. He assumed Anthony would be held until his status was determined.

RUCKEYSER

Your Honor, the People request that decision be deferred--

MITCH

There's no reason to defer. Mr. Heywood's here and prepared to take full responsibility.

JUDGE TROTT

Fine.

RUCKEYSER

(more desperate)

Your Honor, please. This is a murder charge.

JUDGE TROTT

And you'll have your day in court.
But I won't hold the defendant like
an adult until I've decided whether
or not he is one.

(then)

The defendant is released into his
father's custody.

MITCH

Thank you, Your Honor.

And there you go. Mitch knows he's done his job well... and
he's not happy about it. OFF Anthony, then Richard and Karen
Williams, we:

CUT TO:

INT. COURT CORRIDOR - DAY

After the hearing, Mitch stands in the court corridor with
Lavell Heywood. We PICK THEM UP as the two men shake hands
and part. As Mitch moves down the hall, he spots Karen and
Richard Williams nearby. As he goes past them, Karen can't
contain her anger. As she approaches--

KAREN

(with quiet power)

Shame on you, Mr. McDeere.

Mitch stops, thrown. Richard tries to stop her--

RICHARD

Karen.

KAREN

You didn't know my son.

MITCH

Mrs. Williams. I'm an attorney.
I'm a defense attorney.

KAREN

(escalating)

No. An attorney argues facts. He
doesn't say whatever needs to be
said so his client goes free.

RICHARD

Come on, let's not do this...

He tries to pull her away.

KAREN

Let go of me.

(then, to Mitch)

Nathan was a beautiful boy. He was good. He died trying to help someone, but you don't care.

KAREN (CONT'D)

My son never had a knife, he could never kill--

MITCH

Mrs. Williams, I am so sorry for your loss--

KAREN (CONT'D)

No, no. Don't you tell me you're sorry.

(low, from her depths)

What if it was your child?

She's shaking, lost. Richard holds her. She fights for a moment, but then gives in. He pulls her away, leaving Mitch in the hall. As they go, Richard and Mitch hold a look. We can see the hurt and sense of helplessness in Richard's eyes. OFF Mitch, standing in silence, we finally:

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

EXT. MCDEERE HOUSE - BACKYARD - EVENING

Claire's BIRTHDAY PARTY underway. Claire takes a birthday GIFT from a young GIRL. She then runs to FIND ABBY, who is sitting at table nearby. A stack of presents is forming:

CLAIRE

Mom! This one's from Julia Heeney.

ABBY

Julia, got it.

CLAIRE

(hushed, happy)

They came, Mom. Everyone I invited.
This is huge.

And Claire's off again, rejoining the other girls in the yard. It's a beautiful, suburban party. Abby looks around at the tables with food, the lights, the banner wishing her daughter a "HAPPY 10TH BIRTHDAY" and for the first time in awhile, she feels... calm. After a beat, she notices that Mitch isn't in the yard. OFF her:

INT. MCDEERE LIVING ROOM - THAT MOMENT

Mitch stands on a small STEP-LADDER at a BOOKSHELF.

We hear sounds of the party outside. Mitch holds a copy of NATIVE SON, which he found sitting on a top shelf. After a beat, Abby enters. She watches him, then:

ABBY

What'cha got there?

Mitch looks up. He shows her the cover: the silhouette of a young black man staring down at his open hands.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Native Son. A classic, but...
maybe a little heavy for a ten-year-old's birthday.

MITCH

You know it?

ABBY

I taught it. Not for awhile, but it was required reading at my school in Boston. Why?

MITCH

Anthony Heywood. It made an impression. It's the only book he ever wanted to read.

ABBY

It's about growing up poor and black in 1930s Chicago.

MITCH

Guess he could relate to the journey.

ABBY

The journey and now the ending. The lead character can't escape his circumstances. He ends up going to prison for murder.

Mitch absorbs that. After a somber beat:

MITCH

You're right. A little heavy for a birthday party.

ABBY

(with a smile)

Come on, I need your help with the cake.

CUT TO:

INT. MCDEERE KITCHEN - EVENING

Mitch stands at the counter. He puts ten CANDLES on an enormous BIRTHDAY CAKE, a feat of engineering with pink and white icing. There's MUSIC playing and Mitch can HEAR the girls having fun outside. As he works, we:

ANGLE MITCH'S POV. He glances out the KITCHEN WINDOW, which looks out on the street in front of the house. And suddenly, something catches his eye:

A CAR IS PARKED across the street, some distance from the house. In the street light, Mitch can just make out the FORM OF A MAN in the driver's seat. His dark shadow is perfectly still. OFF Mitch, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. MCDEERE HOUSE - SECONDS LATER

Mitch steps out of the house. He looks down the block toward the car, but it's too far away to see clearly.

After a beat, he takes a step or two in the car's direction when:

The engine STARTS. Mitch freezes. Instead of moving toward Mitch, the car backs calmly into a driveway and pulls away in the opposite direction.

What just happened? Was someone watching the house? Was it just Louis? Is there really a threat or did he imagine the danger? As Mitch stands a few steps outside the house:

ABBY (O.S.)
Hey, everything okay?

Mitch turns to SEE Abby at their front door.

MITCH
Yeah... it's fine.

ABBY
Well, come on. We're all ready to sing.

And Abby disappears, back inside. OFF Mitch, the SOUND OF TWO DOZEN GIRLS singing HAPPY BIRTHDAY takes us to:

EXT. MCDEERE HOUSE - BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Mitch and Abby deliver the glowing cake to Claire. She's surrounded by friends, glowing herself, happier than ever.

The CAMERA PUSHES CLOSE on Mitch, taking in the moment. His family's come so far since Memphis. All those years running from the past... what a feeling to finally stop running. As Claire blows out the candles and the group cheers, we:

CUT TO:

INT. MCDEERE HOUSE - EVENING

The same cake, but most of it's gone. The party's over. Mitch and Abby survey the mess: plastic cake plates and torn wrapping paper, etc. Mitch swipes a finger into the last of the cake and falls into a chair opposite Abby:

MITCH
You know, I don't think I've ever seen Claire this happy.

ABBY
Yeah. It makes no sense. How did two of the most independent-minded people on the planet give birth to such a... joiner?

MITCH

(with a laugh)
Speaking of which... I was gonna
tell you this before, but I already
knew what you'd say.

ABBY

Uh oh, that's never the start of a
good conversation.

MITCH

It's not a big deal.

ABBY

Let me guess. It's about that
firm. The one you looked up on the
computer.

MITCH

(surprised)
Oh, you saw that.

ABBY

I teach fifth graders, babe. You
don't move half as fast as they do.

MITCH

Like I said, it's not a big deal.
I ran into Andrew Beckett at the
courthouse. You remember--

ABBY

Andrew Beckett from law school?

MITCH

He asked about you. Sends his best.

ABBY

And he works at that firm?

MITCH

It's called Kinross and Grant.
Forty lawyers, all high-end civil
cases.

ABBY

(concerned)
Did he ask where you've been?

MITCH

He asked. Don't worry, he didn't
know anything about Memphis. And
he didn't want to talk about the
past.

(MORE)

MITCH (CONT'D)

(then)

His partners want to start a Criminal Division at his firm. He offered me the job.

Abby considers that. As expected, she's against the idea, but she stays low key:

ABBY

And you turned him down.

MITCH

Yes.

(then, admitting)

But... he made me promise to think about it. And he wants us both to come see the office.

ABBY

Mitch.

MITCH

I knew you wouldn't like the idea.

ABBY

We just started a firm. Your own firm.

MITCH

And I told him that.

An awkward beat. They're on the same page. But Abby's sharp enough to sense there's more to this.

ABBY

But you're telling me because... there's something about it that interests you.

MITCH

Maybe.

ABBY

Why? Mitch, you're not built for those firms. People who do well at firms have a pack mentality.

MITCH

I get that.

ABBY

Then help me understand. Why would you want to be part of that--

MITCH

I don't know. Maybe because I never was. Maybe because I'm the son of a coal miner and a waitress, not a bank president and a socialite like you--

ABBY

So what, you need to be around entitled people, to make yourself feel worthy--

MITCH

It's not about worth--

ABBY

Then what--

MITCH

It's about potential. It's about being someone, being relevant.

A quiet beat. Then, softer:

MITCH (CONT'D)

Look. I was top-of-my-class at Harvard. I wanted things. I wanted to do things that mattered, make law that mattered. That was taken from me, taken from us.

The PHONE RINGS at the house.

ABBY

You can do it on your own.

The PHONE RINGS again.

MITCH

And I will. I guess there's just part of me that still wonders--

(snatching the phone)

Hello?

(then)

Tammy. Hey, can I call you back we're right in the middle--

(a beat)

Okay, take it easy. About what? No, no, no. You stay there. I'm on my way.

Mitch hangs up.

ABBY

Tammy's still at the office?

MITCH

She never left. She said someone's there to see me. Someone I need to talk to now.

OFF Abby, then Mitch on the move, we:

CUT TO:

INT. LAW OFFICE OF MITCHELL MCDEERE - NIGHT

Mitch arrives to find Tammy waiting at the door. She unlocks it, ushering him in. The office appears empty:

MITCH

You okay?

TAMMY

(quickly)

I was here with Ray. I've been trying to stay angry at him but God knows I cannot stay mad at that boy. We were... "making up" and he just walked in the door.

MITCH

Where is he?

TAMMY

In your office. Don't worry, Ray's watching him.

Mitch shoots a look toward his office door.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

I told him he needed to make an appointment. He said no, he had to talk to you right away.

OFF Mitch, we:

CUT TO:

INT. MITCH'S OFFICE - SECONDS LATER

On the cut, Mitch enters his office. Ray is at the desk, leaning back, contemplating what he's just heard. Sitting opposite him is an UNKNOWN MAN, thirties. He's a powerful guy, not physically huge but ripped. The top of an unseen TATTOO creeps along the side of his neck.

RAY

Hey, bro. Sorry to call, but you need to hear this for yourself.

The Unknown Man stands. Ray does the introductions:

RAY (CONT'D)
Derek Little, this is Mitch
McDeere. Okay, Derek, tell him
what you just told me.

DEREK
You're McDeere? Anthony Heywood's
lawyer?

Mitch didn't expect to hear Anthony's name. He replaces Ray
behind his desk and sits. Ray moves off to the side.

MITCH
This is about Anthony?

RAY
Derek works for Allway Supply.
It's a small construction company
owned by Richard Williams.

MITCH
Nathan's father?

DEREK
Mr. Williams came to see me today.
Told me about his kid getting killed
and how you twisted things--

MITCH
Look, Derek. I don't know what
you're doing here--

DEREK
He said the kid who did it was
gonna walk. The judge just let him
go home or something. He's taking
it hard.

MITCH
I understand that, but--

DEREK
(stronger)
No, I don't think you do. He
offered me ten thousand dollars to
kill your client.

Whoosh. A rush of adrenaline shoots through Mitch. A
stunned beat. Then, finally:

MITCH
When did this happen?

DEREK
A few hours ago.

MITCH
And why'd he come to you?

DEREK
(flatly)
Because some people are uncomfortable around violence. I don't happen to be one of those people. I've done some things and he knows that.

MITCH
Why come to me?

DEREK
Because I had to do something. Look, I like the man. He's been good to me. So I'm sure as hell not going to the police.
(then)
But every man draws his own line. And mine is this: I don't kill kids.

RAY
Good line.

DEREK
I think so. Problem is, not everyone shares my moral values. If I don't do it, he'll find someone who will.

MITCH
You thought he was serious?

DEREK
I'm here, aren't I?
(then)
I talked to the man. I looked in his eyes. It won't be over for him until Anthony Heywood is dead.

OFF Mitch and Ray, in shock, we:

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

FADE IN:

INT. MCDEERE KITCHEN - NIGHT

The group has gathered back at the house. Signs of Claire's party still litter the kitchen. Abby pours a cup of coffee. Ray sits on the kitchen counter, swinging his legs casually. Mitch and Tammy are at the table. With urgency--

ABBY

Richard Williams hired a hitman?

MITCH

He's not a hitman, he's an employee -- a construction worker.

RAY

A construction worker open to killing people, he just prefers they be old enough to vote.

TAMMY

(explaining to Abby)

He doesn't kill kids. Heart-warming, right?

Abby's speechless for a moment.

MITCH

It's crazy. Richard Williams is forty-three. The man runs his own company. He's got a wife and a daughter.

RAY

An eight year old daughter.

MITCH

Most guys his age from where he grew up? They've been arrested half a dozen times. He has no criminal record.

ABBY

Meaning what, you don't think he'd go through with it?

MITCH

(ruefully)

Meaning... he's a good man. It took a lot of desperation to make him even consider it.

A quiet beat. Abby picks up on the tone in his voice. She can tell that he feels partly responsible.

ABBY

Hey. You did not drive him to this. You had a legal obligation to defend your client and I don't need to tell you that.

Mitch just nods. She's right, but that's little consolation now.

TAMMY

(bad under pressure)
Can I smoke in here?

MITCH

No.

ABBY

No.

RAY

The question is, what are we dealing with? An angry father who shot off his mouth in a moment of rage or a serious threat?

ABBY

How can we know that?

TAMMY

We can't.

But then, something clicks for Mitch:

MITCH

Maybe we can. Derek told Richard he needed time to decide. They're meeting in the morning.

TAMMY

So?

MITCH

So maybe we keep the meeting. Maybe Derek won't do the job, but he recommends someone who will.

Mitch POINTS to Ray.

RAY

Oh, and because I'm the only one with a Manslaughter conviction and prison time, you automatically think of me.

(then)

(MORE)

RAY (CONT'D)
Just kidding. I think it's
brilliant.

TAMMY
Can we really do that?

MITCH
Damn right. Richard Williams is
a decent guy. We're not going to
the cops until we know if he's
for real.

They all exchange looks, agreed on the plan. Then, suddenly,
Claire ENTERS THE KITCHEN. They immediately stop talking --
and Claire senses that something is wrong.

CLAIRE
What's going on?

ABBY
Nothing, honey. It's late, you
need something?

Claire's eyes narrow.

CLAIRE
(suddenly upset)
No... no, no, no. You cannot do
this to me again!

Claire storms out the door.

MITCH
I've got her.

And Mitch follows after Claire, exiting out to the:

INT. MCDEERE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mitch trails after Claire:

MITCH
Hey. You want to tell me what that
was about?

CLAIRE
(wheeling on him)
Why? You never tell me anything.
(then)
I'm not stupid, Dad. I know what's
going on.

MITCH
Claire.

CLAIRE

All four of you? Whispering in the kitchen in the middle of the night? I've seen it before. We're leaving aren't we--

MITCH

Nobody's leaving--

CLAIRE

(ignoring that)

You can't do this. We just got here. I like it here. I finally have friends--

MITCH

Okay, first of all, you've always had friends. And second, if you'll take two seconds to breathe, you'll be extremely relieved because we're not leaving.

A beat. Claire stares back at him. Reluctantly, she takes a deep breath.

MITCH (CONT'D)

This is our home. That's not changing. We were discussing a problem I'm having at work.

CLAIRE

You promise?

MITCH

I promise we're done running. Okay?

The relief floods over her. In a rare display of vulnerability, she throws her arms around him and hugs as hard as she can. OFF this, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. BURGER KING RESTAURANT - DAY

QUICK SHOTS establish the restaurant, on the corner of a rundown block in Washington D.C. A young MOTHER exits and runs to catch the city bus at the corner. A few KIDS on their way to school pass a HOMELESS MAN outside.

INT. MITCH'S CAR - THAT MOMENT

And now we FIND MITCH sitting in his car, positioned so he can SEE INTO the windows.

Mitch puts on a small EARPIECE with a MICROPHONE:

MITCH
Can you hear me?

Instantly, we INTERCUT TO:

INT. BURGER KING RESTAURANT - THAT MOMENT

The CAMERA FINDS RAY at a booth in the corner. He scans the crowded restaurant, then looks out the window to where Mitch is watching:

RAY
Affirmative. We are all systems
go, little brother.

The AUDIO CRACKLES a little too much.

MITCH
You broke up a little on that.

RAY
Damn, hang on.
(adjusting his mic)
This isn't my equipment. I traded
a guy for a couple of designer suit
knockoffs.

MITCH
Where did you get -- you know what,
don't even tell me.

At this, Mitch sees Richard Williams approach the Burger King. As he enters--

MITCH (CONT'D)
He's here. Ray, you sure you can
handle this?

But it's too late now. In the restaurant, Ray gives a casual WAVE to Williams. Williams sizes him up, then approaches the booth.

RAY
(icy cool)
Mr. Williams?

RICHARD
You're Derek's friend? The one who
called?
(off Ray's nod)
I told you, I prefer to talk at the
office.

RAY

This is my office.

Williams considers that. He's not a criminal -- just a wounded father out of his league. Reluctantly, he sits.

RAY (CONT'D)

Derek told me about the work you need done. He's not up to the job, but he thought maybe we could help each other.

WILLIAMS

(nervously)

Can you do it?

A tense beat.

RAY

I don't know you, Mr. Williams. But from what I've heard, you're a decent man. So before we continue this conversation and we both say things we can't take back...

(simply)

This thing you want done... walk away.

WILLIAMS

I can't do that.

RAY

Yes, my friend. You can. Your son's case isn't over. Let the system--

WILLIAMS

To hell with the system.

RAY

Derek says you have a family that needs you.

WILLIAMS

(lashing out)

You want to know about my family? I got up today and sent my daughter to school -- the same school where my son was killed.

(with quiet power)

My daughter walks the yard where he died every day. And the boy who killed him was sent home like it never happened--

RAY
I just think--

WILLIAMS
I don't give a damn what you think.
You can't help me? Fine. I'll find
someone who can.

Williams stands to go. We quickly JUMP BACK TO Mitch in the car. He barks into the mic--

MITCH
You can't let him go. Ray, he
needs to say it. Do not let him
leave--

Ray quickly adjusts--

RAY
Okay, okay. Hey, take it easy.
I'll do it.

Williams stops. After a beat, he sits again.

RAY (CONT'D)
How do you want it done?

Silence. It's a question Williams hadn't considered. He thinks for a long moment. Then, finally:

WILLIAMS
(resolved)
With a knife. You kill him the
same way he killed Nathan.

RAY
The deal was ten grand.

WILLIAMS
You'll get it. Here. Same time
tomorrow.

And without more, he's gone. With a look of both heartbreak and deep resolve, Williams heads for the door. As he exits:

RAY
You get all that, bro?

We PICK UP MITCH in the car. With great sadness, he watches Williams leave the restaurant.

MITCH
Yeah. Well, I guess we know he's
for real.

RAY
So what now?

MITCH
I don't know. I've got a meeting
downtown. I'll call you as soon as
I'm out.

Mitch grabs the DIGITAL RECORDER by his side and hits PLAY.
The chilling words we heard earlier hang in the air:

RAY RECORDING
How do you want it done?

WILLIAMS RECORDING
*With a knife. You kill him the
same way he killed Nathan.*

As the conversation plays, the CAMERA PUSHES IN CLOSE on the
recorder. Then, we PULL BACK TO REVEAL we are now:

INT. MITCH'S CAR - DAY

Mitch is driving with Abby. The recording finishes:

RAY RECORDING
The deal was ten grand.

WILLIAMS RECORDING
*You'll get it. Here. Same time
tomorrow.*

The recording ends. Abby is stunned.

ABBY
You have to go to the police.

Mitch doesn't respond.

ABBY (CONT'D)
Mitch, you heard him. The man is
unstable. What if he does it? What
if people find out that we knew--

MITCH
They won't.
(then)
Look, he's not killing anyone. He
thinks he made a deal with Ray. We
have until tomorrow to figure out
what to do.

They ride for a beat. Then:

ABBY
What does Ray think?

MITCH
I don't know. We said we'd talk later.

ABBY
Did you tell him why?

MITCH
I said I had a meeting downtown. I didn't want to get into it.

ABBY
Because you knew he wouldn't approve.

MITCH
It's just a meeting, Abby.

ABBY
I understand. And that's why I'll go--

ABBY (CONT'D)	MITCH
--and I will even <u>smile</u> --	It's just a <u>meeting</u> .

ABBY (CONT'D)
Because I love you.
(then, deadpan)
A lot.

OFF Mitch, who can't help cracking a smile of his own, we go:

CLOSE ON ANDREW BECKETT, beaming:

ANDREW
Abby!

CUT TO:

INT. KINROSS & GRANT - LOBBY - AFTERNOON

Mitch and Abby stand in the firm's lobby. Andrew approaches, excited to see them both. Abby musters that smile she promised and hugs him hello.

ABBY
Andrew. Wow, look at you... and look at this place, this is really beautiful.

And now the CAMERA takes in the lobby:

It's exactly the opposite of a stuffy law firm. No sterile marble flooring or mahogany paneling. There's a light, airy, modern feel -- chrome and glass, splashes of color.

ANDREW

Let me guess. You expected more mahogany and marble.

ABBY

I think so. You know, shadows and leather and at least one gargoyle.

MITCH

(with a laugh)
We were a little scarred by our last firm experience.

ANDREW

Well, I tried to tell you. Things are different here. Come on, I'll give you a tour.

CUT TO:

INT. KINROSS & GRANT - MAIN WORKSPACE - MOMENTS LATER

The CAMERA tracks Andrew as he shows Mitch and Abby the firm. It has the feel of one large workspace -- a communal warehouse vibe, brimming with activity and energy. Private offices are along the outside walls, with a BULLPEN for PARALEGALS and ASSISTANTS in the center.

ANDREW

It was built for us about eight years ago. It's not exactly Google but we try to be progressive. Our Managing Partner wanted to bring a little of that tech inspiration to the legal world.

MITCH

Smart guy.

ANDREW

Alex Grant. She runs our corporate litigation team.

ABBY

She?

ANDREW

Brilliant woman. You know the saying, this is not your father's law firm? Actually, it is.

Andrew swings past the firm's DAY CARE CENTER. A group of CHILDREN play happily.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

We've got the soul of a family firm, but Alex really took us to the next level. We're not happy practicing law. We want to make law and we do that in every area but criminal. That's why you're here, buddy.

Andrew grabs Mitch by the shoulder, laying on the charm a little thick. Behind him, Abby makes a goofy face at Mitch, who tries not to laugh.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

And this... would be your office.

Andrew guides Mitch and Abby into the:

INT. KINROSS & GRANT - EMPTY OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

It's exquisite. Abby's not making any faces now. The room is spacious and beautifully furnished. The view includes a glimpse of the majestic dome of the Capitol Building.

ABBY

Look, honey. It's exactly like your office now.

(then)

How many lawyers do you have?

ANDREW

Forty. But only twenty partners. Mitch would be twenty-one.

(checking his watch)

Come on. We're having a small reception for a few clients. I'll introduce you.

OFF Mitch and Abby, we:

CUT TO:

INT. KINROSS & GRANT - MEETING HALL - MONTAGE

A COCKTAIL RECEPTION underway. A few dozen LAWYERS mingle with upscale CLIENTS in the modern meeting hall. As Mitch and Abby arrive with Andrew, we BEGIN A BRIEF MONTAGE:

- * Mitch and Abby meet several attorneys and clients.
- * Mitch walks with two glasses of wine, brings one to Abby.
- * Abby listens as a BLOWHARD LAWYER pontificates.

The MONTAGE ENDS as Andrew brings Mitch and Abby to meet ALEX GRANT, forties, the firm's Managing Partner. There's a manic charisma about Alex, something subtly wild in her eyes. She's either supremely confident or a little dangerous -- think Tilda Swinton at her most dynamic.

ANDREW

Mitch and Abby McDeere, this is Alex Grant.

ALEX

Of course, no introduction necessary.

(to Mitch)

I know we haven't met, but after Andrew's report I feel like I know everything about you.

MITCH

(drawn in by her energy)
Really.

ALEX

Don't worry, it was all glowing.
And Abby, welcome.

ABBY

So nice to meet you.

ALEX

I heard you had one hell of a hearing. Your case, with the young boy who was killed. Word is, you can "cross" with the best.

MITCH

Well...

ALEX

Don't be modest. Some people, they never relax in a courtroom.

(then, remembering with nostalgia)

I remember my first time in front of a jury. It was a drunk driving case. I still remember walking in, seeing the Judge on the bench and the jury watching. My God, I was petrified.

MITCH

The first client's always scary, especially if he's innocent.

ALEX

Oh, I was the client. And I wasn't innocent. Did beat the case though... and I've been comfortable in a courtroom ever since.

Alex LAUGHS. Mitch and Abby exchange quick looks, not sure what to make of her. OFF this, we:

CUT TO:

INT. KINROSS & GRANT - MEETING HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Mitch now stands with Andrew and BRADLEY HALVERSON, mid-thirties, handsome, a bankruptcy lawyer probably born in a crisp blue shirt with a white collar. An hour has passed. Outside, the sun is starting to set.

BRADLEY

So, Mitch. I wanted to ask you about your tax law background.

MITCH

What about it?

BRADLEY

Well, maybe you could help me out. I've got some clients taking aggressive positions.

MITCH

Aggressive meaning they're risking an audit?

BRADLEY

All my clients are risking an audit. Aggressive means they're risking indictment.

A beat. Mitch shoots a surprised look to Andrew.

ANDREW

Now, Brad--

BRADLEY

Maybe I could send the files over, you could take a look--

MITCH

I'm not sure that's a great idea--

BRADLEY

Why not? Andrew says you were brilliant--

MITCH

Because I'm done helping rich people hide their money. Andrew should've mentioned that.

An awkward beat. Bradley backs off. In the silence, Mitch looks across the room to Abby, who's talking with some other PARTNERS. He nods toward the door -- wanna get out of here? Abby nods back, ready to go, and we:

CUT TO:

INT. MCDEERE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mitch and Abby are back home. Mitch pulls off his tie and unbuttons his shirt, lost in thought. Abby enters:

MITCH

It's getting late. We need to decide what to do about Richard Williams.

ABBY

You call Ray?

MITCH

He and Tammy are on their way.

A quiet beat. Then:

ABBY

You know, I have to say. It could've been a lot worse. They seemed like nice people.

MITCH

(with humor)

Yeah, hobbies include: teenage drunk driving and tax fraud.

ABBY

Hey, you asked for it. The big players have big personalities.

Mitch goes to her, puts his arms around her.

MITCH

Yeah, well... that's not what I want.

ABBY

(unconvinced)

Really. So that office didn't speak to you at all.

He kisses her neck.

MITCH
Terrible office. Unsightly,
really. Embarrassing...

He stops, then looks right at her -- so much love and determination in his eyes.

MITCH (CONT'D)
I just hope we can make it on our
own.

ABBY
We will.

MITCH
You love this house. If we don't
start making some money soon...

ABBY
Then we'll downsize.
(then)
Hey, I followed you into Witness
Protection, so don't start acting
like I'm high-maintenance.

She playfully pushes him onto the bed, jumps on top of him.
He fights for a beat, then:

MITCH
No, Mrs. McDeere, you are...
exactly the right amount of
maintenance.

He KISSES her. They laugh, having fun for a moment. Then,
as we watch, the CAMERA RISES and floats to the WINDOW. And
suddenly, we get a shock:

SOMEONE IS WATCHING THEM from outside! We don't see his face
in the shadows. After a beat:

EXT. MCDEERE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The MAN strides away. As he goes, his jacket brushes aside
and we SEE A NINE-MILLIMETER HANDGUN in his belt. OFF him,
moving quickly now, we:

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT SIX

ACT SEVEN

FADE IN:

INT. MCDEERE KITCHEN - MORNING

It's early. Mitch stands at the counter, looking out the window. He checks the spot where he saw the mysterious car, but finds nothing. A cup of COFFEE and the WASHINGTON POST sit in front of him.

ABBY (O.S.)

You okay?

Mitch turns to see Abby enter, dressed for work. He goes back to reading the paper:

MITCH

I'm fine.

ABBY

Mmm hmm. Tell me three things about the story you're reading.

Mitch is busted.

MITCH

(quietly)

You know, Louis warned me about fathers and sons. He said you mess with that bond, anything can happen.

ABBY

You really think the bond's any different with a daughter?

MITCH

Maybe not.

(honestly)

I'd probably do the same thing if something happened to Claire.

ABBY

I'd like to think you wouldn't solicit a murder.

But Mitch isn't so sure right now. He goes to the table and sits for a beat. Then:

MITCH

The tape destroys him, Abby. He has no defense. If we turn it over to the police--

ABBY

We talked about this last night.

MITCH

It's not just solicitation. If he shows up today with the money that's an Overt Act. They can charge him with conspiracy.

(then)

We're sending him to prison for at least a few years.

ABBY

Hey, we are not sending him anywhere.

Another beat. Mitch knows she's right, but it's in his DNA to keep pushing for a hidden solution.

MITCH

There has to be another way to handle this. I just don't see it yet.

ABBY

If you don't report it and something happens to Anthony... could you live with that?

MITCH

No.

ABBY

Could you be prosecuted?

MITCH

Possibly. I wouldn't technically be an accessory, but if the truth came out... at the very least I'd be disbarred.

At this, Mitch's CELL PHONE RINGS. He grabs it:

MITCH (CONT'D)

(to Abby)

It's Tammy.

(answering)

Hey...

And instantly, we INTERCUT TO:

INT. LAW OFFICE OF MITCHELL MCDEERE - MORNING

CLOSE ON: Tammy at her desk, adrenaline racing:

TAMMY
 (hushed, excited)
 It's here. That offer you've been
 waiting for? It just walked in.

MITCH
 On the Sanderson case?

TAMMY
 There's a lawyer here from Gentech.
 He came down to deliver it in
 person.

And now the CAMERA WIDENS TO REVEAL: GREG BOLSON, mid-
 thirties. He's slick, manicured: a walking achievement in
 the art of grooming. He holds a MANILA ENVELOPE with the
 settlement offer.

TAMMY (CONT'D)
 (sotto, on phone)
 That's a good sign right? It's
 probably too much money to send in
 the mail.

MITCH
 Just keep him there.

Mitch HANGS UP.

MITCH (CONT'D)
 (a bit stunned)
 Sanderson offer's in.

ABBY
 Any good?

MITCH
 I don't know. Let's go find out.

OFF Mitch and Abby, we:

CUT TO:

INT. LAW OFFICE OF MITCHELL MCDEERE - MORNING

Minutes later, Mitch and Abby arrive, moving quickly. As
 they enter, Mitch goes directly for Bolson. Ray and Tammy
 are also there. The two men shake hands:

MITCH
 Mitch McDeere.

BOLSON
 Greg Bolson.

MITCH

Thanks for coming. We were expecting an offer, but I didn't think Gentech would send someone in person.

BOLSON

Oh, I don't work for Gentech. Ms. Sanderson's case is no longer being handled by in-house counsel. I'm with Cromwell and Taft, maybe you know us.

RAY

(surprised)

Cromwell and Taft's the biggest law firm in D.C.

BOLSON

Second largest in the country. But you know... who's counting? My firm was retained to handle the trial.

A tense beat. Mitch stays composed, forces a smile:

MITCH

Assuming there is a trial. I was under the impression you came down to offer a settlement.

BOLSON

That's true.

MITCH

Why don't we talk in my office.

Mitch starts to move, but--

BOLSON

That won't be necessary.

Mitch stops.

BOLSON (CONT'D)

I work for Martin Vance. Mr. Vance is our Managing Partner and he runs corporate litigation for our office. He sent me personally to explain our offer. This morning, Mr. Vance was instructed by Gentech to draft you a letter stating that the company has no intention of settling this case. To the contrary, we fully intend to try the matter.

MITCH
(anger building)
Then why are you here?

BOLSON
Mr. Vance wanted me to tell you that he bills Gentech at a rate of eight hundred dollars an hour. He felt it would take about one hour of his time to draft the letter I mentioned.

(extending the envelope)
He'd rather not. Instead, he's offering you the eight hundred as a courtesy, in full satisfaction of your frivolous case.

Mitch's blood is boiling now. He shoots a look to Abby and then to Ray. His jaw clenches.

RAY
You should leave now.

BOLSON
It would be a great mistake to pursue this any--

MITCH
I assure you, Mr. Bolson, the mistake would be to underestimate what I'm capable of. What we're capable of.

Bolson considers that. Then, simply:

BOLSON
We have 120 lawyers in D.C. alone. Last year, we billed over thirty-six million dollars on a dozen complex tort litigations. The simple fact is: this is what we do.

(then)
You? You're an office of one lawyer. And from what I can find, you haven't handled a case that so much as made the local penny-saver in the last ten years.

MITCH
We'll fight you on this.

BOLSON
No. I don't think you will.

ABBY
 (interjecting)
 Why not?

BOLSON
 Because I'm standing in an office
 that six months ago was being used
 to sell rental cars.
 (then)
 You have a good day.

And Bolson is gone. Mitch and the others watch him go in
 silence. Finally, after a long beat:

MITCH
 (incredulous)
 Eight hundred dollars.

TAMMY
 I don't understand.

ABBY
 How can Gentech not settle? If
 that stent is defective--

MITCH
 (strong)
 It is defective. Althea Sanderson
 was almost killed by a defect in a
 cardiac stent designed by Gentech.
 And she's not the only one. Other
 people may already have died--

ABBY
 Then why risk a trial? It doesn't
 make sense. If we convince a jury,
 it creates a precedent. They're
 looking at hundreds of millions in
 damages.

RAY
 And if they pay us off, they look
 guilty. It's like admitting to the
 entire legal world they have
 something to hide.

At this, Mitch takes off toward his office. His anger and
 frustration are boiling over--

ABBY
 Mitch--

MITCH
 I just need a minute to think.

The others watch as Mitch storms into the:

INT. MITCH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Mitch paces. Abby follows him in. This all flows quickly:

ABBY

Hey--

MITCH

He's right, Abby. Lawsuits take money. We need experts, research, the discovery alone could take a year. We can't afford our own office space--

ABBY

Then we figure something out. You always figure something out.

MITCH

(amazed)
Cromwell and Taft.
(then)
I finished fifth in my class at Harvard. Four people were ahead of me. Two of them went to Cromwell and Taft.

ABBY

So what, we just give up?

That STOPS Mitch. He looks at her for a surprised beat. Mitch never considered giving up. He's just thinking it through, finding an angle.

MITCH

Give up? I don't want give up, Abby. I want to grind those smug sons of bitches into ground fucking glass.

ABBY

Then let's do it.

MITCH

We need lawyers. Resources. The kind of backing you only get from a major firm.

And now Abby realizes what he means:

ABBY

You're talking about Andrew.

Mitch just nods.

ABBY (CONT'D)
If that's what you want, you know
I'm with you.

MITCH
Give me a chance to make it work.
I have an idea.

CUT TO:

INT. LAW OFFICE OF MITCHELL MCDEERE - MOMENTS LATER

Ray and Tammy are there. On the cut, Mitch blows out of his office and heads for the door--

RAY
Hey, bro, where you going--

MITCH
I'll be back.

RAY
You can't leave. We're supposed to
meet Williams in an hour--

MITCH
I should make it. I'll meet you
there.

And Mitch is gone. OFF Ray and Tammy, we:

CUT TO:

INT. KINROSS & GRANT - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A beautiful, sleek room with a view. Mitch sits at the conference table, opposite Andrew Beckett. Mitch is nervous but does his best to appear calm as Alex Grant enters.

ALEX
Well, well. Mr. McDeere. I'm so
pleased our little shindig didn't
scare you off.

MITCH
Not at all.

ALEX
Andrew tells me you're interested
in our offer. How wonderful. I've
always wanted a Criminal Division
at the firm.

ANDREW

Mitch does have a few... ideas about how the relationship would work. I thought you two should talk directly.

Alex sits. She and Andrew look to Mitch, expectantly:

MITCH

Well, first let me say... I appreciate you coming to me. I've asked around and your firm--

ALEX

What do you want, Mitch?

Her tone surprises him.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You love us and we love you. I think we're done blowing smoke at this point, don't you?

Another beat.

MITCH

I just started a firm.

ALEX

I'm aware of that. Our firm will acquire your practice and move you in-house.

MITCH

Yes. But what if I don't want to move in-house? What if I want to maintain my own office and staff?

ALEX

Not an option.

MITCH

Then I've wasted your time. Because it's the only option I'll consider.

Alex just stares for a beat.

MITCH (CONT'D)

I'm not looking to be folded into your firm, Ms. Grant. I'm looking for an "Association". You give me your resources... and I give you a piece of my business.

ALEX

We project an image here, Mitch.
One our clients have come to expect.

MITCH

Meaning?

ALEX

Meaning our lawyers don't do
business out of store-fronts with
linoleum floors.

MITCH

Fair enough. If you provide the
space, I'll meet your clients here.
But my office stays open.

ALEX

And your cases? What exactly would
we be inheriting?

And now Mitch smiles a bit. He knew this moment was coming
and he's ready for it:

MITCH

I thought we were done blowing
smoke.

(then)

Look. I'm a good lawyer. On my
best day, maybe better than good.
But this city's filled with good
lawyers. I know why I'm here.

ALEX

Enlighten me.

MITCH

Althea Sanderson. Her case is a
winner. If it's handled right, it's
the biggest tort case of the year,
maybe the next few years. So...

ALEX

(flatly)

So we want sixty percent.

MITCH

Forget it. I found the case. My
team did the groundwork.

ALEX

Yes. And that's all you can do.
We both know you can't go to trial
without us.

MITCH
I'll give you forty percent.

ALEX
Then we really are done here.
(standing)
You were wrong, Andrew. He wasn't ready.

Alex moves toward the door. After a beat:

MITCH
Fifty.

Alex STOPS.

ALEX
Let me be clear. If we do this,
you report to me on all your cases.
I am your boss from this day
forward.

Mitch nods, absorbing that reality. Finally:

ALEX (CONT'D)
Congratulations. Your firm just
became "associated" with the best
litigation house in town. Andrew
will send the papers.

And Alex is gone. Mitch stands in silence for a beat,
knowing he just made a huge decision. OFF him and Andrew,
true partners now, we:

CUT TO:

INT. BURGER KING RESTAURANT - DAY

CLOSE ON RAY: once again in the booth where he met Richard Williams. Ray looks concerned: where the hell is Mitch!? He looks out the window for Mitch's car, but sees nothing. It's tense. He speaks into his microphone:

RAY
Mitch. Mitch, can you hear me?
Where are you?

But it's too late. Ray SEES Williams enter the restaurant. Williams approaches the booth and sits.

WILLIAMS
(all business)
You decided to show. I assume that
means we have a deal.

Ray starts to answer, when suddenly--

MITCH (O.S.)
I'm here.

ANGLE THE WINDOW: as Mitch's CAR FINALLY ARRIVES OUTSIDE. He's in the same position as before.

MITCH (CONT'D)
Sorry, bro. I'm ready. Stick with the plan.

Ray stays perfectly cool:

RAY
(to Williams)
You got the money?

Williams reaches into his jacket pocket. He removes an ENVELOPE with the TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS and slides it across the table to Ray.

RAY (CONT'D)
You realize once I take that--

WILLIAMS
We've been over this. Do we have a deal or not?

Resigned, Ray opens the envelope. He SEES THE CASH inside. It's a sad moment. Finally, he simply says:

RAY
No.

WILLIAMS
No?

But Ray doesn't explain. Instead, he just stands and heads for the door.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
Hey. Hey--

But Ray keeps moving. In seconds, he's gone. And suddenly, there's a VOICE behind Williams:

MITCH (O.S.)
It's over, Mr. Williams.

Williams turns to:

FIND MITCH standing at the booth. The CAMERA PUSHES IN CLOSE on Williams as his world caves in.

Williams is FROZEN -- his mind can't compute how Mitch could be there. Dazed, he sinks back into his seat.

Mitch sits opposite him. He removes his DIGITAL RECORDER and hits PLAY:

RAY RECORDING

How do you want it done?

WILLIAMS RECORDING

With a knife. You kill him the same way he killed Nathan.

Mitch STOPS the recording. He doesn't have to say anything. Williams is already a beaten man. They sit in silence for a long beat. Then:

WILLIAMS

What was I supposed to do? The Judge just let that boy go home.

MITCH

It wasn't over. There's still a chance Anthony could be tried as an adult.

WILLIAMS

(defiant)

Well, I wasn't willing to take that chance.

More silence.

MITCH

So you threw everything away.

WILLIAMS

Please.

MITCH

We tried to help you. We begged you to let it go, to trust the system--

WILLIAMS

But nothing happened. I didn't hurt anyone--

MITCH

(stronger)

It doesn't matter. You conspired to commit murder. That charge alone carries a maximum of twenty five years.

That hits Williams hard.

WILLIAMS
You could help me.

MITCH
No. Not without risking my career
or maybe getting arrested--

WILLIAMS
(escalating)
Just listen. I made a mistake.
But it's done. Nobody has to hear
that recording. Nobody needs to
know this happened.

MITCH
I see. So now you want me to
twist the truth. Now you want me
to decide what did or didn't
happen.

It's a harsh irony. Williams is reeling. His desperation is mounting--

WILLIAMS
My family...

MITCH
You should've thought of them
before.

Williams is lost, broken. He would cry, but all his tears are long gone.

WILLIAMS
I don't expect you to understand.
My wife won't get out of bed. My
daughter won't eat, she has these
dreams about Nathan...
(then)
I didn't do this because I forgot
to think of my family, Mr. McDeere.
I did this because they're all I
think about.

Mitch stays composed. He can see how much Williams is hurting, but what can he do? Suddenly, his CELL PHONE RINGS. Grateful for the escape, Mitch grabs it and answers:

MITCH
Mitch McDeere.
(a beat)
I understand, thank you.

He HANGS UP.

MITCH (CONT'D)

(to Williams)

Judge Trott's reached a decision on Anthony Heywood. He wants everyone in court.

WILLIAMS

When?

MITCH

Now.

OFF Williams, then Mitch, we finally:

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT SEVEN

ACT EIGHT

FADE IN:

INT. JUDGE TROTT'S COURTROOM - DAY

All parties are present. Mitch stands at the defense table with Anthony Heywood. Lavell Heywood sits behind them in the gallery. At the prosecution table, A.U.S.A. Diane Ruckeyser gives a supportive nod to Richard and Karen Williams nearby. The room is silent, waiting for Judge Trott to enter.

ANTHONY

(sotto, covering his fear)
Are we gonna win?

MITCH

I don't know. Whatever happens,
Anthony, we still have a trial to
get through.

Judge Trott enters from his chambers. He takes the long walk to the bench and sits. There's a weight and formality to the moment, but when Trott finally speaks, he takes a disarmingly casual tone:

JUDGE TROTT

I don't have kids. Maybe it
doesn't matter. I certainly take
great pains most of the time not to
let my personal opinions shape my
legal ones.

Judge Trott looks to Richard and Karen Williams:

JUDGE TROTT (CONT'D)

But in a case like this, I find
myself grateful. Grateful that I
can only imagine what it must be
like to stand here having lost a
child.

And now to Lavell Heywood:

JUDGE TROTT (CONT'D)

Or knowing your child could be
lost... to a criminal system from
which some never return.

(a beat)

Let me be clear. This was a
shocking crime of great violence.
Mr. Heywood with both malice and
aforethought went looking for a
fight that afternoon.

The CAMERA FINDS Dougie Breen in the gallery.

JUDGE TROTT (CONT'D)

He did this, I believe, while carrying a weapon. A knife. He had that knife because he thought he might need it. He thought he might use it. And he did use it, without hesitation and to brutal effect. It's hard to think of a more Adult act.

(a beat)

That said, this situation was not entirely of Mr. Heywood's making. He was, on some level, responding to a very real humiliation... and he lashed out, much as you might expect from a child.

(then)

So what now? The truth is, I want to believe in Mr. Heywood. I want to believe he hasn't gone from us, that there remains something in him worth trying to save, that he might benefit from something more than the punishment that awaits him in the adult system.

Judge Trott stops, considers his words.

JUDGE TROTT (CONT'D)

But it's not that easy. In fact, it's incredibly hard because I don't know how to value Anthony Heywood's life without de-valuing Nathan Williams' death.

(a beat)

To Nathan's parents... I can only pray you understand how deeply this court respects your loss. But I've made my decision... and it's one of hope. Hope that one day this young boy will be even a fraction of the man your son already was.

(then)

The court rules Anthony Heywood to be a Juvenile Offender. And we are adjourned.

The GAVEL FALLS. The room reacts. Judge Trott is quickly up and out of the courtroom.

Overcome with relief, Lavell Heywood embraces his son. And for the first time, Anthony shows genuine emotion in return.

For his part, Mitch is stone-faced. Like Judge Trott, he wants to believe in Anthony. But he's not watching Anthony now. Mitch turns to see Richard and Karen Williams holding each other, devastated by the decision.

ANGLE RICHARD WILLIAMS. He and Mitch hold a look, knowing this is the critical moment. Will Mitch turn him in? Diane Ruckeyser is just steps away, gathering her things at the Prosecution table. Finally, Mitch approaches her:

MITCH

Diane.

RUCKEYSER

Congratulations. I can live with losing. I hope you can live with winning.

MITCH

We need to talk.

RUCKEYSER

About what? Even if he's found delinquent now, he'll be out in less than five years.

MITCH

(from his depths)

Diane, please. I need your help.

A beat. Even without hearing why, Ruckeyser can see that something is wrong. OFF her, we finally:

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON STREET - WILLIAMS HOUSE - DAY

The CAMERA FLOATS DOWN on a small row-house, in a lower-middle class section of D.C. It's not much, but the house is well-cared-for. On the steps outside, a makeshift memorial of candles and flowers has formed around a school PHOTO of Nathan Williams.

The CAMERA FINDS a POLICE SQUAD CAR as it pulls to the curb. TWO UNIFORMED OFFICERS exit and approach the front door. As they RING the doorbell, we INTERCUT TO:

INT. WILLIAMS HOUSE - THAT MOMENT

Richard Williams approaches the door. Behind him, in the KITCHEN, we can SEE Karen pouring herself some tea. She's not watching as Richard OPENS the door and comes face-to-face with the Officers.

OFFICER
Richard Williams?

Williams freezes. Behind him:

KAREN
Richard? Who's at the door?

WILLIAMS
(calling back)
It's nothing. It's someone from
work.

OFFICER
I'm sorry, sir, but I need you to
come with us.

WILLIAMS
(somberly)
May I have a moment?

The Officer nods. Quietly, Richard closes the door and returns to the kitchen. Karen has just taken a seat at the table with her tea. Richard stops, watching her for a beat. Is this the last time he'll be with her like this? Finally, he steps forward and kisses her forehead:

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
I have to run to the office, babe.
I won't be long.

And without more, Williams goes. He exits the house and joins the Officers, who escort him to their car. As they place him inside, we:

CUT TO:

INT. U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - CORRIDOR - DAY

The Officer leads Williams down a long corridor. He's wearing handcuffs now. The Officer guides Williams to a Conference Room door and orders him inside.

INT. U.S. ATTORNEY CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Williams enters. Inside, he FINDS Mitch and Ruckeyser waiting. They sit at a table, deadly serious now. Another attorney, HENRY CLAY, is there.

RUCKEYSER
Mr. Williams... I understand you
were just given a chance to speak
with Mr. Clay?

Williams nods yes.

RUCKEYSER (CONT'D)

Mr. Clay is a defense attorney.
You understand that my office has
arranged for him to represent you
at this meeting?

(another nod)

And that's acceptable to you?

WILLIAMS

(weakly)

Yes.

A tense beat. Then:

RUCKEYSER

Before we begin, I need to know
that Anthony Heywood is safe. If
you made any other attempt--

WILLIAMS

No.

RUCKEYSER

He's under our protection as we
speak. But if you approached any
other individual--

WILLIAMS

I didn't.

HENRY CLAY

It's the truth, Diane.

(then)

And let me say, my client deeply
regrets his behavior. He's willing
to cooperate in any way he can.

Another beat. Ruckeyser and Mitch exchange a look. Then,
resolved:

RUCKEYSER

Fine. He can sign a confession and
plead guilty to the charge.

That's a bomb.

HENRY CLAY

(thrown)

Excuse me?

Ruckeyser reaches for a LEGAL BINDER. She removes a few
DOCUMENTS and slides them to Clay.

RUCKEYSER

This is the official complaint. It charges your client with conspiracy to commit murder.

(then, to Williams)

This document is a plea agreement. You need to sign it.

HENRY CLAY

Now wait a second--

RUCKEYSER

No deals. He takes the top count. He also needs to write a full confession.

Clay feels ambushed--

HENRY CLAY

What the hell's going on, Diane? You called me. I thought you wanted to talk.

RUCKEYSER

We are talking.

HENRY CLAY

(standing)

Then this meeting is over.

MITCH

(with power)

Sit down, Henry.

Silence. Clay looks to Mitch, confused.

MITCH (CONT'D)

Diane and I have been talking... not talking, working to find the best possible solution here and I think we've found it.

HENRY CLAY

By making him plead to the top count?

MITCH

Just hear her out.

(to Williams)

You walk out of this room, Mr. Williams, you are going to prison. I promise you that.

A long beat.

HENRY CLAY

Fine. Assuming my client does what you ask, what happens then?

RUCKEYSER

I file the complaint and the plea agreement.

(a beat)

In my bottom drawer.

And now Clay understands.

HENRY CLAY

You're not going to charge him?

RUCKEYSER

Not for now.

(to Williams)

Mr. Williams, you and I will have a standing appointment. You will come to my office once a week for as long as I say.

WILLIAMS

(thrown)

Why?

RUCKEYSER

So you never forget, not for one second, that I'm watching you. You can tell me about your family, your daughter... I don't know what we'll talk about, but you will come see me every week.

(a beat)

And let me be clear. If you do anything to make me nervous, if you so much as jaywalk, I will file that complaint and your confession and I will put you away for a very long time. Understand?

Williams is quietly overcome. Even Clay is moved.

HENRY CLAY

Thank you, Diane.

RUCKEYSER

Don't thank me, Henry. Mitch is the one who pushed for this.

(to Williams)

He convinced me that you deserve another chance, Mr. Williams. Do not make me sorry.

Williams looks to Mitch.

WILLIAMS

You...

Both men fight to contain their emotion.

MITCH

Sign the papers, Mr. Williams. And go back to your family.

Williams turns to Clay, who nods his approval. OFF him, then Mitch and Diane, we finally:

CUT TO:

INT. LAW OFFICE OF MITCHELL MCDEERE - EARLY EVENING

As daylight just begins to fade, we FIND Mitch back at the office. Tammy and Ray are with him. Tammy's jazz station is on low in the b.g. At the end of an impossibly long day, she can't help grooving just a little.

TAMMY

So they're not gonna charge him?

MITCH

Not officially.

(then)

Diane took a risk. The deal she made... if it's legal, it's right on the edge. If it went public, it might end her career.

RAY

So how'd you convince her?

MITCH

She's got three kids of her own. She knows what it would mean for them to lose their father.

They all consider that. Then:

TAMMY

Well, as long as we're on the subject of secret deals... maybe you can explain this.

Tammy reaches under her desk. She removes a HUGE CARDBOARD BOX filled with legal files.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

It came for you about an hour ago.

And now Tammy holds up a LETTER:

TAMMY (CONT'D)

It's got about a dozen files. And it came with a hand-written letter from one Ms. Alex Grant.

(reading)

Dear Mitch. Welcome aboard -- with two exclamation points -- on behalf of the firm, let me say how excited we all are to have a new partner -- two more exclamation points.

She stops, nauseated by the letter's enthusiasm.

MITCH

Yeah... about that.

RAY

You joined a firm. You didn't think that was something Tammy and I should know about?

MITCH

Okay, first of all, I didn't join anything. It's an association--

TAMMY

It says partner.

(to Ray)

Does it not say partner?

MITCH

Okay, technically, yes, I am a partner. But nothing else changes--

RAY

I can't work at a firm--

TAMMY

Neither can I--

MITCH (CONT'D)

(stronger)

You guys, nobody has to work at a firm. We keep our own office. Our own staff. We're just "associated" with Kinross and Grant.

(off their looks)

Hey, it was either that or shut down. You got a better idea, I'm all ears.

Ray and Tammy exchange a look. Sadly, they don't.

RAY

What does Abby say?

ABBY (O.S.)
Abby's on board.

They all turn to see Abby at the door. She looks great, dressed in a black suit.

ABBY (CONT'D)
I admit, I wasn't at first. But
I'm coming around.

TAMMY
(flatly)
I'm telling you now, I'm not
kissing any asses.

MITCH
Fair enough. Ray?

RAY
Hey, you know me, bro. I always
got your back.

Mitch smiles at that.

ABBY
(to Mitch)
You ready to go?

MITCH
Yeah. I just need to make a quick
stop on the way.

Mitch grabs his jacket and heads for the door. But before he goes, he turns back one last time:

MITCH (CONT'D)
(seriously)
Hey. I want you to know something.
I love you guys.
(then, cracking)
With three exclamation points.
Seriously. Three.
(mouthing)
Three!

And he's out the door with Abby. OFF Ray and Tammy, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. CAPITOL CARE SPECIALTY HOSPITAL - EARLY-EVENING

Mitch's CAR pulls to a stop in front of the mid-sized, brick building. A sign out front tells us that this is a facility for *LONG TERM, ACUTE CARE*.

MITCH
 (to Abby, as he exits)
 I'll be right back.

ABBY
 The service starts in twenty
 minutes.

Mitch nods, then heads for the lobby as we:

CUT TO:

INT. CAPITOL CARE SPECIALTY HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER

Mitch now walks down a quiet hospital corridor. These patients aren't receiving urgent emergency care, they're parked here for the long-term. Mitch arrives at a ROOM at the end of the hall.

ANGLE MITCH'S POV: a hand-written sign is taped on the glass window. It names the patient inside as: A. SANDERSON. This is Althea Sanderson, Mitch's star client. From the door, we can see that Althea is in a COMA, breathing with the help of a ventilator.

Next to the bed is Althea's daughter, CAROLINE SANDERSON, only nineteen. She sits quietly in a chair, keeping her mother company. When she SEES MITCH, her face brightens. She goes to the door.

CAROLINE
 Mr. McDeere. I didn't know you
 were coming.

MITCH
 (re: Althea)
 How's she doing?

CAROLINE
 She's still fighting.

MITCH
 (simply)
 So are we.

OFF Caroline, then Althea Sanderson holding on, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. CEMETERY - EVENING

On the cut, Mitch and Abby exit their car, arriving at the FUNERAL SERVICE for Nathan Williams.

All around them, people exit their cars and walk onto the grass toward the gathering by the grave-side. STUDENTS and TEACHERS are there, along with FAMILY MEMBERS and FRIENDS from the neighborhood. Nathan was truly loved.

Mitch takes Abby's hand. With some trepidation, they approach the group. As they walk, they spot Richard and Karen Williams, standing with their family.

When Karen sees Mitch, her face hardens. She steps away from the others to confront Mitch and Abby as they arrive:

KAREN
(quietly)
You're not welcome here.

But then, she feels a HAND on her shoulder. Williams stands behind her:

RICHARD
I asked them to come.

Karen doesn't understand. She doesn't know about how her husband was saved -- and she never will. But she doesn't argue. Instead, without more, she rejoins her family.

Mitch and Williams hold one last look. Then, Williams goes as well, taking his place among the others. As he returns, his EIGHT-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER rushes to his side. She clings to his leg for support, holding her father. It's clear how much she needs him now.

As the MINISTER begins, the CAMERA PUSHES IN CLOSE on Mitch and Abby. It's a moving moment. Until... suddenly, we hear an unexpected sound...

A CLICKING NOISE. Then another. And soon we realize we are hearing the SHUTTER SNAP of a DIGITAL CAMERA. And we REVEAL:

OUR UNKNOWN MAN -- the same man we saw outside the McDeere house with a gun -- at the edge of the cemetery. He's taking PHOTOS with a long lens.

ANGLE THE DIGITAL CAMERA POV: we see Mitch and Abby through the CAMERA, unaware of the danger in the distance. OFF their faces, and a building sense of dread, we finally go:

CLOSE ON:

A beautiful FOUNTAIN PEN as it artfully glides along a sheet of high-grade paper. As it moves, we SEE A NAME take shape:

ANDREW BECKETT, ESQ.

A HAND comes into view. It takes hold of an old, WOODEN STAMP sitting on the desk nearby. The hand presses the stamp into a RED INKPAD and returns to the paper.

ANGLE THE PAPER: which we now recognize to be a legal document. At the top of the document, the hand PRESSES THE STAMP DOWN, marking it with a single red word:

PRIVILEGED

And now we WIDEN TO REVEAL:

INT. KINROSS & GRANT - ANDREW'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Andrew is at his desk. He places the document in a LEATHER FOLIO and carries it with him as he exits to the:

INT. KINROSS & GRANT - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

The CAMERA tracks Andrew as he moves through the dark firm. Almost everyone is gone. Finally, he enters the:

INT. KINROSS & GRANT - CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

We've been here before. Now, a small meeting is beginning. SIX SENIOR PARTNERS have gathered after hours. Alex Grant and Andrew are two. The others (HAFT, GUNDERSON, FIGGIS, and JENKS) will be introduced in good time.

Andrew hands the leather folio to Alex, then takes a seat alongside her at the table. A POWERPOINT SCREEN sits ready in the b.g.

ALEX

Alright, let's get started. We only have a few minutes before our client arrives.

The partners quiet.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Thank you. Well, I have good news. Today, we welcomed our twenty-first partner, Mitchell McDeere. It went just as we planned... almost.

FIGGIS

Almost?

ALEX

We offered him an in-house position. He preferred to create an Association.

HAFI

That's not what we talked about.

ALEX

(strong, curt)

It's all McDeere would accept.
Bottom line, his office is now the
Criminal Division of this firm and
that is what we talked about.

Her power backs them off.

JENKS

Does he know why we made him an
offer?

Alex looks to Andrew. She nods for him to answer.

ANDREW

No. He thinks we want a piece of a
tort case he found. A client named
Althea Sanderson.

(then)

I took a look. It's actually a
damn good case. And thanks to Alex,
we now own fifty percent.

ALEX

Consider it a bonus.

ANDREW

Of course, our real interest hasn't
changed.

Andrew grabs a POWERPOINT REMOTE. He hits a BUTTON and a
PHOTO APPEARS on the screen. To our shock, IT'S A PHOTO OF
SARAH HUGHES, the young woman charged with murder who Mitch
arraigned earlier.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Sarah Hughes. She was officially
charged with murder this week.

ALEX

Of course, ideally, we would've
known about this sooner. But by
the time we learned of her arrest,
the court had already assigned
the case to McDeere.

ANDREW

Obviously, our priority here is
control. And now, McDeere reports
to us.

FIGGIS

How far has he gotten?

ANDREW

Not far. But now that he's ours,
we can install our own phones, our
own copy machines, even our own
computers at his office.

The partners nod in approval.

HAFT

We shouldn't stop there. He should
be under surveillance.

FIGGIS

I agree. We should be listening
everywhere.

ANDREW

We already have a man in the field.

ALEX

Good. Because let's be perfectly
clear. If Mitch McDeere ever finds
the truth in this case, everyone in
this room is going to prison.

A tense beat. The CAMERA PANS across the faces of the
partners, each one ready to do whatever it takes to protect
their own.

Suddenly, there's a KNOCK at the door. We HEAR THE DOOR OPEN
and then a MAN'S VOICE:

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Sorry (*sniff*), got stuck in some
traffic.

ALEX

And here's our client now. No
problem, Daniel. We were just
discussing your case.

And now, the CAMERA REVOLVES TO REVEAL THE MAN who has
entered. It's DANIEL MOXON, the man we met in the TEASER --
just before he jumped to his death.

As the CAMERA REVEALS Moxon, a low RUMBLING SOUND begins in
the distance. It's faint at first, like the sound of a fist
banging against a door. Then another... and another until
the RUMBLING ESCALATES to a ROAR and we:

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. FAIRVIEW HOTEL - ROOM 1801 - DAY

WHOOSH. Suddenly, we are BACK WITH MITCH on the balcony of Room 1801. He's right where we left him, staring down at the body of Daniel Moxon, eighteen stories below.

A TITLE CARD READS:

DECEMBER, 2011... THREE MONTHS LATER...

The RUMBLING CONTINUES and now we realize it's the SOUND OF FISTS banging on the door. We HEAR THE VOICE we heard in the TEASER:

VOICE (O.S.)
Mitchell McDeere. Daniel Moxon.
Open the door!

Mitch scans the room for a weapon. Nothing. Panic begins to rise in his chest. He returns to the balcony, looking for an escape route, but there's nowhere to go. Unless... there's a BALCONY outside the next room. Could he jump it!? Is it too far to reach!?

Mitch has no choice. He rips off his suit jacket and gets ready to go. But just at that moment, the DOOR CRASHES IN, SPLINTERING OFF ITS HINGES!

Mitch is jolted -- it's too late. OFF his eyes, as they widen with fear, we:

SMASH TO BLACK...

... and our final TITLE CARD to end the Episode:

THE FIRM