

"The Street Lawyer"

Pilot Episode

by

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Based on the novel by

John Grisham

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TEASER

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

MICHAEL BROCK, 30's, purposeful, in an expensive but conservative suit, steps in and presses the 'Door Close' button.

Right before the doors do close, a large black MAN squeezes in. He is clearly HOMELESS, in dark glasses, a tattered trench coat, hair and beard unkempt and flecked with gray.

Michael does his best to ignore the Homeless Man, but can't help stealing a sideways look.

INT. DRAKE & SWEENEY - SAME

The elevator doors open on a white shoe law firm, Drake & Sweeney, the seat of D.C. corporate/civil legal power.

Michael enters the plush reception area.

Though high-style, Drake & Sweeney is quite sterile and forbidding.

A prim woman, MADAME DEVIER, is behind the desk.

MICHAEL

Is my two o'clock here yet?

MADAME DEVIER

Yes, and your 2:30. Polly has them.

MICHAEL

Good. Call security. There's a bum in the building.

As he moves past her, wrestling off his overcoat, her eyes WIDEN.

Michael rounds the corner.

VOICE IN B.G.

He's got a gun!

A GUNSHOT is heard. SCREAMS echo through the halls. Normally professional LAWYERS and PARALEGALS scramble for the exits.

Amid the panic, Michael takes action. He runs back to find Madame Devier standing, petrified, at GUNPOINT.

The Homeless Man has a large handgun drawn. Debris falls from the ceiling where he's fired. He points the gun at Michael.

Though afraid, Michael stands his ground.

MICHAEL

Don't shoot.

Michael raises his hands and eases in front of Madame Devier.

More PEOPLE can be seen and heard running away in the b.g.

A conference room door swings open. RAFTER, a scrappy little torpedo comes out.

RAFTER

What the hell?

The Homeless Man swings the gun on Rafter.

RAFTER

Put that gun down.

The Homeless Man FIRES another shot into the ceiling.

Rafter flinches, looks to Michael.

MICHAEL

Guess he doesn't know you're a partner.

HOMELESS MAN

Let's go.

The Homeless Man thrusts the gun in their faces and backs them into the conference room. Left alone at her desk, Madame Devier takes the opportunity to RUN.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - SAME

A high-powered meeting was taking place inside the walnut-paneled room. Now, rudely interrupted, EIGHT LAWYERS-- UMSTEAD, COLBURN, NATE MALAMUD, BARRY NUZZO, others-- scramble for an exit or under the conference table.

Malamud huddles in a corner calling the police on a cell phone.

HOMELESS MAN

Shut the phone.

Malamud does. The men, used to giving orders, not taking them, are now at a loss.

HOMELESS MAN
Up against the wall.

His tone is calm. He displays his gun and the Lawyers obey. He turns to Michael.

HOMELESS MAN
Lock the doors.

Michael and Barry Nuzzo--the only other man Michael's age--trade a look. Michael has no choice but to lock the doors.

RAFTER
Look, pal, exactly what do you want?

The Homeless Man FIRES over Rafter's shoulder. Rafter cowers.

HOMELESS MAN
I'm not your pal. Don't call me that.

The Lawyers huddle fearfully. No one speaks. No one wants to be noticed. Only Michael is willing to step forward. He becomes the leader.

MICHAEL
What should we call you?

The Homeless Man pauses. This respect reaches him.

HOMELESS MAN
Call me Mister.

MICHAEL
Okay. Mister.

Mister takes out rope and hands it to Michael.

MISTER
Tie everybody together. Collect all the wallets, money, watches, jewelry.

They start putting their valuables on the conference table.

COLBURN

Why didn't you knock off a liquor store? At least then you'd have a chance to get away.

MISTER

It's not for me. For your next of kin.

The air goes out of the room. Only Michael has the presence to speak.

MICHAEL

Look, this is gonna end badly for you. Why don't you let us go now, before it gets there.

Mister opens his coat, he's got DYNAMITE wired to his chest.

MISTER

We're not going anywhere.

Fear is plain on the Lawyers' faces as Michael starts tying them up.

END TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. DRAKE & SWEENEY BUILDING - DAY

Police vehicles screech to a halt around the building.

Boots hit the street as heavily armed and body-armored OFFICERS pile out and take up strategic positions.

SUPERIORS bark commands.

A HELICOPTER cuts the air as it arrives on-site.

A string of LAWYERS and other FIRM EMPLOYEES are hustled out of the building by POLICE.

One lawyer is a striking brunette woman in her late 20's-- CAROLINE BROWNE. She runs well in her high heels, and carries an expensive briefcase.

A SECRETARY grabs Caroline's arm and speaks as she runs by.

SECRETARY

Caroline, I think Michael's in there.

Caroline stops. She glances back at the building for a moment, and then keeps running away.

INT. DRAKE & SWEENEY BUILDING - DAY

POLICE and SWAT deploy in the lobby, stairwell, and entrance to the firm.

A CAPTAIN arrives on the scene, talks to his Lieutenant.

CAPTAIN

What do we got?

LIEUTENANT

Some lunatic's holding eight lawyers at gunpoint.

CAPTAIN

Eight, huh? That's a start.

They deploy.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - SAME

The Lawyers are now tied to one another at the wrist, except for Michael.

MISTER
Who're the evictors?

MICHAEL
What?

MISTER
One minute you got a roof over your head. The next, the marshal's putting you out. Drake & Sweeney stamped on the papers. Now, who're the evictors?

Michael begins to understand Mister's motive.

MICHAEL
None of us are in property law. We're corporate lawyers. Litigators.

MISTER
Then I guess you're not the guilty ones, right?

MICHAEL
Right.

MISTER
Uh huh. You ever been hungry? Ever slept in the snow?

MICHAEL
No.

MISTER
What'd you eat for lunch today?

MICHAEL
A grilled chicken Caesar.

MISTER
Dressing on the side?

MICHAEL
No.

MISTER
Oh, a risk-taker...Were you alone?

MICHAEL
I went with a law school buddy.

MISTER
What'd it cost you?

MICHAEL
Thirty bucks. Plus tip.

This disgusts Mister.

MISTER
You know what I had? Soup and
crackers at a shelter. You could
feed a hundred of my friends for
thirty bucks...

He stares pointedly at Michael.

MISTER
...Plus tip. Tell you what.
We're gonna eat together. Pick up
that phone. Dial 911.

Mister puts his hand on a RED WIRE attached to the dynamite
on his chest, and pulls it taut.

MISTER
Do it.

INT. POLICE TRUCK - SAME

The firm brass, including RUDOLPH MAYES--50ish, with the
confident bearing of a full partner--and ARTHUR JACOBS--
older, distinguished, authoritative, the Senior Partner--are
with Police in the make-shift command post.

An OFFICER wearing a telephone headset turns to the Captain.

OFFICER
They're calling in. 911 is
connecting the call.

The Captain punches a button putting the call on speaker.

CAPTAIN
This is Captain Metcalfe, D.C.
Police.

MICHAEL (O.S. PHONE)
This is Michael Brock.

MAYES
Brock? Is everybody alright in
there?

MICHAEL (O.S. PHONE)

For now.

CAPTAIN

What are his demands?

MICHAEL (O.S. PHONE)

He wants you to send us soup from
the Methodist Mission on L Street.

Rudolph can't help playing to the audience of Cops.

MAYES

The soup kitchen does carry out?

MICHAEL (O.S. PHONE)

Just do it, Rudolph. Enough for
ten people. He says we start to
die if he sees any cops.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Mister stalks the room. The Lawyers are pressed against the
wall. A helicopter is heard outside.

Mister checks out the corner of the window, staying clear of
lines of fire, then wheels and trains the gun on Michael.

MISTER

You. What do they pay you to put
people out in the cold?

MICHAEL

I told you, we don't--

Mister cocks the gun.

MISTER

How much?

MICHAEL

Hundred forty thousand a year.

Mister points to Nuzzo.

MISTER

You?

NUZZO

One fifty-one.

ANGLE ON: Michael can't help but shoot Nuzzo a look. He
talks low.

MICHAEL
You make eleven grand more than me--

NUZZO
Can we talk about this later, Mike--
Mister points to Malamud.

MISTER
Old guy, what are you pulling down?
Malamud can't keep the pride out of his voice.

MALAMUD
Salary or with the bonus?
Mister raises the gun.

MISTER
Don't play with me.

MALAMUD
Million two.

MISTER
Over a million dollars. But if you
walked past me on the street, you
wouldn't give me a dime.

MALAMUD
I give to charity--

MISTER
Charity. Hmph. Don't lump me in
with the symphony.

A Helicopter BUZZES close by outside. Mister checks the
window and mutters to himself.

MISTER
They laying in wait. But I ain't
gonna go easy...

Barry Nuzzo speaks quietly.

NUZZO
If I don't walk out of here, look
after Lynn and the kids.

MICHAEL
Of course.

There is a sharp KNOCK on the door. Everybody FREEZES.

MISTER
Food's here.

Mister points at Umstead.

MISTER
Untie him. I want him in front of
me, you behind me. Try anything
and you die.

Michael unties Umstead, and in position, they move to the door.

Umstead opens the door. There is a cart there, bearing soup in containers, and bread.

MISTER
Now you can see how I eat.

ANGLE ON: As Umstead leans forward for the cart, Mister is EXPOSED.

A GUNSHOT rings out. Mister is hit. His blood SPRAYS all over Michael. Mister goes down.

ANGLE ON: In the foyer, behind a credenza, the SHARPSHOOTER emerges. A SWAT TEAM floods the area.

Pandemonium. The Lawyers RUN for the door and freedom, the ones in front dragging the others behind.

ANGLE ON: Michael, covered in blood, not sure if he's hit, slumps to his knees.

POLICE and PARAMEDICS rush to him, past the toppled cart and blood splattered soup containers.

EXT. DRAKE & SWEENEY BUILDING - NIGHT

Medics attend to the Lawyers from the hostage situation.

Michael is seated on a stretcher near an ambulance. He is getting wiped down, his blood pressure checked, by a MEDIC.

MEDIC
This is an anti-viral. You might
want to get blood tests for HIV and
hepatitis.

The Medic moves off.

The hostages are surrounded by their FAMILIES. There are tears and hugs, bursts of relieved laughter.

Barry Nuzzo hugs his two small CHILDREN.

ANGLE ON: Michael sits on the stretcher, totally alone. There's no one there for him. Nuzzo, leaving, turns to Michael.

NUZZO
Hey, Mike, where's Caroline?

Michael shrugs.

NUZZO
You okay?

MICHAEL
I'm okay. Go on home.

Nuzzo goes.

A stretcher is brought out of the building. This one holds a zippered BODY BAG. Michael watches as Mister is put in a meat wagon.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - LATER

Michael stands looking out the window of a tasteful Georgetown apartment, a glass of vodka in his hand.

There is the sound of keys in the door and a knock. The door opens and Caroline steps in. She crosses to him and they embrace with much awkwardness.

CAROLINE
Are you all right?

MICHAEL
Where were you?

CAROLINE
I was in the Pierson Group merger meeting when we heard the shots. Then we got the hell out of there.

She grabs a hold of him and hugs him.

CAROLINE
I was so worried about you.

Michael takes a long drink.

MICHAEL
Uh huh. You finalize the merger over the phone?

She's half-embarrassed.

CAROLINE
After you were released.

Michael raises his glass to her.

CAROLINE
It's exactly what you would've
done, Michael...Look, I waited to
find out you hadn't been hurt.
Finished my deal. Tried your cell.
Then I came over.

Michael swallows this. They stand in silence for a moment, a
gulf between them.

CAROLINE
I'm here now. You want to talk?

He does, but he can't bridge the gap.

MICHAEL
Not really.

She leans close.

CAROLINE
You want to make me a drink then?
We could--

MICHAEL
Caroline...

CAROLINE
Okay. I guess I'll go home then.

She turns for the door.

MICHAEL
How about tomorrow, after work?

She stops.

CAROLINE
Tomorrow.

He nods. She leaves. Michael is a man whose reality has
been upended. Everything that he was sure of this morning is
now in doubt. He turns back toward the window, drinks.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. DRAKE & SWEENEY - DAY

Michael Brock steps off the elevator. He's made this walk a thousand times, but it will never be the same.

Madame Devier is behind her desk. He looks at the ceiling above her, it's been repaired.

As he passes Madame Devier, she breaks from her reserve and reaches out for his hand. He stops. She looks up at him.

MADAME DEVIER

Michael...Mr. Brock, I want to--

MICHAEL

I'm just glad we're all okay.

After an awkward moment he moves on toward the conference room.

ANGLE ON: The wall is in the last stages of being repaired by a CARPENTER.

ANGLE ON: The rug where Mister fell has been cleaned or replaced. There's hardly a trace of his having been there.

INT. MICHAEL'S OUTER OFFICE - SAME

Behind her desk is POLLY, Michael's attractive young assistant.

POLLY

Mr. Brock, are you sure you're ready to be back?

MICHAEL

I need a year off, Polly. What's a day gonna do?

Polly takes a plate of cookies off her desk.

POLLY

I figured you'd say that. I baked these for you.

Michael pockets a few and goes into his office.

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - SAME

The office is well-appointed, stacks of case files dominate the desk.

Michael sits, opens a file, tries to focus, his gaze goes distant.

Barry Nuzzo enters.

NUZZO

Hey, buddy. You didn't want to take a day either?

MICHAEL

I was hoping you'd stay home, so I could close the gap to nine thousand.

NUZZO

Nah, and it's not just us. Eight for eight, we're all here. No one wants to be the weak one in the herd.

Nuzzo opens a cabinet, turns on a small TV to Headline News.

NUZZO

Check this out.

ANGLE ON: The television features a serious looking middle-aged black man, his name is chyroned--MORDECAI GREEN.

MORDECAI (ON TV)

...We are considering many legal avenues. Possibly a suit for wrongful eviction...

MICHAEL

Who's this?

NUZZO

Represented Mister.

MORDECAI (ON TV)

This man wouldn't have been on the street if he wasn't wrongfully evicted by River Oaks Development Corporation.

MICHAEL

River Oaks. Fifty bucks against twenty says we represent 'em.

NUZZO

No action.

Michael picks up his phone.

MICHAEL

Polly, run a client search on River Oaks Development Corporation.

ANGLE ON: TV. A photo of Mister--real name shown as DEVON HARDY--flashes on screen. He looks different in the photo--no beard, younger, focused, not the type to take hostages.

Michael mutes the TV with a remote.

NUZZO

You believe this guy? Threatening to sue on behalf of the killer--

MICHAEL

He didn't kill anybody, Bar.

NUZZO

Well, he didn't get the chance.

MICHAEL

He shot a few walls and ceilings. You read the paper? That 'dynamite' was road flares taped and wired together.

NUZZO

Seemed real enough. Tell me you didn't think you'd filed your last brief.

There's a half-knock and Rudolph Mayes enters. Michael and Nuzzo straighten a bit.

MAYES

Gentlemen, glad you're in. We're meeting at three with all the hostages. Taking statements in case of any litigation.

The men nod. Mayes is ready to go, but feels he should say something inspirational.

MAYES

I, uh, know this was traumatic for you. We're stepping up security in the lobby. My prescription, for both of you, is one that's guided me through difficult times. The work. No matter what, we always have the law...Well, back at it.

Mayes marches out. Michael does his best Mayes impression.

MICHAEL (AS MAYES)
My prescription is: work your butt
off. And when it does fall off...

NUZZO
Strap it back on and keep
working...I better go.

As he leaves, Polly enters.

POLLY
River Oaks has been a client for
eight years. Braden Chance is the
partner in charge.

Michael goes back to his work, then closes the file and puts
it aside. He tries to start on something else. After a
moment he looks up to the muted television.

ANGLE ON: The television. Mordecai Green's face once again
fills the screen.

EXT. 14TH STREET LEGAL CLINIC - DAY

A shiny Lexus parks in a run down part of town. No other
cars on the street are within a decade of being new.

Michael gets out and crosses.

INT. 14TH STREET LEGAL CLINIC - SAME

Four desks in an unpainted room suffocating under files and
legal books. Though the waste baskets are filled, the carpet
worn, the bookshelves sagging, compared to the mausoleum-like
Drake & Sweeney, the clinic is vibrant and alive.

A small line of FOLKS dressed in parkas and overcoats fill
out forms and wait to be seen.

SOFIA MENDOZA, a pretty, boisterous young Hispanic woman is
yelling into the phone as Michael walks in.

SOFIA (INTO PHONE)
If you're looking for trouble, you
got a whole heap of it here by the
name of Sofia Mendoza. Now, Judge
Cross said you have to admit our
client, insurance or no...That's
right. Don't make me come down
there and shove the ruling up
your...Good.

She hangs up, sees Michael, who's flustered, in a good way, by her attitude.

MICHAEL
Are you a lawyer?

SOFIA
No I just play one on T.V. What's that say?

She points to a sign that reads "14th Street Legal Clinic."

SOFIA
Law office. You looking for somebody, sweetie?

It takes him a moment to remember.

MICHAEL
Mordecai Green.

Just then Mordecai stomps into the room. He is huge, over six feet with a wide frame that carries a lot of weight.

MORDECAI
Abraham, I'm running. You've got that Baker kid in Superior Court.

ABRAHAM LEBOW, a slight, studious looking man, leans out of an office into the main room.

ABRAHAM
I'm on it. They're predicting a ton of snow. Watch it.

Mordecai, putting on his coat, notices Michael.

MICHAEL
Mr. Green, I'm Michael Brock.

MORDECAI
What's on your mind?

MICHAEL
DeVon Hardy.

Michael hands over a business card. Mordecai bristles.

MORDECAI
Drake & Sweeney. Slumming, huh?

MICHAEL
I saw you on the news.

MORDECAI

You worried I'm gonna sue--is that why you're here?

Michael shakes his head.

MICHAEL

I don't know why I'm here...I was one of the hostages...I went back to my desk this morning like nothing happened, but I couldn't think straight. I took a drive. Here I am.

Mordecai pauses, picks up his briefcase.

MORDECAI

Well, here I'm not. I'm late for something...

Michael is motionless. Mordecai stops at the door.

MORDECAI

You can take a ride with me if you want.

INT. MORDECAI'S CAR - LATER

The car is a far cry from Michael's Lexus. The men's breath clouds show how well the heater works.

MICHAEL

That woman back in your office, Sofia, is she really a lawyer?

Mordecai's laugh booms.

MORDECAI

She's never set foot in law school. But don't let that fool ya--she's better versed in street law than a dozen attorneys at a white shoe firm like Drake & Sweeney put together.

Michael registers the insult.

MICHAEL

Oh, 'street law.' That's what you call representing lunatics like DeVon Hardy.

MORDECAI

We represent people who need a lawyer and can't pay for it. Victims. Shoes don't stay white for long in my line of work. I don't expect you to understand.

Things grow testy between them.

MICHAEL

So you've got me pegged?

MORDECAI

Ivy leaguer. Top ten in your class. Use paralegals to do your heavy lifting. State of the art gymnasium at the office to keep you fit and trim. Coasting along toward partner--

MICHAEL

No one coasts toward partner. It's eighty hour weeks, giving up everything for your job. And I've never seen the gym--no one who's serious about making partner has time to use it. But I wouldn't expect you to understand that.

MORDECAI

Is that so?

MICHAEL

Yeah. Here's your profile: bottom third of your class. At City Law. Finally passed the bar after a few tries. Couldn't catch on at a decent firm. So you make yourself feel better by 'doing good.'

Mordecai shakes his head at the young man next to him.

MORDECAI

Street law's not about making yourself feel better. It's about getting down in it. Getting underneath the system, turning it upside down. Help those who can't help themselves...Would I like to make a bunch of money? Give my family a little more? Sure.

(MORE)

MORDECAI (CONT'D)
But I was called to this...And
since you mentioned it: I
graduated Georgetown Law, 1981.
Summa.

This catches Michael. He goes silent for a moment.

MICHAEL
Do you know if DeVon Hardy had
AIDS?

MORDECAI
No, why?

MICHAEL
The bullet he took almost hit me.
I was standing behind him and I got
a face full of his blood.

Mordecai glances over at Michael, sees he's not the enemy,
that he's a little frightened, lost too. Mordecai parks.

INT. CAR - SAME

The car is in front of a large, run down church building, the
Ebenezer Fellowship.

MORDECAI
Is that why you came down? You
worried about AIDS?

MICHAEL
It's one reason. Wouldn't you be?

MORDECAI
Sure...Look, as his attorney, I can
make a call, get his blood tested.
I'll let you know.

MICHAEL
Thanks. Any idea why he did it?

Mordecai removes his glasses, rubs his eyes.

MORDECAI
He was mentally ill, like a lot of
these people. You spend years on
the streets, boozing, using,
sleeping in the cold, getting
kicked around by cops, it makes you
crazy. Plus, he had grounds.

MICHAEL
The eviction.

MORDECAI

Yep. He lived in an abandoned warehouse on the corner of New York and Florida. An ex-pimp named Tillman Gantry bought it from the city for five grand. He threw up plywood, chopped the place into little apartments. Wasn't bad as far as these places go--a roof, some toilets, water. DeVon and a bunch of other people lived there until last month, when Gantry sold it to this development outfit River Oaks for two hundred thousand.

MICHAEL

Nice profit margin.

MORDECAI

Yeah, he made out. The tenants didn't.

MICHAEL

Tenants? You mean squatters, right?

MORDECAI

I mean tenants. Gantry was charging them a hundred bucks a month. Acting as landlord.

MICHAEL

Landlord? Uh uh. I'm sure my firm did due diligence, found no one was paying rent. They were squatters. With no rights.

MORDECAI

The way I have it is: they were tenants, and entitled to due process. Thirty day notice. A hearing. All things that take time and would've set back the River Oaks Development time table. Maybe blowing the whole deal.

Mordecai gets a battered briefcase from the back seat, pulls out a thin file, scans it.

MORDECAI

Instead, no notice was given. Everyone was just kicked out.

(MORE)

MORDECAI (CONT'D)

DeVon was angry, maybe even crazy, but he wasn't stupid. He tracked your firm down. I think he wanted some payback, or at least some answers.

Mordecai looks at his watch.

MICHAEL

I've, uh, taken too much of your time.

MORDECAI

I help out at this soup kitchen. I've gotta go in. Some of the other tenants are regulars here. You can ask them what happened for yourself.

Michael looks out at the building, clearly hesitant.

MORDECAI

Or you can forget about it. I'll call you when I hear about the blood test.

Mordecai gets out.

MORDECAI

Either way, lock the door when you go.

He slams the door.

INT. EBENEZER FELLOWSHIP - LATER

A throng of rundown HOMELESS PEOPLE are on line for food.

Some are dirty, long-time street denizens, some look so NORMAL they can hardly be distinguished from the VOLUNTEERS.

The door swings open and Michael stands there. He looks out of place in his buttoned-down suit. He can't help but gawk.

He peers back toward an open kitchen where Mordecai works in an apron. Michael heads toward him.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Michael enters. Mordecai, talking with an older black woman MISS DOLLY, doesn't see him at first.

MISS DOLLY

What do you hear from Cassius?

MORDECAI

Nothing. He knows I don't want to, long as he's doing what he's doing.

MISS DOLLY

So good to these people, so hard on your own.

MORDECAI

Not hard enough. I help those who can't help themselves, not those who won't.

Mordecai looks up from where he makes sandwiches and sees a stunned Michael.

MORDECAI

Makes you uncomfortable, doesn't it, counselor? The distance isn't that great. You lose your job, savings go, can't make rent, here you are. For most of 'em it's only a pit stop before they get back on their feet. For others...

Michael surveys the room.

MICHAEL

Are any of those squatters here?

MORDECAI

The tenants. Probably, but they talk better once they're fed. Care to help?

Michael tries to hide his discomfort.

MICHAEL

I'm not sure I'm qualified.

MORDECAI

Know how to spread peanut butter on bread?

MICHAEL

I think so.

MORDECAI

Then you're qualified.

Michael's cell phone RINGS. Several people look over. Embarrassed, he answers.

MICHAEL
The meeting, right...I, uh, got
hung up...I can be there in twenty
minutes...

Michael and Mordecai lock eyes. Michael makes his decision.

MICHAEL
But I'm not gonna be...Cover for
me, Polly.

Michael shuts off his phone. Mordecai smiles warmly.

MORDECAI
Miss Dolly, set the Counselor up.

She steps over.

MISS DOLLY
Chop these vegetables.

Michael takes off his overcoat and suit jacket and begins
chopping celery.

MISS DOLLY
Smaller. Smaller. Your chunks are
too big.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

The meal prep is over. Michael and Mordecai work side by
side, cleaning the kitchen.

MICHAEL
Who's Cassius?

MORDECAI
Huh?

MICHAEL
I heard Dolly asking.

Now Mordecai becomes uncomfortable.

MORDECAI
Cassius is my son. First born.

This avenue is not open, but Michael presses.

MICHAEL
Are you close?

It costs him to answer.

MORDECAI

He's been in and out of the system.
Gangs. Rock. Can't seem to steer
him right...Come with me, the
Burtons are here. They lived in
that warehouse with DeVon.

Michael grabs his suit jacket and overcoat and follows.

INT. EBENEZER FELLOWSHIP - SAME

They cross to a table where a family sits.

LONTAE BURTON is mid-twenties, dishevelled, and has nodded
off with her BABY in her arms. Her other children are
adorable, but poorly dressed for the weather--ONTARIO, four
years old, small and bony, and TWO TODDLERS.

MORDECAI

These are the Burtons. Mother is
Lontae.

MICHAEL

Don't wake her.

He sits, faces the boy.

MICHAEL

What's your name?

ONTARIO

Ontario.

MICHAEL

Want a cookie?

Ontario nods. Michael takes Polly's cookies out of his
jacket pocket and gives them to the boy.

MORDECAI

Say thanks.

ONTARIO

Thanks.

MICHAEL

You used to live in the warehouse?

ONTARIO

Yeah.

Michael realizes what this means.

MICHAEL
Where do you stay now?

ONTARIO
A car.

Michael is stricken by this. He turns to Mordecai.

MICHAEL
Can they live here now that the
warehouse is gone?

MORDECAI
No one lives here. And the waiting
list for emergency shelter's got
five hundred names on it.

ANGLE ON: A fight erupts nearby between TWO MEN. Mordecai
wades in, throwing his considerable bulk, breaking it up.

MORDECAI
You got the gristle to fight, then
you can use it to work. Fight with
them brooms over there. Sweep up.

He directs them towards the cleaning supplies.

Michael is left alone with the family, and Lontae stirs.

LONTAE
Ontario likes you. He's usually
not that easy with strangers.

MICHAEL
I'm Michael Brock. I wanted to ask
you a few question about the
warehouse.

She nods.

LONTAE
Yeah, they tore it down.

MICHAEL
I heard that. You were living
there free, right?

LONTAE
Uh uh. I wouldn't do what Tillman
wanted me to to live there for
free. I paid a hundred bucks a
month.

MICHAEL

You have cancelled checks?

LONTAE

Cash. It wasn't easy raising a hundred dollars a month. But it was worth it to keep my babies warm and dry.

Michael is rocked by this. Mordecai returns.

MORDECAI

Find out what you needed to? They tenants like I said?

Michael stands. He is uneasy, overwhelmed.

MICHAEL

I, uh, should go...

MORDECAI

I'd drive you, but I can't. 'Cause of the storm they're letting people stay until midnight, but only if I stay too.

Michael looks at the Burtons. He wants to help, but doesn't quite know how. He holds out his overcoat.

MICHAEL

Here. It must be cold in the car.

Unfamiliar emotion gripping him, he hurries out.

EXT. EBENEZER FELLOWSHIP - NIGHT

A heavy snow is falling and sticking.

Without a coat, in the cold, in a rough part of town, Michael walks down the street, checking over his shoulder often.

Finally, a cab lumbers by. Michael waves it down.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. DRAKE & SWEENEY - DAY

Michael walks down the hall.

INT. DRAKE & SWEENEY, BRADEN CHANCE'S OFFICE - DAY

Michael arrives in a fancy outer office. Behind the desk is a SECRETARY.

Standing nearby at a filing cabinet is a young, wavy haired, paralegal, HECTOR PALMA.

MICHAEL

I'm Michael Brock, an associate.
I'd like to talk to Mr. Chance for
a moment.

ANGLE ON: Palma glances over.

SECRETARY

I'll see if he's available.

INT. BRADEN CHANCE'S OFFICE - SAME

Michael is seated in a lavish office, the kind all young associates work towards.

Behind his large desk is BRADEN CHANCE, fifties, wired tight, but he tries to conceal it under an easy and smooth manner.

CHANCE

This firm's got over four hundred lawyers. If we all went roaming the halls, knocking on each others' doors, it'd turn into a Louisiana hay ride. That's why we have a protocol, which you well know. If you want to meet with a partner, you need to go through your supervising partner--

MICHAEL

I know. I can--

CHANCE

That said, it's always a pleasure to sit with one of Rudolph Mayes' boys. He usually snags the best and the brightest. What can I help you with?

MICHAEL

I was wondering if I could see the River Oaks file.

Chance leans back and appraises Michael.

CHANCE

You were one of the hostages weren't you?

Michael nods.

CHANCE

Nasty business. I'm just glad it ended the right way.

Michael's not buying the charm.

MICHAEL

Me too. I want to put it behind me. Which is why I was hoping to get a look at that file...

Chance stiffens.

CHANCE

Well, sure, you can look at it. In fact, you can look at all my files...just as soon as you make partner. That is if you make partner.

The threat is clear, but Michael tries to press on diplomatically.

MICHAEL

Okay, forget looking at the file. Do you think I could ask you some questions about it?

Chance's tone goes steely.

CHANCE

Under what auspices?

MICHAEL

Under the auspices that I was almost killed over it yesterday. How's that?

Chance bristles.

CHANCE

I don't need to engage in this conversation. But since you're obviously still shaken up over what happened to you, I'll indulge your curiosity.

MICHAEL

Thank you. Were there rent receipts?

Chance answers almost before the question is out.

CHANCE

There were no rent receipts. Because there were no renters. The people living in that warehouse were squatters.

MICHAEL

It's just, there's this woman--she said she paid rent.

Chance gets to his feet.

CHANCE

Of course that's what she said. They all have a story. But you know as well as I do, that if she was a renter, we couldn't have had her removed. Now what, exactly, are you after?

Michael stands as well.

MICHAEL

I want answers.

CHANCE

Well you won't find answers to why a crazy man picks up a gun in any file. Please leave.

ANGLE ON: Chance crosses to the door, OPENS it.

MICHAEL

I wasn't implying--

CHANCE

You implied everything the moment you walked in here. And I resent it. I'll thank you to let me worry about River Oaks from here on out.

Michael leaves, the door slams behind him.

The Secretary and Hector Palma have witnessed the end of the argument.

MICHAEL
Horse's ass.

As Michael walks away, Hector nods in agreement.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

A dozen LAWYERS from the Corporate Litigation Group meets, Umstead, Rafter, and Nuzzo among them. Michael is too.

Fresh fruit platters and silver urns of coffee and water line the table.

RAFTER
Met this guy on the golf course who pitched me on a corporate jet leasing program. Sounds good, John. No more waiting in airports. We could hold client meetings en route, be billing all the time--

UMSTEAD
Hold off on that until the next partner meeting...Let's get to business.

Rafter scowls, pops a strawberry in his mouth.

UMSTEAD
General counsel for Kelly Telco says if their name is being removed from the stadium, then they're owed their money back.

A portly associate with a Maryland accent, MACKOVER, snipes.

MACKOVER
They should've thought of that before they put their books in the frying pan and turned up the burner.

Nuzzo looks to Michael, bumps his eyebrows over Mackover's comment. Michael gives him nothing back.

NUZZO

Their name on the stadium does cast a pall over the whole league every time it's on TV.

UMSTEAD

Telco's our client, and we're not giving their retainer back, so I want plausible theories of recovery.

The lawyers talk amongst themselves with fervor.

Michael sits apart, a blank look on his face, his thoughts clearly elsewhere.

UMSTEAD

Brock, you have any ideas? You're usually good with the creative thinking.

Michael snaps back to focus.

MICHAEL

Uh...yeah...We argue unjust enrichment, like in Spivak v. Thornton...

INT. DRAKE & SWEENEY - NIGHT

Leaving for the night, Michael waits for the elevator. Rudolph Mayes and Arthur Jacobs walk past and stop.

JACOBS

Michael, missed you at the deposition meeting yesterday.

MICHAEL

Sorry about that, sir.

Michael doesn't know what else to say.

JACOBS

Still going to need that statement. Get with McCaulley, he's taking them down.

MICHAEL

Okay.

MAYES

Everything alright with you?

Michael turns, meets their eyes.

MICHAEL
I don't know, Rudolph...

MAYES
Got a call from Braden Chance.

Michael is surprised to hear this.

MICHAEL
He called you? I just asked him
some simple questions.

JACOBS
He's a partner here. Once you've
earned that, you expect to be the
one asking the questions.

MICHAEL
Right.

MAYES
If you've got concerns, come to me.
But I can tell you, we've vetted
this already. The people evicted
from that warehouse were there
illegally. They had no rights.
We're clean. No exposure.

Michael walks the line of disrespect.

MICHAEL
As long as we're clean, Rudolph.

The elevator arrives. Michael gets in.

Mayes and Jacobs watch him go, trade a concerned look.

INT. SPORTS CLUB L.A., FOGGY BOTTOM - NIGHT

Michael enters a fancy health club and finds Caroline, barely
covered by lycra, on a Stair Gauntlet at high speed. He
wears a canvas car coat over his suit jacket.

MICHAEL
Hi. I was wondering if I could buy
you dinner. Or a protein shake or
something.

She smiles, pulls off earphones.

CAROLINE

That was last night. Only you stood me up. I called you--

MICHAEL

I turned off my cell. I'm sorry. I ended up at this homeless shelter, met this family. They live in a car. You wouldn't believe what I saw--

CAROLINE

I want to hear about it, but I'm in my peak heart rate right now. Then I have to redline a deal memo on Pierson.

Michael nods, begins to go.

CAROLINE

Maybe this weekend.

She notices his coat.

CAROLINE

Where's your overcoat?

MICHAEL

I, um, gave it away.

She looks at him like he's from Mars.

EXT. GEORGETOWN STREET - DAY

A bright morning.

Michael walks down snow-bank lined streets courtesy of the earlier storm.

He stops at a newsstand and buys the Washington Post. He's stunned when he sees...

ANGLE ON: Bottom of the front page. "HOMELESS FAMILY SUFFOCATES IN CAR. LONTAE BURTON--MOTHER--AND FOUR CHILDREN DEAD"

Michael goes pale, as if he may pass out.

MICHAEL

Oh no.

INT. 14TH STREET LEGAL CLINIC - LATER

Michael enters the clinic. Abraham sits with a CLIENT conferring quietly. Sofia types. The place is somber. Michael walks past them into Mordecai's office.

INT. MORDECAI'S OFFICE - SAME

Mordecai is on the phone.

MORDECAI

Thank you Reverend Hagler...Yes, it is a sad day indeed.

He hangs up. The deaths have hit Mordecai hard. He has no warmth for Michael.

MICHAEL

What happened?

MORDECAI

You read the paper. You know. Carbon monoxide. She was running the engine, to keep the heater on. But the tailpipe was stuck in the snow bank.

Michael slumps down onto a metal folding chair, realizes.

MICHAEL

If my firm hadn't put them out in the street, they would've never been in that car.

MORDECAI

That's right.

MICHAEL

What can I do about it?

MORDECAI

Nothing. We shouldn't even be having this conversation. You're on the other side. Remember? Here...

Mordecai picks up a slip of paper.

MORDECAI

DeVon Hardy's blood was clean.

Michael has a moment of relief.

MORDECAI

So you can go back to work. Go
back to your world. Your firm.

Mordecai grabs a handful of papers and walks out into the
main area. Michael gets up and follows.

INT. 14TH STREET LEGAL CLINIC - SAME

Abraham confers with Sofia. Mordecai walks up and hands off
the papers.

MORDECAI

These need to be filed by end of
day. Can you do it over lunch?

SOFIA

If you're buying. And I ain't
settling for baloney.

Michael walks up. Mordecai hardly gives him a glance.

MICHAEL

You're at least adding the Burtons
to the lawsuit, right?

MORDECAI

There is no lawsuit.

MICHAEL

But on television, you said--

MORDECAI

I said: I was looking into it.
And now I have. Even if Drake &
Sweeney is liable, there's no
paperwork. I can't prove there
were tenants. End of story. End
of suit.

MICHAEL

Can't you find the others that
lived there?

ABRAHAM

Maybe. Unstable witnesses.

MICHAEL

There's gotta be something you can
do--

MORDECAI

I'm arranging a proper burial.
Nothing else to do but try and go
on. Keep helping the living.

MICHAEL

I thought street law was about
'getting down in it.' Not running
from a fight.

Abraham and Sofia share a bitter laugh at this, as the fire
comes to Mordecai's eyes.

MORDECAI

Don't you think I wanna make
somebody pay? Drag your firm into
court and take a chunk out of 'em?
Believe me I do. But I've gotta
pick the fights I can win.
Abraham, what would a lawsuit of
this size cost us?

ABRAHAM

With depositions, investigators,
court reporters...Fifty thousand at
least.

MORDECAI

We simply don't have it to throw at
one weak case that could cost us
all our others.

There's a pained silence, which Michael breaks.

MICHAEL

But if you win a case of this size
it could finance twenty other
cases. And change the way big law
firms do business.

Sofia sparks to this. She looks to Abraham, who welcomes the
argument as well.

MORDECAI

Well that's not how we do business.
We don't work on contingency. We
don't share in any of the
judgements. And we don't sit
around daydreaming about global
change. We don't have that luxury
since we're not billing by the
hour. Here, we try to solve one
problem at a time.

MICHAEL

As long as you don't have to risk too much. Right, Mordecai?

Michael and Mordecai are at odds.

MORDECAI

The streets are full of injustice, man. We fight it when we can. This time we can't.

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Michael tries to work. Polly pokes her head in.

POLLY

Is there anything else? You want me to order you up dinner?

MICHAEL

No, Polly. You're here too late as it is. Go home.

She leaves, closing the door behind her.

Michael goes back to work.

ANGLE ON: The base of the door. A manila envelope slides under.

Michael crosses and picks it up.

He opens the door looks down the empty hall one way, then the other.

ANGLE ON: The hall is EMPTY. An Exit door swings.

Michael closes the door and opens the envelope.

ANGLE ON: The envelope contains TWO KEYS and a DOCUMENT titled "TENANT LIST." The list of names includes DeVon Hardy and Lontae Burton & family.

Michael examines one key. He pulls out his key ring, and compares his own office key. They are similar.

EXT. DINER - LATER

Michael can be seen through the window sitting in a booth. Barry Nuzzo walks in, sees him.

INT. DINER - SAME

Nuzzo slides into the booth opposite Michael.

MICHAEL

You eating?

NUZZO

It's ten o'clock. I had dinner
three hours ago.

A moment passes. Nuzzo calls out to the WAITRESS.

NUZZO

Two deluxe with cheese.

MICHAEL

Atta boy.

NUZZO

So what's up?

MICHAEL

You ever have the urge to go
outside the system? To drop due
process and letter of the law and
just start breaking things? You
ever feel that way?

NUZZO

Feel? We're corporate lawyers,
Mike. It's one of the good things
about the job. Gotta stay
objective.

A BUSBOY puts down waters.

MICHAEL

What if I can't?

NUZZO

Can't? You're Michael Brock, the
Iceman. You faced down the Service
Workers' Union after they lost
three quarters of their pension.
These were old women who'd have to
keep cleaning garbage 'til they
croaked. You didn't even sniffle.

Michael's no longer proud of this.

MICHAEL

When I started Yale, I used to imagine the moment I'd hang my law degree in my office. It would stand for something--honor, justice, fair play. But about a year ago, when they re-painted the offices, I never bothered taking it back out of the closet. Because by then when I looked at it, all I saw were dollar signs.

NUZZO

Yeah, I hear ya. There was a survey first year of law school. Over half the class planned on working in public interest law. Then we grew up.

This frustrates Michael.

MICHAEL

Well I met this guy, a lawyer. He's not all about billable hours. He actually helps people.

A WAITRESS drops off the plates.

NUZZO

We help people. What about that pro bono death penalty case you wrote a brief on?

MICHAEL

That's different. Faceless. This guy's out in the streets, battling, while I'm in an office pushing paper.

Nuzzo takes a French fry, eats half, gestures with it.

NUZZO

I don't know what you're thinking. But let me put it to you plain: don't break the law. No client, no case, is worth that.

Michael takes a breath.

MICHAEL

Yeah. Yeah, you're right.

They pick up their burgers.

INT. DRAKE & SWEENEY - LATE NIGHT

Michael makes his way down the hall. He tries to act casual.

INT. BRADEN CHANCE'S OUTER OFFICE - SAME

He reaches the area of Braden Chance's office. No one is around, the lights are dim.

Michael uses the key and opens the door to Chance's office.

INT. BRADEN CHANCE'S OFFICE - SAME

Michael enters the office, absorbs the strangeness of being there illegally.

He takes a breath and goes to Chance's filing cabinet. The second key opens it.

ANGLE ON: Files. Michael thumbs through them until he finds "River Oaks". He removes the thick file.

INT. BRADEN CHANCE'S OUTER OFFICE - SAME

Michael exits Chance's office. As he pulls the door shut behind him he is STARTLED by a squeaking noise.

Spinning around, Michael sees a JANITOR pushing a cart past.

They lock eyes. It seems the Janitor knows whose office it is, that it isn't Michael's. Michael has no choice but to walk briskly away.

INT. DRAKE & SWEENEY COPY ROOM - SAME

Michael steps into the doorway of a large copy room full of heavy duty Xerox machines...Unfortunately there are THREE PARALEGALS burning the midnight oil.

PARALEGAL

Mr. Brock? You're in late.

He sees the file.

PARALEGAL

You want me to run copies of that for ya?

MICHAEL

Uh, no. No, I'm good. I'll have Polly do it tomorrow.

He leaves. They watch him go.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - LATER

Michael sits at his dining room table with coffee and the contents of the River Oaks file strewn before him.

He checks a log against documents.

MICHAEL
Something's missing...

He leans back, rubs his eyes. A key is heard in the door, and a knock. Caroline enters. She's dressed in evening wear and has had a few drinks.

CAROLINE
Back in the saddle, huh? That didn't take long.

MICHAEL
I'm...This is something else.

CAROLINE
Bar Association hosted "Young Political Minds" at the Sheraton. Shouldda been there.

MICHAEL
Yeah?

CAROLINE
Mackover got drunk, tried to...

She moves behind him.

MICHAEL
To what?

She GROPES him.

CAROLINE
That. What're you working on?

MICHAEL
You know how every file contains a log?

CAROLINE
Uh, yeah. We spent two weeks on it in orientation after I was hired last fall. Every document, every piece of paper, associated with a case is added to the file and logged in.

MICHAEL

Right. Like this one. Item 002. Title for the property and notes by B.C.--that's Braden Chance--the partner on the case. So it's all fine until Item 572. It says: 'Memo from H.P.'--that's the paralegal, Hector Palma--but there's no memo.

CAROLINE

Really?

MICHAEL

Yeah. Look at this. Item 571 is also a memo from Palma. It says: "will visit site to inspect Monday, January 27th." The next entry is on Monday the 27th: 'H.P.memo, site visit, inspection of premises.' But that memo's gone.

She takes it in.

MICHAEL

Chance knew that blacking out the log would only call attention to it, so he pulled the memo, hoping no one would notice. I think evidence against Drake & Sweeney is in the missing memo.

CAROLINE

What? Against Drake & Sweeney? We are Drake & Sweeney.

MICHAEL

I don't know. Maybe I'm not. I think the firm's done wrong. And if I let it go, then I'm a part of it.

This sobers her up.

CAROLINE

Where'd you get this?

MICHAEL

I borrowed it.

CAROLINE

You stole it...

Her apparent concern over the situation starts to turn.

CAROLINE

That's pretty reckless. I didn't know you had that in you.

She smiles wickedly, moves seductively close.

MICHAEL

I've learned I can be pretty reckless when I need to be. Don't worry, I'm going to copy it and have it back by morning.

CAROLINE

I have two things to say. One: Don't copy it, just return it. If you think there's been impropriety, write a memo to Mayes or Jacobs and then forget it. And two:

The room goes quiet for a moment. She removes his tie.

CAROLINE

You're not the only one with impropriety on his mind. I'm having some pretty improper thoughts myself.

She takes his hand, pulls him up out of his chair. They start to kiss.

He glances back at the file, torn for a moment, then caves to the need for contact. He leads her toward the bedroom.

INT. BROCK APARTMENT, BEDROOM - SAME

They start to undress, make love.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROCK APARTMENT, BEDROOM - LATER

Caroline sleeps. Michael lies awake.

He jumps up, grabbing his pants. Caroline stirs.

CAROLINE

What're you doing?

MICHAEL

I'm gonna go return that file. Go back to sleep.

CAROLINE

Good.

She turns over.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. STREET, NORTHEAST - NIGHT

Michael's Lexus moves through a low income housing area.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - SAME

Michael walks down a poorly lit hall in a shabby building.
He gets to a door, knocks.

After a moment, the door opens on a tired, annoyed, Hector
Palma in T-shirt and sweats. When he clocks Michael he
becomes guarded.

MICHAEL

Hector Palma.

HECTOR

Oh no. You're not standing here.

MICHAEL

Hector--

HECTOR

Don't try to pull me into this--

MICHAEL

You saw me arguing with Chance.
You left me the keys and tenant
list. You're in it.

This stops Hector.

MICHAEL

Let me in, we'll talk about it.

HECTOR

Nah, you'll wake my kids. Wait.

The door closes.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - SAME

Michael and Hector, in a coat over his sleep wear, stand
outside in the cold. Hector smokes.

HECTOR

...So I went into the warehouse.
The place was full of people.

(MORE)

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Not squatters either. They had these little apartments. One of them even gave me a rent receipt she'd gotten from Gantry. It was written on the back of a grocery store coupon, but that's what it was.

Michael realizes the significance of this.

MICHAEL

Which means the firm had evidence they were tenants.

HECTOR

Yeah.

MICHAEL

What'd you do then?

HECTOR

I went back to the office and wrote up what I saw.

MICHAEL

And how'd Chance take it?

HECTOR

He took it fine. Told me not to say anything. River Oaks is his biggest client and he wanted to keep 'em happy. They were on a tight schedule, so he didn't tell anyone about the tenants...But then, when that family died, he got pretty jumpy. Removed the memo from the file.

MICHAEL

I'm sure he destroyed it...

Michael thinks for a second.

MICHAEL

Don't suppose you kept a copy?

Hector puffs the cigarette.

MICHAEL

C'mon, Hector. A family died. Kids. You can't let that go.

Hector pulls a much folded piece of paper out of his coat.

HECTOR

I'm getting my law degree, you know? Night school. They teach us to always keep copies.

Michael extends a hand for the memo. Hector hesitates.

HECTOR

I've got a wife. Two babies. I can't get fired, man, I need my health insurance. Chance may be pulling some snaky stuff, but Drake & Sweeney, it's a good place to work. I get rotated out of Real Estate in six months and I won't have to deal with the guy anymore.

MICHAEL

I'll protect you. No one'll know where I got the memo.

HECTOR

Why you? Huh? A partner track dude like you, why're you doing this?

MICHAEL

I...I don't know. Will you help me?

Finally Hector hands over the piece of paper. Michael puts it in his COAT POCKET.

INT. LEXUS - LATER

Michael drives quickly on the icy streets. He talks on his cell phone at the same time.

MICHAEL (INTO PHONE)

Mordecai, it's Michael. It's late so I'm leaving this on your machine. I...I did something...And I don't know what to do next--

A horn BLARES. Lights FLASH. A CAR runs a red light and T-BONES Michael's Lexus in an intersection. The airbag goes off and fills the screen.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

A young ER doctor who sports an earring--DR. GREKIN--finishes wrapping Michael's knee.

DR. GREKIN

Between the knee and hip injuries, walking's not gonna be easy. You should try to stay off it.

Groggy, Michael nods.

DR. GREKIN

Guy who hit you got the worst of it. He won't get out of here for two weeks. That'll teach him to drive on bald tires.

The doctor begins writing out a prescription.

DR. GREKIN

This is for Vikes, should help your pain. Don't operate any heavy machinery on 'em...Gonna file your discharge papers.

MICHAEL

Thanks.

Dr. Grekin leaves, passing Barry Nuzzo, who steps into the curtained area.

NUZZO

Hey, pal.

MICHAEL

Barry.

NUZZO

Your car's registered to the firm. We got a call.

MICHAEL

Oh yeah?

NUZZO

Yeah. They sent a kid from the mail room down to the impound lot for it. The contents were inventoried.

Michael understands what this means.

MICHAEL

The file.

NUZZO

Yeah, Mike. They have the file back. I wish you wouldda told me exactly what you were planning last night. I wouldda walked you home.

There's a moment of silence.

MICHAEL

Am I out?

NUZZO

Not yet. The partners view it as post traumatic stress. They're looking to help you. If you come back to work, forget about these squatters, this'll all go away.

MICHAEL

Tenants. And now they'll always look at me as the guy who stole the file.

NUZZO

Arthur Jacobs himself said he 'understood what you were going through.' They did fire that paralegal though.

MICHAEL

What?

NUZZO

Hector something or other. They figured him as the guy who helped you out.

Michael shakes his head, sick with himself.

MICHAEL

Those bastards.

Nuzzo gets angry.

NUZZO

Whoa. Whoa. Don't put this on Drake & Sweeney. You stole from your employers. For no reason. C'mon, man. Don't go off the grid on me.

(MORE)

NUZZO (CONT'D)

You've worked too hard to piss it
all away over something like this.

MICHAEL

I'm not pissing it all away.

NUZZO

Well, car's gone. Job's not far
behind. You think Caroline wants
to hang around with some schnook
who wears knit ties and makes
twenty-two grand a year?

MICHAEL

Suddenly I'm gonna have bad taste
in ties?

NUZZO

You will. Mess around with public
interest law, you will.

An uncomfortable moment passes.

NUZZO

Let me drive you home.

Michael painfully gets to his feet.

MICHAEL

You can drop me somewhere else.

Michael grabs his coat, checks the pocket.

ANGLE ON: Hector Palma's MEMO IS STILL THERE.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

ANGLE ON: The door swings open and Michael limps in. He is
nearly crushed by what he sees.

A small GROUP is assembled in a modest church for the Burton
funeral. Mordecai, Abraham, and Sofia are up front.

Before the pulpit are FIVE PLAIN CASKETS. One is full-sized,
the other four are small.

REVEREND HAGLER finishes a prayer, the service breaks. The
caskets are carried out a side door.

Michael remains standing in the back.

SERVICE GOERS pass him on the way out. Abraham and Sofia
pass him by too. Mordecai gets to him and stops.

Michael takes out the Memo, and the list of Tenants, and hands them to Mordecai.

MICHAEL

Use this.

Mordecai examines them. Shakes his head.

MORDECAI

Where'd you get these?

MICHAEL

You don't want to know. Just use 'em.

MORDECAI

I can't. These'd be inadmissable in a dozen ways. Want me to count 'em? Attorney-client privilege. Fruit of a forbidden tree. On and on. If I even introduced this in court, you'd be disbarred.

MICHAEL

Don't worry about me. DeVon Hardy and the Burton family are dead. There are fifteen more on that list. They need money, places to live. You can get that for them now.

Mordecai examines Michael, his commitment. He bursts out with a harsh laugh.

MORDECAI

Okay, counselor. I see you've got the zeal of the newly converted. Swinging for the fences. Now you're gonna finally make a difference. And you'll cut corners and break laws in order to do it...

Mordecai leans against a pew.

MORDECAI

Well I've seen it before. But you know what happens to home run swingers most of the time?

MICHAEL

What's that?

MORDECAI

They strike out.

Mordecai shakes his head, hands back the documents, walks out. Michael goes after him.

EXT. CHURCH STEPS - SAME

It's raw out. The Capitol dome is visible in the distance. The Caskets are being loaded into hearses.

MICHAEL

If you don't want my help, fine.

MORDECAI

Oh, I do. Me and Abraham decided it yesterday. Come and work with us. Thirty thousand a year. Honest money. More work than you can stand. Impossible odds against you.

Michael doesn't speak to the offer.

MICHAEL

Admissability doesn't matter. I know these guys. Like you said: I'm one of 'em. And I'm tellin' you, Drake & Sweeney'll never let this go to court. The only thing they hate worse than losing money is public embarrassment. If you threaten to expose them, they'll sit down with you. But if you don't punish them, if you let 'em walk, they'll do it again. More people could die...

Michael goes eye to eye with Mordecai.

MICHAEL

Just get in the room with them. Let them lie to your face, and then decide if you want to use this.

Michael sticks the DOCUMENTS into Mordecai's coat pocket. Mordecai watches him go.

INT. DRAKE & SWEENEY, MAIN CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Drake & Sweeney's top guns are assembled around an oak table, like a power-suited army.

Arthur Jacobs, Rudolph Mayes, Braden Chance, Umstead, Rafter, as well as OTHERS.

Mordecai Greene is shown into the room. Trying to make the most of his bulk, but still very much alone, he sits down and sets up his papers across from the phalanx.

MAYES

Before we begin, Mr. Greene, let me tell you why we agreed to sit down with you.

MORDECAI

I know why. Because I've got you by the short and curlies.

The D&S lawyers are stone faced.

MAYES

I won't be baited. And no, you don't 'have us' by anything. Although we are in the right, this firm does have a conscience. We feel the situation with Mr. Hardy was...regrettable.

MORDECAI

That it was.

MAYES

But it had nothing to do with us.

MORDECAI

I disagree. The residents of the warehouse on the corner of New York and Florida were tenants in the eyes of the law. They were paying rent to Tillman Gantry. They were illegally evicted by you on behalf of your client, which set in motion a chain of events resulting in six deaths. They deserved the protection of the law. You didn't give it to them.

MAYES

What we have here...

Mayes pulls out a document.

MAYES

Is a sworn affidavit from Tillman Gantry that he never collected rent from anyone. That the building was occupied by squatters and he tried to have them removed on more than one occasion...If you contend he is lying, then go after him. Mr. Gantry's not our client, we relied on his word, and we had no first hand information to contradict him.

MORDECAI

I think you did.

RAFTER

What you think doesn't matter.
What can you prove?

MORDECAI

I now have over a dozen residents willing to swear to the fact that they paid rent, and told this to your firm.

MAYES

Street people. Some of them mentally ill. Many with criminal records no doubt. Not a very reliable bunch. Do you have any real evidence?

ANGLE ON: Mordecai looks down at his documents, at a loss for the moment.

ANGLE ON: The Hector Palma EVIDENCE. Mordecai is conflicted, can't bring himself to use it.

The door swings open and Michael enters carrying his briefcase. All eyes turn on him.

MAYES

Michael, this is a closed conference. We don't need you here.

Michael steels himself.

MICHAEL

He does.

Michael walks past the Drake & Sweeney contingent, and sits next to Mordecai.

MAYES

This is a conflict of interest Michael. You can't say anything against us while you're working here--

MICHAEL

So fire me.

MAYES

Come on, you'll be a partner in three years. We're not going to fire you.

MICHAEL

Then I quit.

MAYES

Michael.

Arthur Jacobs speaks for the first time.

JACOBS

It goes beyond that. If you use anything you learned while under our employ, you are subject to prosecution. You will be disbarred. There may be criminal charges.

Mordecai tries to act the buffer.

MORDECAI

Well he doesn't have anything.

He gives Michael a hard stare. But Michael picks up Hector Palma's memo.

MICHAEL

Yes, I do. This isn't about me or my career. Four children died so that our--your--clients could close quickly on a deal without having to go through a long eviction process. We have a document here that proves Drake & Sweeney was aware those people were renters.

MORDECAI

Michael, don't--

Braden Chance speaks up.

CHANCE
That memo's inadmissable. You
stole it.

Jacobs and Mayes whip their heads toward Chance.

MAYES
What memo?

Voices raise.

MORDECAI
Michael, stop it--

CHANCE
You're a common thief--

MICHAEL
Whether it gets into court or not,
I'll talk about it. Even if it's
from a jail cell.

Arthur Jacobs brings his hand down.

JACOBS
Just a moment. Braden, are you
saying that this firm knew--

CHANCE
There's no exposure.

JACOBS
No exposure? People are dead.

CHANCE
Arthur, please--

Jacobs silences him with a raised hand, points to the memo.

JACOBS
May I see that?

Michael slides it to him. Jacobs reads.

JACOBS
Why wasn't this in the file?

Michael points to Chance.

MICHAEL
Because he had it removed.

JACOBS

And yet you have it. You stole from us, Michael. Regardless of how this turns out, your resignation is accepted.

Michael takes this blow.

ANGLE ON: Jacobs turns to Mayes and they confer quietly.

JACOBS

We should think about settlement.

MAYES

We don't have to settle--

JACOBS

I do.

They face Mordecai, who straightens his documents.

MORDECAI

First things first--

MICHAEL

You will terminate Braden Chance as a partner at Drake & Sweeney.

Drake & Sweeney reacts.

MORDECAI

We want your firm to donate legal services--three hundred hours per month to the 14th Street Clinic.

MICHAEL

And Hector Palma gets his job back. With a clean slate.

This causes a bit more ruckus. Mordecai talks over it.

MORDECAI

Now to the money. I can see a D.C. jury getting real upset with your firm. The case is worth plenty.

MICHAEL

For the tenants, and the relatives of those who've died.

UMSTEAD

Ridiculous.

CHANCE
It's extortion, Arthur--

RAFTER
You planning on taking a nice chunk
of it too. The standard third?

Mordecai is indignant.

MORDECAI
I work on salary and collect
expenses only. The Clinic never
takes a share of a settlement.

Arthur Jacobs puts his palms on the table and stands.

JACOBS
No to Palma. No to Chance. No to
the hours. We'll hire and fire who
we want to, and deploy our lawyers
as we see fit. But you can bet
disciplining Braden Chance will be
the subject of the next partners
meeting.

He turns to Chance.

JACOBS
You're excused from the rest of
this proceeding, Braden.

CHANCE
Arthur--

JACOBS
Go.

Humiliated, Braden exits, glaring at Michael, who returns the
stare.

JACOBS
You say this matter is worth a lot
of money. And you're right.

Prepared for it by a lifetime of negotiating, Jacobs speaks.

JACOBS
That's why we're prepared to pay
out ten thousand per person for the
evictees. And for the relatives of
the family that died...one hundred
thousand dollars.

MICHAEL

You can do better than--

JACOBS

I can't, and I won't.

Michael and Mordecai look to each other, and STAND.

MORDECAI

See you in court, Mr. Jacobs.

As they hit the door--

JACOBS

Do you really think it'll take more than that to put roofs over the heads of fifteen people?

Michael and Mordecai stop and turn.

MICHAEL

Yes, it will. And how can you put such a small price on the lives of four kids?

Jacobs absorbs this, and wavers.

JACOBS

Fifteen thousand per person for the evictees. And a million dollars for the relatives of the family that died. Take it or leave it.

MICHAEL

Twenty-five thousand per person for the evictees. And for the Burton family--three million. You take it, or we put it to a jury.

Arthur Jacobs hesitates, then nods.

JACOBS

Done.

It's a bitter pill for the Drake & Sweeney partners, but they swallow it.

JACOBS

The terms of this settlement shall be sealed. No press.

MORDECAI
Including the part about Michael's
ethical breach.

The partners hate to let Michael slip away, but finally nod.
Michael and Mordecai walk out of the room.

EXT. DRAKE & SWEENEY BUILDING - SAME

Michael and Mordecai come through the doors. The sun shines
on their small moment of victory.

MORDECAI
You know what happens to home run
swingers some of the time.

Michael looks to him.

MORDECAI
They knock it outta the park.

Mordecai puts an arm across Michael's shoulders.

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE, DRAKE & SWEENEY - DAY

Michael is in the process of clearing out. File boxes are
stacked all over the place. He puts personal effects in
another box.

Caroline enters, takes in the mess.

CAROLINE
Can't believe you're really
leaving.

MICHAEL
Believe it. I'm out.

CAROLINE
Listen, um, I was thinking. Things
have been so hectic, maybe next
weekend the two of us could get
away. How about Bermuda? Pink
beaches. Full body tans.

MICHAEL
Ah, I don't think so.

CAROLINE
Is it 'cause of the money? I can
pay. I still work here.

They share a smile.

MICHAEL

No. Let's just stay around town.

She accepts this, but doesn't love it.

CAROLINE

I have a breakfast meeting.

She leaves. Michael goes back to packing.

NUZZO (O.S.)

Got you something.

Michael looks up to see Barry Nuzzo holding out a flat box. Michael opens it.

ANGLE ON: A brown, square-bottom, KNIT TIE.

NUZZO

Wanted you to fit in.

Michael shakes his head and laughs.

MICHAEL

That's great, Bar.

INT. 14TH STREET LEGAL CLINIC - DAY

It's still early, and the place is quiet. Sofia turns on her battered desktop. Abraham makes coffee.

Michael walks in, briefcase in one hand, a wrapped item under his other arm. Sofia mutters under her breath when she sees him.

SOFIA

Damn. You're here.

MICHAEL

Hello to you too.

ABRAHAM

Good morning.

MICHAEL

Morning.

Mordecai comes out of his office.

MORDECAI

Counselor.

Mordecai smiles, holds out a hand toward Sofia. She slaps a \$5 bill into it.

SOFIA

Never thought you'd go through with it.

Michael addresses Mordecai, but he's happy for the others to hear him too.

MICHAEL

Just want you to know--I'm not here to think small. I don't like hearing 'it can't be done.' If we don't have the money to try a case, let's go get the money. If we're outgunned, let's find a back door. There are thousands of people out there who need help. You've been fighting for 'em one at a time. I say let's start fighting for 'em all.

They Clinic staff is inspired despite themselves.

Then Sofia turns to Mordecai.

SOFIA

Still don't think he'll last out the month.

MORDECAI

Double or nothing?

SOFIA

You got it.

Michael faces her.

MICHAEL

Can I get in on that action?

SOFIA

Baby, you can't handle my action.

They share a charged moment.

MORDECAI

Set up in there. I'm going to court.

Mordecai points to a small office, not much more than a storage closet.

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - SAME

Michael walks in, appraises his new digs: a battered desk and chair, metal folding chairs for visitors, a lamp.

Michael turns the lamp switch--nothing. He uses his sleeve to wipe a layer of dust off his desk, when there's a knock on the door. It's Arthur Jacobs.

MICHAEL

Arthur. I didn't expect to see you here.

JACOBS

I didn't expect to be here...May I?

Arthur sits on a folding chair as if it will soil him permanently.

JACOBS

The last few days have been the most difficult of my professional life.

Arthur sighs.

JACOBS

I've been thinking. I haven't been able to stop thinking about it actually. Although I didn't do anything wrong, I've had to ask myself what I've done right. A firm is a reflection of its leader. I must have set the wrong example.

Michael shrugs 'maybe.'

JACOBS

At the settlement you asked for us to donate legal services. Can you handle four hundred lawyers? A couple hours a week each?

Michael's stunned.

MICHAEL

I'll figure out how to handle it.

JACOBS

It'll be a big program. You'll need to guide them. I'd like you to keep an office at Drake & Sweeney.

MICHAEL

No. I want to remember which side I'm on. I'll stay here.

JACOBS

Fine. Just know you're free to roam at Drake & Sweeney, to make sure everyone's doing their part.

MICHAEL

They're not gonna like it.

JACOBS

They don't have to.

The men share a smile. Arthur Jacobs stands.

JACOBS

By the way, Hector Palma's been reinstated. Clean slate. Good luck to you here.

He leaves.

ANGLE ON: The WRAPPED ITEM Michael brought with him. He opens it, pulls out his framed LAW DEGREE.

Michael turns to the wall behind the desk. An outdated calendar hangs there. He takes it down and hangs his degree.

He looks at it, satisfied for a moment.

SOFIA (O.S.)

Michael! We've got clients!

He goes to the door, looks out.

ANGLE ON: The Clinic is clamorous. A group of UNION WORKERS--white, black, latino, but all LARGE--are there.

MICHAEL

Step into my office, gentlemen. If you can fit...

They squeeze in. Michael closes the door.

FADE OUT.