# FIRESTARTER

by

Brett Alan Bentman

babentman@gmail.com

FADE IN:

#### EXT. THE FIELD - NIGHT

A large open pasture. Surrounded by deep woods. It's late. After midnight. An UNKNOWN FIGURE steadily walks along the damp grass. A gasoline can dangling at his side -- smacking up against the left leg of his jeans as he slowly makes his way to --

A large two-story colonial home. Poised. Established. Planted there like a ghost in the fog.

The figure ends his journey just beyond the steps of the front porch. He UNSCREWS the gas canister's top, and proceeds to spill its contents upon the silent ground. Circling the house completely. Emptying the can. Every last drop. Ending exactly where he started.

> HERBERT (V.O.) (frantic words) They're called endorphins, Noah. They're miracles -- they're feelings of exhilaration -brought on by pain, or danger, or any other form of stress. All supposedly due to the influence of God's greatest miracle... these endorphins.

The silence of night. The sting of chemicals. No coat -nothing makes sense right now -- or makes a difference to the troubled soul about to embark on this sick pilgrimage.

> HERBERT (V.O.) Think of it this way, see it as I see it -- when a nerve impulse reaches the spinal cord, all these tiny endorphins are released. They prevent nerve cells from releasing more pain signals, they prevent you from feeling the pain, the undying, unrelenting pain...

He pulls out a lighter -- sparks the flame and... drops.

The fire spreads through the home like dry tinder. Our FIRESTARTER stands there. Lost. Empty. A dark silhouette against a sea of deep reds and yellows.

And just like that... he's gone. Smoke rising to the sky.

#### INT. UNKNOWN HOUSE - DAY

A group of POLICE OFFICERS and DETECTIVES use a battering ram to FORCE OPEN the front door. They flow inside, weapons pointed -- poised. Scouring for someone, anyone. Splitting up into search groups...

#### BEDROOM

A wall chock-full of Polaroid photographs -- children -shirtless -- girls, boys -- pinned, hanging. A sickening collage.

#### HERBERT (V.O.)

And for however brief a moment it may be, they allow humans to feel a sense of power... a sense of utter control over themselves and their surroundings -- it's a miracle -- allowing them to forge ahead, to push ahead for an extended period of time.

# KITCHEN

Gas cans. Ten of them. Rags clogging the sink drain. Matches, fire logs, cigarette lighters and lighter fluid. A pyro's paradise.

#### INT. BEATEN DOWN TRUCK - DAY

HERBERT (V.O.) I've come to realize, that's the missing piece -- that's it! All I am missing is a morphine like substance originating from within my body. All that stands between me and a normal human being -- is the pain...

Just off the property. Rusted. And old Ford. A DETECTIVE forces open the trunk, revealing --

A black garbage bag, filled with mini-discs, labeled with names and ages. Children's names. Pouches of gun powder, lighters, 35mm camera, duck tape and gloves. Appalling.

## INT. MORTON KEYS & JEFFERSON/VARIOUS SHOTS - DAY

Early morning inside a powerful New York City law firm. Countless stories up, overlooking a sleepy Times Square. Within a few hours, this building will transform into a buzzsaw of communications and billable time. Room for three hundred attorneys -- each with their own collection of support cast members. Bullpens of cubicles, phone lines, and half-eaten breakfast sandwiches.

A series of shots give off the impression that somewhere, even at this hour, someone very important is already at work.

## INT. LAW FIRM WAR ROOM - DAY

Contemporary. The big room. SWARMING. A group of ASSOCIATES and PARALEGALS working on deadline. They are all hunkered down over a large conference table covered in mounds of paper files and documents. Laptops and cell phones scattered throughout. This is big business.

CARL MICULEK walking around the table. He's mid-forties, a decent New York lawyer with a knack for ass-kissing. He's a year away from making partner. He carries a cell phone with him -- open -- someone waiting on hold as he stops at...

CARL (bends down/ whispers) You've gotta take line five. There's a bit of an issue.

JEFFREY MORTON looks up from his laptop. He's older. Top dog. Managing Partner. The buck stops with him. A gentle demeanor hides his sharp teeth.

> JEFFREY (takes the call) Can I help you?

> > UNKNOWN CALLER (V.O.)

(phone) "Jeffrey, Hi. I'm calling from HAROLD RAMIS' office. He wants to carve out some time to speak with you. What works well?"

JEFFREY Right now, nothing works well. It's six a.m. and I'm in the middle of settling a four million dollar class-action lawsuit. (pause) What's this in regard to? UNKNOWN CALLER (V.O.) (phone) "Harold would rather tell you personally. All I know is he needs a favor."

JEFFREY What kind of favor?

UNKNOWN CALLER (V.O.)

(phone) "An important one..."

JEFFREY (senses urgency) Okay. Tell him to call me tonight. Anytime after seven...

Hangs up. Carl is right there.

CARL What was that all about?

JEFFREY

Who knows. (scanning the room) Where the fuck is NOAH ROBERTS?

## INT. NOAH ROBERT'S OFFICE - DAY

A photograph hanging on the wall. A face filling the frame -- Noah, smiling. A grown man's face. The kind of face you can trust. A quiet loneliness only the camera captures -right behind his eyes. Outwardly holding it together, inwardly -- a whirlwind of boiling emotions.

The office itself is comfortable. More practical than flashy. Times Square looming just outside the windows. Photographs, diplomas -- the usual attorney garbage. Famous handshakes and pointless awards. Noah behind his desk, talking on the phone --

> NOAH (phone) How did she find out?

PAT (V.O.) (phone) Does it matter? She knows. She's been showing up at the house whenever she wants, taking all kinds of shit she claims is hers.

NOAH Sounds like she's gonna want half. PAT (V.O.) Of what? NOAH Of everything. PAT (V.O.) That can't happen. NOAH What can I say? That's the price you pay to play. (ends this) Find out if they had anything in place prior to the marriage and get back to me. PAT (V.O.) Will do. Thanks Noah. (hangs up, and --) Noah hangs up and calls back out the door --NOAH Any new calls? ASHLEA (yells back) Not yet. NOAH You'll let me know? ASHLEA (confirms) I'll let you know. TIME CUT Later. New caller. Noah pacing now. Bluetooth in ear. NOAH (phone) If they're smart, they're already pulling paint chips off the guardrail as we speak. (sarcastically)

And trust me, they're smart. You think this is new to them?

WALTER (V.O.) (phone) How fast can they process something like that?

NOAH How much time's passed?

WALTER (V.O.)

Six hours.

NOAH It's already done. There's no play here.

WALTER (V.O.) Are you certain?

## NOAH

There are things the cops do slow and there's things they do fast. Traffic citations are slow, hit and runs go fast. Your client should have stopped the car, I don't care who he claims to know...

WALTER (V.O.) Do you know someone who can see this through?

#### NOAH

(figures) Yeah. I'll have to call you back.

TIME CUT

Another call. Noah at the window. Almost whispering.

STACEY (V.O.) (phone) C'mon Noah, what you're asking me to do is career suicide.

NOAH (phone) I'm just asking you to think it over. Give us one week.

STACEY (V.O.) A week? And then what?

NOAH Retire? Quit? We really don't care.

Short pause --

STACEY (V.O.) Is this a joke?

NOAH

Not even close. You go to trial with this and we're coming after you with everything we've got. The lab test, the girl's mother, all of it. Catch my drift?

STACEY (V.O.) Is that a threat?

NOAH

(stern) It's a wake-up call.

Silence on the other end. Noah displays his witty persuasion.

Noah hangs up. He turns to find ASHLEA, his assistant, in the doorway --

ASHLEA Your father called.

NOAH

When?

ASHLEA An hour ago. I tried to get your attention, but you were in your...zone. I know you never call or visit, but he sounded a little bit desperate.

NOAH (lying) I'll get back to him --

She's shooting him a look of "no, you won't."

ASHLEA You ever gonna tell me why you don't talk to him? NOAH (uneasy) Probably not. It's a father-son thing.

She rolls her eyes, steps out. Noah stands there, absorbing the morning's craziness.

NOAH (yells out the door) Tell me if Jeff Morton calls...

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Half-empty. Controlled chaos -- typical of any city courthouse. Each case as mundane as the last. Noah stylishly sits beside a CLIENT of his -- a business man who has "guilty" written all over his face. A young PROSECUTOR seated across the floor...

JUDGE MOREHEAD, 60-ish, looks through her half glasses.

JUDGE MOREHEAD Are we ready to begin?

The defense rises. Noah leading his Client to his feet, the old, "act like you've been here before."

JUDGE MOREHEAD Mr. Roberts, is your client aware of the severity of the charges brought against him by the State of New York?

NOAH He is, your Honor.

JUDGE MOREHEAD

And do you waive further reading of the complaint and complete statement of rights?

NOAH

He does.

JUDGE MOREHEAD And are you prepared to enter a plea at this time? NOAH Yes, you Honor. My Client wishes to plead not guilty.

JUDGE MOREHEAD A hearing date will be set for --

# NOAH

(cocky)
-- you Honor, my Client and I
would like to waive our right to a
preliminary hearing and move
straight to trail.

JUDGE MOREHEAD (taken back) Excuse me?

#### PROSECUTOR

(perks up) Your Honor, if I could have a moment alone with the defense --

> NOAH d vou need

-- why would you need a moment alone? The defense is confident in it's case and wishes to prove that in trial.

The Prosecutor is shaken. Rookie. Noah glares in his direction -- "gotcha!" Judge Morehead considers Noah's request long and hard before making a decision --

JUDGE MOREHEAD I don't have a problem with Mr. Robert's request, unless the prosecution strongly objects?

#### PROSECUTOR

(unsure) No. No objection, your Honor.

## JUDGE MOREHEAD

(it's settled) Then the people are prepared to go to trial without a preliminary hearing.

The prosecution looks uneasy -- scrambling through notes. Noah, on the other hand, looks calm. He's played this game before.

Judge Morehead opens her docket calendar...

INT. POOL HALL - DAY

The Bronx. A dirty billiards haven. Empty and harmless. SEYMOUR ROBERTS, Noah's father, sits at a table. Sweet eyes. A charmer from back in the day. Noah enters from the front door. Sits across from his father.

> SEYMOUR I didn't think you'd show up.

> > NOAH

Me either.

SEYMOUR (fake) It's good to see ya.

NOAH (ignores the compliment) You called?

Tension between them. Straight to business --

SEYMOUR

I need fifty.

NOAH

Thousand?

Noah attempting to hide the impact of the huge number --

SEYMOUR What do you want me to tell ya?

NOAH Something. Anything. Lie to me if you have to. (angry) Don't just drag me out to here so you can beg me for cash.

SEYMOUR I'm not begging.

NOAH Sure looks like it. Hat in hand, right?

#### SEYMOUR

You know how it is with these guys. I don't have a choice.

NOAH How long did they give you?

SEYMOUR

A week, maybe.

## NOAH

You've got to be kidding me...

# SEYMOUR

Noah, look, if you don't wanna help me, that's your choice, but if they can't get to me -- who do you think they're gonna come to? (honest) There's nobody else.

NOAH

You don't have anything to give up?

## SEYMOUR

Like what?

# NOAH

Like what? Like the thirty grand you stole from the girls when we were fifteen. Remember that? Or how about the ten grand you pocketed from selling mom's cabin. (calmer) Now you've got me into this shit.

Seymour hangs his head. His version of "I'm Sorry." Noah has places to be --

NOAH

I gotta go.

# SEYMOUR

(concerned) Where you going?

# NOAH

Does it matter?

SEYMOUR Let me know what you can do. Noah heads for the door, visibly angry --

NOAH (parting shot) Stay off the damn tables until we get this straight.

## EXT. LARGE BRICK HOUSE - DAY

Outside the city. Sitting on an acre of beautiful countryside. A brand new BMW sitting in the driveway, it sticks out like a sore thumb.

#### INT. BRICK HOUSE/DINING ROOM - DAY

Cluttered yet organized. The house feels...lived in. Noah sitting at the table. His older sister MARISSA enters, serving coffee and some homemade cake. She has a seat next to her brother.

> MARISSA You finally saw him, huh?

NOAH He wouldn't stop calling the office. I had no choice.

She grins. She's been there before. She serves Noah a slice of red velvet. He grabs a spoon and devours a chunk of white icing. She cares about him --

> MARISSA You look terrible.

NOAH I've been spinning. There aren't enough hours in a day.

MARISSA You need some sleep.

NOAH What I need is a twin.

She stares at him with pity in her eyes --

MARISSA So...what did he say?

NOAH He needed money. How much?

NOAH

Fifty.

MARISSA (rolls her eyes) Shit.

NOAH (eating) My sentiments exactly.

MARISSA

Do you have it?

NOAH Some of it, but that's not the point --

MARISSA -- there is no point. It's all bullshit and you know it, I know it and even he knows it.

NOAH (jokes) Of all the fathers...

MARISSA The girls haven't seen him in months. I haven't even seen him in...God knows how long. (thinks) I've got something saved up. The last thing I need is for the kids to see their grandfather face down behind some dumpster on the news.

Noah pounds some more cake.

#### INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Minutes later. A room seldom used. A depository for broken crap. Marissa finds a safe. CLICKS. Opens.

MARISSA You found a nice girl yet?

She's counting large bills. He's not going there --

NOAH

(jokes)

You heard of a bank?

MARISSA I asked you first.

NOAH I asked you second.

MARISSA

The fancy apartment, the great job, the new car... all that stuff and you've still got nothing to show for it.

NOAH It's a loft, not an apartment, and you should come visit sometime.

MARISSA

Excuse me. Big LOFT.

She hands him a wad of bills. Folded over. Noah hides it in his jacket pocket.

#### NOAH

I haven't gotten around to writing
that chapter of my life.
 (sighs)
Listen, I don't wanna do this
again. He's grown up -- maybe not
mentally, but he's an adult. Next
time, I wanna let the chips lie
where they fall.

MARISSA

I understand.

He doesn't believe her --

NOAH

You sure?

MARISSA

It just sounds cruel, that's all.

## NOAH

(stern) He gambled on us. On our family. Mom left him because he drank and left it all to chance. We didn't have things growing up because of (MORE) NOAH (cont'd) him. It was always because of HIM.

MARISSA Okay. Cool down. I understand, alright. (hugs Noah) RICK doesn't know about this money. Don't tell him, okay?

NOAH When do I ever see him?

MARISSA Be nice. He's trying.

Noah nods. Stares at her. Best friends. The only honesty in a cruel world. Say no more.

INT. BRICK HOUSE DRIVEWAY - DAY

A minute later. Noah walking down to the BMW. Coming up to the car when --

RICK (O.S.)

Noah?

Noah looks up to find RICK, Marissa's husband, approaching. He's a recovering drunk. His hair is disheveled, a real mess of a human being. He has the droopy stance of a stoner.

> NOAH (not pleased) Hello, Rick.

RICK Been here long?

NOAH

Long enough.

RICK

(senses sarcasm) Is that right? You know, I've been sober for three months now...

NOAH What do you want? A medal? RICK No, but I'll take a little respect, especially in my own house.

Noah getting in the car. Ready to go.

NOAH I'm not in your house, Rick. Besides, you're name isn't even on the mortgage.

The car door SLAMS shut. Pulls away.

INT. BMW -- FRONT SEAT - DAY

Noah speeding down the open road. He's tired, bags under his eyes. His cell phone is glued to his ear -- checking voice mail.

JEFFREY (V.O.) (phone) "Noah, it's me. Sorry I've been terrible at getting back to you lately. Tell you what, come on out to the thing tonight and we'll talk. Just make sure you wear something nice..."

Noah hangs up. Turns the car around.

INT. CITY BAR AND RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A firm function. It's dim and stiff. A place for the city's who's who. Jeffrey Morton and a hand full of ATTORNEYS buy up the bar. Everyone is dressed to impress, but no one is.

Noah shows up and moves down the line. Shaking hands, fake smiles, usual "can-do" attitude. Jeffrey sees him, meets him where he stands, drink in hand --

JEFFREY (handshake) Stag again?

NOAH What'd you expect?

JEFFREY This is no good. People are gonna start thinking the wrong things.

#### NOAH

(jokes)

If I don't have time for a woman, what makes you think I'd have time for a man?

JEFFREY Well, in the meantime, lets get you a drink.

NOAH (agreed) Why not?

CORNER TABLE

Thirty-minutes later. Empty glasses on the table. Appetizers. Noah and Jeffrey are alone now. The conversation, like their expression, is heavy.

> NOAH What about Carl? Have him look into it.

> > JEFFREY

Carl?

## NOAH

He's sniffing around for cases right now. Or how about you ask any one of the other three hundred lawyers in the damn building.

JEFFREY Not for this kind of case.

Jeffrey shoots him the "let it all out" look --

#### NOAH

(not happy)
I don't get it. One minute you're
asking me to put out fires and
take calls, and now you're asking
me to defend a criminal trial?
Why?

JEFFREY Why? Harold Ramis, that's why.

NOAH

The Senator?

#### JEFFREY

(nods) He called me the other day needing a favor. His younger brother was arrested on a bunch of different charges and he needs a good attorney. Who else would I point him to? Carl?

NOAH

What charges?

JEFFREY Kiddie porn. Arson -- all kinds of sick shit.

NOAH So you pass him off to me?

JEFFREY

It's a favor.

NOAH

Some favor.

#### JEFFREY

For me, not you.

Noah drinks.

#### JEFFREY

I'm just asking you to take the case, do the best you can, and forget about it. Win or lose, it makes no difference. It's never made a difference. It's how we pay the rent. (drinks) If it was about winning or losing, we'd all be out of a job. It's about getting paid to do what you do best.

Noah nods. Understood. Jeffrey pats him on the back. Stands --

JEFFREY Have another drink. I'll come see you in the morning and we'll talk. Enjoy yourself will ya? (smiling) You too.

With a drunk, misty wave goodbye -- Noah is left at the bar. Just him, his drink, and his thoughts.

## INT. NOAH'S OFFICE - DAY

The next morning. Bright and early. Nice light. Noah in the "good" suit and tie. Ashlea in the corner taking notes. Jeffrey dumps a three-inch thick folder on the desk. Noah's eyes widen, less than excited. The briefing begins --

#### NOAH

This must be our guy.

JEFFREY

HERBERT SAMUEL RAMIS. Born August 13, 1961. St. Joseph's hospital, Bronx, New York...

## NOAH

Local guy?

#### JEFFREY

Sort of. You already know his brother, our highly regarded senator. The only other family he had was his mother -- DEBORAH MARIE RAMIS.

#### NOAH

Father?

#### JEFFREY

(pacing)
No one knows. Herbert here,
graduates Harper High School -barely -- skips college, does
three years in the Marine Core,
and gets tossed for sexual assault
on a fellow officer.

## NOAH

-- dishonorable discharge?

## JEFFREY

Yep. That's when the shit starts hitting the fan. He goes out west, tries to become a male pornstar, fails, and gets pinched for a sloppy convenience store hold up (MORE) JEFFREY (cont'd) in Yucca. Serves a year in county.

NOAH Let me guess, the prodigal son returns?

## JEFFREY

(at the window)
Tries to. Along the way he's
arrested on three different
occasions for possession of
unregistered firearms, possession
of child pornography and
conspiracy to commit murder.

NOAH

Murder?

#### JEFFREY

A cop.

NOAH

(jokes) Who else?

Noah is flipping through the file now, slightly interested in this character. Jeffrey wraps it up --

## JEFFREY

Anyway, he does a total of seven years. Maximum security. Gets out on good behavior, comes back to Jersey and starts lighting fires all over the damn place. The latest incident was that home upstate that he burnt to the ground while the family was still inside, asleep --

NOAH

-- dead?

JEFFREY

All four.

NOAH

Motive?

JEFFREY

(dreadful) In a signed confession to police he later admitted to being in love with one of the girls that lived (MORE) JEFFREY (cont'd) at the residence. She was seven-years-old.

# NOAH

(sick) And you want me to defend this bastard?

JEFFREY Defend? I want you to show up to court...

Noah exchanges a glare with Ashlea -- furiously taking notes -- she's disgusted by the whole story.

JEFFREY You need anything else from me?

NOAH

No, I'm good.

JEFFREY

(leaving) Have fun.

Jeffery leaves them. Ashlea walks up to Noah's desk for discussion --

NOAH Did you get all that?

ASHLEA

(sarcastically) Which part? The part about the cop murdering pedophile or the ex-pornstar firestarter?

NOAH

It's a favor --

ASHLEA -- call it what you want, but this guy belongs in jail, if not dead.

NOAH That's not up to us to decide.

ASHLEA You're the attorney.

NOAH And you think I should pass on this one? ASHLEA (firm) I think that if you defend people like this quy...you condone what he's doing. Noah is lost. Torn, and it shows all over his face. NOAH You know, the only reason Jeffrey gave me this case is because he's got three kids at home. He wouldn't be able to look himself in the mirror if he defended this guy. ASHLEA You don't have to explain yourself to me. NOAH I'm not. ASHLEA I already know you don't have a conscience. NOAH I lost it when I passed the bar. She gathers her choppy notes and the monster file to begin her discovery. She's angry. Wanting a better answer. ASHLEA You can always find another case, but you only get one soul. She leaves him with that thought -- not a pretty one. Noah in his familiar spot at the end of the couch, elaborating --

NOAH

Even if he's a changed man, it won't make the slightest difference. After everything he's done, after everything he's said, it's all bullshit. He's a liar, among other things.

# THERAPIST (O.S.) What other things?

NOAH

A drunk, cheater, obsessive gambler -- a bad one at that -take your pick. He's perfect at ruining people's lives.

#### INT. LOCAL BAR - NIGHT

The happy hour crowd. Business suits and hazy smiles. The BARTENDER slides Noah a second scotch on the rocks. He nods to her -- thanks.

His eyes are glued to Herbert's file. The world could be falling down around him, but at this moment, he's focused on his new client's police reports. We catch glimpses of words and phrases:

-- Possession with the intent to distribute...

-- ...accused of having sexual relations with an under-aged female.

-- Showing no remorse for his actions and threatening to stab the arresting officer....

Noah drains his drink -- gathers his things before leaving.

## EXT. BURNT DOWN HOUSE - NIGHT

A heap of charred wood and steel. The wreckage of a home in shambles. Noah makes his way, stumbling through the rubble, in awe of how quickly it can all be lost. He's not sure what he's looking for, but searches through the burnt belongings, finding --

A photograph, warped by the heat, of a SMALL, BLOND HAIRED CHILD. He stares into her eyes, his own face fading. After a few seconds, he folds the picture and stuffs it into his coat pocket.

#### INT. DINER - DAY

Morning. The hustle and bustle of a cheap, popular breakfast spot. A well-thought out place to meet up with your typical, second-rate, neighborhood loanshark. RICHIE busy eating, Noah standing over him -- slips him an envelope... RICHIE

What's this?

NOAH Thirty. For my father.

RICHIE That's still twenty short.

NOAH (sarcastically) Go figure...

# RICHIE

(rhetorical) You want me to tell my boss the three of you can't come up with fifty large?

## NOAH

Three of us? C'mon Richie, you know it's just me out here. I'm on an island.

RICHIE Ask for a bonus.

NOAH Not gonna happen. What else can I do?

RICHIE Get me the money, that's what you can do.

NOAH But let's say I can't get it, then what?

## RICHIE

(suggestive) You got all your affairs in order? How about your father?

Noah knows the name of the game --

NOAH Pretty sure of yourself, aren't you?

A low blow. Richie with a heart stopping stare --

# RICHIE

You wanna test me?

#### NOAH

I didn't mean it like that. I just...I just don't want Marissa or the girls involved. Can you do that for me?

RICHIE

Your father's a real piece of shit, you know that?

NOAH I've heard --

RICHIE -- he's too old to be in this position. Not a smart man.

NOAH

Just promise me, if anything goes down, Marissa and the girls are left out of it?

RICHIE

We're not Al Qaeda, that's not our business. I'll give you as much time as I can.

Richie goes back to his breakfast. Noah leaves.

EXT. FIFTH AVE - DAY

Crowds. Raincoats. Cold. Noah coming up the street, checking his wristwatch. The BUZZ of his cell phone --

NOAH

(phone) Noah Roberts...

MALE VOICE (V.O.) (phone) "Noah, thank God you answered the phone, we need you to come in."

NOAH Why? What happened?

MALE VOICE (V.O.) "You're guy -- he's talking, all kinds of stuff --" (cautious) -- what's he saying? To who?

MALE VOICE (V.O.) "Nothing he says makes any sense. Noah, I mean, you're on this now, right? Because, this guy -- I dunno."

NOAH

I'm on my way.

He hangs up, flags down a taxi.

#### INT. POLICE STATION MEETING ROOM - DAY

Temporary home for Noah and his litigation team. Police station ugly. Used. Gray table and uncomfortable chairs. Soda cans and energy drinks. Noah BURSTS inside --

> NOAH Has he said anything, I mean anything, to any of you? (talking to --)

TWO YOUNG ASSOCIATES. Fresh out of Harvard or a similar Ivy League school. Tired faces, perking up as Noah asks questions. You can tell, they are not pleased to be the "do-boys."

> MALE ASSOCIATE (is that a joke?) He doesn't even know we're here.

> FEMALE ASSOCIATE The police have been telling him that his attorney is on his way, but he keeps saying that he's innocent and doesn't need a lawyer.

MALE ASSOCIATE I thought he signed a confession?

NOAH (smart-ass) I have a feeling he's probably not thinking clearly.

MALE ASSOCIATE What do we do? NOAH How long has he been here?

FEMALE ASSOCIATE Thirty minutes. (nervous) He claims he needs his pills, but we don't have any record of him being on medication.

NOAH

Forget that. (quarterbacking this) He's playing the insanity card. If it's pills, he'll claim chemical imbalance. Find out if he's supposed to be on medication -- if he is, we need to what and how much

They begin scuffling, jotting down notes. Noah stands there -- spitting out --

NOAH

This guy's special. We all know that. Even if we don't agree with his...personal tastes, this is what it is. This is not the kind of information we want to be throwing around. Understood? (pauses) If either of you has a problem with that, I need to know, now.

Silence.

MALE ASSOCIATE Are you gonna talk to him?

NOAH Yes. And then I need to know who the prosecution is --

MALE ASSOCIATE -- PAT KLEIN.

NOAH (shit) Pat? Get me her cell. I'll set up a meeting. MALE ASSOCIATE She's already called twice.

NOAH Tough shit. She can wait.

FEMALE ASSOCIATE (moving) I'm on it --

NOAH Get me a glass of water and start the tape as soon as I step in the room. I want everything on film.

The two Associates get to work. Noah takes off his jacket, he's in full-blown shark mode. About to go to work --

## INT. HOLDING CELL - DAY

A hideous, unkempt jail. A table and two chairs. Stale. Camera mounted on the wall. Big brother. HERBERT seated. In the flesh -- nervous tick. MUMBLING to himself. Manic depressive -- a total head case.

> NOAH (sitting)

Herbert Ramis?

HERBERT Are you a lawyer?

NOAH (no emotion) I'll do you one better, I'm your lawyer.

HERBERT You're younger than I expected.

# NOAH

You've been charged with four counts of pre-meditated murder, my age doesn't particularly matter at this point.

## HERBERT

You're insane. I don't need a lawyer, I haven't done anything wrong.

I've read your file. You signed a sworn confession. (glares) There's only one person in this room that happens to need representation, and it aint me.

Herbert begins an onslaught of rambling --

## HERBERT

(off somewhere) Did you know, some women actually prefer to avoid analgesic medication during childbirth?

#### NOAH

What the hell are you talking about?

#### HERBERT

(spewing now)
It's true! They can still try to
alleviate the labor pain by using
psychological preparation
--education -- massage -hypnosis, or water therapy, like
in a tub or shower... it's simply
amazing!
 (breathing)

You see...the human body also has a chemical response to pain, it releasing endorphins... Endorphins allow you to handle the pain!

## NOAH

(uninterested) So endorphins killed that family upstate?

#### HERBERT

(louder)
ARE YOU LISTENING?
 (pacing now)
Endorphins are present before,
during, and immediately after
childbirth -- they're always
there...it's the body's own way of
dealing with pain -uncontrollable pain! I have
enorphins, in me, around me --

#### NOAH

Five counts of voluntary arson, three counts of possession of child pornography, four counts of murder, should I go on? --

## HERBERT

-- IT WAS THE PAIN! (screaming) There's no way for my mind and my body to aid in pain control like it can for women during childbirth!

#### NOAH

They opened your front door and found the Monalisa of kiddie porn pinned to your bedroom wall, they found gun powder in your truck --

## HERBERT

-- you're not hearing me!

Noah SLAMS his fist into the table top out of pure frustration --

## NOAH

(aggressive) YOU'RE NOT HEARING ME! This insane bullshit isn't gonna work with me, and it sure as hell won't work on a jury that's going to recommend that a judge feed you to the Goddamn wolves.

Herbert staring back -- speechless.

#### HERBERT

You said it yourself, I'm insane...

## NOAH

(pleading) You see, this is one of those rare moments in a man's life when he gets to be completely honest. Treat me like a prostitute, tell me things you wouldn't dare tell your wife. You need to be on the level with me...

#### HERBERT

(small) I loved her.

I IOVEU HEI.

# NOAH

Who?

HERBERT The girl. The youngest.

NOAH (come on) She was seven years old.

#### HERBERT

(tears) She loved me too. She told me she did.

## NOAH

Impossible.

HERBERT You don't have to believe me --

## NOAH

(face-to-face)
-- you're going to rot in a cell
for the rest of your life, do you
understand that?

HERBERT Until I see her face again --

## NOAH

-- do you have any idea what they do to child molesters in prison? You'll be passed around like a carton of cigarettes.

HERBERT

Then, I'm insane --

NOAH

-- you're lying --

HERBERT

-- I'm crying out for help --

## NOAH

-- you're already dead. You're just too stupid to see it.

Herbert, rejected, in the corner -- cowering. Noah heading for the exit.

NOAH (stoic) I'll talk to the prosecution. I'm not gonna ask for much.

#### INT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

PAT KLEIN is sipping an outrageously overpriced latte in an empty corner. She's got her head buried in paperwork. She's sharp. Edgy. Doesn't put up with anyone's crap. She catches Noah walking through the door and towards her.

NOAH

```
(hello)
```

Pat.

PAT Noah. You're late.

NOAH I've been down at the station all afternoon.

She cuts to the chase --

PAT

What are you thinking? That I should go light on this guy?

NOAH

I know you too well for that --

PAT

-- two hundred. That's how many hours of child pornography they found in his truck. In Memphis, where he was arrested the first time, it was three times as much.

NOAH

(sits)

I heard about that.

PAT

In Tyler, Texas, they found a fifteen-year-old girl bound and gagged in the trunk of his rental car --

# NOAH -- okay, I read the file.

She's not listening. She's pouring it on, as if she's auditioning for trial --

#### $\mathbf{PAT}$

Frankly, I find it a little
disturbing that a firm like Morton
Keys would even entertain the
notion of defending a known
pedophile with arsenic tendencies.
 (reading her notes)
"Honor, Integrity, Passion."
That's off the website. Tell me,
Noah, do any of those words even
come close to describing the
feeling you get when you look at
Herbert Ramis?

## NOAH

(small)

No.

PAT

You talked to him...what would you do if you were me?

#### NOAH

Look, I'm not asking you to go easy on him. That's not why I came here --

PAT -- so you know you're going to lose, and you're fine with that?

#### NOAH

His brother's a Senator. Jeffrey had me sit in on this as a favor. That's all.

PAT So that's it?

NOAH

That's it. There's no big secret. No white Bronco and police cameras.

#### PAT

You lose, he gets the chair, and you just walk away?

## NOAH

Pretty much.

She laughs. Nothing funny -- more uneasiness than humor.

PAT Thank God I'm on my side of the bench.

NOAH I just came to tell you I was fine with whatever you wanna throw at him --

PAT (leaving) -- how could I live with myself.

She out of there. Noah grins. Understood.

#### EXT. TIMES SQUARE - NIGHT

Noah meanders down the illuminated street. A wounded soldier. Bouncing off strangers -- soaking in the stink. He's oblivious to his surroundings, lost in thought. Letting the neon data pass him by. Noah reaches a corner -- stops -- nearly hit by a bike messenger.

He looks to the sky -- a silent cry to be lifted out of this place.

#### INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

A swank pad overlooking Central Park. Clean. Organized. Noah in a towel, walking to the window. Pat Klein wrapped up in the sheets behind him. This is her place. The sheets apres-sex around her.

> PAT You want me to make you something?

NOAH (lost) No. I'm not hungry.

The view from the window is sharp. Fog just above the trees. Pat is finishing a glass of Red Wine from earlier. Covering her privates as she sits up in bed --

> PAT You're thinking about Ramis.

NOAH How'd you guess?

PAT I can always tell. You get sucked in. You get to personal.

NOAH I try not to, but this one's different.

PAT Just... let it go. Tell Jeffrey you want something else.

NOAH

And punt?

PAT

He won't know if you don't tell him.

NOAH I told him and he knows. (unsure) I think he knows. (for sure) He knows I want something.

She offers him a glass, he takes it and drinks. Staring into her eyes --

PAT (revelation) You're not a lawyer.

NOAH

No?

PAT You have a heart.

NOAH Lawyers can have hearts.

PAT Yeah, but if they do, they're usually on my side on the courtroom.

He drains his glass. Pours another...

INT. JEFFREY'S LONG ISLAND HOME - NIGHT

HELEN MORTON leading Noah inside from the front. She's been with Jeffrey forever. Steady. The better half for sure.

HELEN (walk and talk) He's been working all evening. It never ends.

NOAH He's a workhorse.

HELEN He used to be a husband.

Noah smiles at her -- a kind soul.

LIVING ROOM

The great room. Everything looks expensive and neat except for Jeffrey's desk. Piled high with important legal crap. Boxes of paper. Jeffrey reading through a brief...

#### JEFFREY

(eyes on paper) I didn't expect you to be out in Long Island this time of night...you didn't even call ahead.

He looks up -- Noah with his hands in his pockets.

NOAH I need to talk to you.

JEFFREY

Now?

NOAH Yes, now. It's important. It's about Ramis --

JEFFREY -- stop. Stop right there -- it's too late for this.

#### NOAH

I'm serious. I just spent an afternoon with that psychopath, and let me tell you, he's a very, very confused man. One minute he's insane, the next he's fine. NOAH Way-the-fuck-confused.

JEFFREY Pat Klein called me this afternoon, less than pleased.

Noah accepts this. He hesitates, then goes for it --

NOAH Look, Jeff, I need to know what kind of spot I'm in here.

#### JEFFREY

(stands) Spot?

#### NOAH

Yeah, spot. You talked to Pat, you know what others are saying about this case. How's that gonna make me look?

JEFFREY So this is about your reputation?

NOAH

Maybe --

## JEFFREY

(fed up) -- maybe? Please. Son, this is a business.

## NOAH

This is my life. This is my next twenty years.

# JEFFREY

So what? So you take a bad case. You honestly don't think I've been on the end of that stick before? God forbid you go out on a limb and take a gamble? What you fail to recognize is that the law is in no way, shape, or form perfect... and neither are you. But you're close. So put your personal feelings aside and do what you need to do. It's that simple.

#### JEFFREY

Say what?

NOAH You know what. Say it.

JEFFREY (he knows) If -- when you lose, you're future is safe. I promise. You have my word.

#### NOAH

Good.

They are closer now. Face-to-face.

JEFFREY I'm on the record, and you drove all the way out to Mineola to hear it. (shakes his hand) But I'm still counting on you.

NOAH

(jokes) No pressure, huh?

Jeff smiles, lightens the mood.

JEFFREY When the hell did you get so sensitive?

Noah left hanging there, the phone RINGS -- Jeffrey attends to it. He's finished with Noah and back to the brief from before. Noah turns to leave as --

## INT. LOFT ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Going up. Noah alone in the car. Checking his watch -always in a hurry, there are always places to be. There's a strange sense of that he's being watched.

# INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Late. Cold. Quiet. Doors to the left and right. Noah coming up the hall -- keys in one hand, cell phone in the other. A

dark figure ahead of him, suspiciously leaning against the wall -- just beside Noah's loft door.

Noah stops at his entrance --

DARK FIGURE (muffled) Noah Roberts?

# NOAH (cautious) Who are you?

SUDDENLY, AND WITHOUT WARNING -- the man takes out a shiny metallic kitchen knife and THRUSTS it into Noah's side. Deep. Leaning into him with the blade...

Noah SCREAMS in pain, the Man holding onto him -- turning the blade -- no way to stop the bleeding.

He releases Noah -- runs off. Noah falls to the ground, holding his side -- blood pouring out of the wound -- spilling out onto to parque wood floor...

Noah's eyes close -- just an instant -- glimpses of light -- then gone, just like that -- a puff of air -- darkness.

# INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

A series of shots. Noah in and out of consciousness. Fluorescent lights -- DOCTORS -- NURSES -- medical equipment -- BEEPS -- breathing masks -- it's all a frenzy of movements and sounds. A glass box of technology. Nothing more.

TIME CUT

A day later. Noah's eyes flutter open from deep sleep. The shock of waking up in a hospital room and not knowing why. IV drips -- paper gown -- a gauze patch over his stab wound. He looks up and finds --

Marissa and the GIRLS at the foot of the bed.

NOAH

(slow) Hey.

MARISSA You scared us. NOAH (to the Girls) Hey girls.

The Girls smile back awkwardly. Marissa turns to them --

MARISSA Why don't you wait outside with your father, okay?

The scamper out. Marissa pulls up a chair --

MARISSA Where should I start?

NOAH Doesn't matter.

#### MARISSA

Are you thinking they got tired of waiting?

NOAH (agrees) They couldn't find him, so they came for me.

MARISSA After all this... (uneasy) I hate him. I really do.

NOAH

Where is he?

MARISSA Jersey? Delaware? Who knows. Gone.

NOAH Good. Maybe he won't come back.

MARISSA

It's not fair --

NOAH

-- nothing ever is. What's done is done. Hopefully, it's over now.

MARISSA You think we'll ever see him again? He nods -- not a chance. She reaches out and grabs her brother's weak hand. Her eyes well up -- hating to have to see him like this -- fighting tears.

#### MARISSA

I never told you, but Mom always used to say that people looked at you differently. She always said that people would stare at you when you walked in a room.

NOAH

(humble) She was just hoping I didn't turn out like him.

MARISSA Everyone loves you Noah...

NOAH

I have no idea why.

MARISSA

Because of who you are --

# NOAH

(oh please) -- no. Because of what they expect from me. Because they know they can pick up the phone, and Noah is gonna make everything fine, everything's gonna be fixed, everything's gonna be cool... (pauses) It's not love, it's desperation.

Marissa is taken back. Clueless.

MARISSA I had no idea you were so unhappy.

NOAH I'm as happy as everyone else needs to think I am.

Silence. Nothing left to say.

## INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Rust. Damp. POLICE OFFICERS in and out. Minding their own business.

# DET. HARANG (V.O.)

... nobody claims to have seen anything. The girl next door found you, maybe three minutes after the attack, but she didn't see anyone fleeing the scene either...

# INT. SQUAD ROOM - DAY

DET. HARANG at his desk. Established. Talking Noah through. Emotionless faces.

DET. HARANG The knife was a standard kitchen steak knife. Nothing fancy. That's gonna make it hard to trace, meanwhile forensics is still looking for prints in the hallway.

NOAH I know you're doing all you can.

DET. HARANG I wanted to ask you, is there anyone, maybe a client you once represented -- an angry one, that might have a reason to come after you?

NOAH Not that I know of.

DET. HARANG Owe anybody money?

> NOAH (knowing the truth)

DET. HARANG What about this case you're on? The psycho from upstate?

NOAH

What about it?

No.

DET. HARANG His brother's a Senator, right? Could he be unhappy with how the case is going?

(understands) He's a rising star. He wouldn't put his career at risk like that, if anything he wants his fire starting brother as far away as possible. It had to be somebody else.

The Detective is out of answers --

DET. HARANG Well, if something comes in, I'll give you a call.

#### NOAH

Thank you.

DET. HARANG (reassuring) Hang in there, we'll get this guy.

They shake hands. End of story. Noah leaves.

# INT. SUSHI HOUSE - NIGHT

Packed. Noah walks in and scans the room, searching for Pat -- she's at the bar. He struts over, a slight limp, taking the empty seat next to her.

PAT California roll?

NOAH Mercury. I can't risk it with the pain killers.

PAT

How is it?

NOAH It hurts, but I'll be alright.

She's plays the part of a stranger. Wanting to be close, but unable to be. Anyone could be watching.

PAT You thinking about going back to work?

NOAH

Tomorrow.

PAT You gonna give up Ramis?

NOAH (drinks water) Still figuring that out.

She looks deep into his eyes, it speaks volumes.

NOAH

What?

PAT (small) I just miss you.

NOAH

I'm here.

She looks away -- now, unable to look at his face --

PAT No, you're not.

INT. JEFFREY'S OFFICE - DAY

Noah enters, picking up exactly where he left off -- not skipping a beat. A nice suit. Iron curtain. Jeffrey is focused on his work. Then, he looks over at Noah, his first time seeing him since the attack --

> JEFFREY You look good for chrissake...

NOAH I'm doing alright.

JEFFREY Back to work already?

NOAH Few days out and I'm already swimming in it.

Jeff caught in a moment of speaking to Noah like a son. Severe sincerity --

JEFFREY (suggests) Godawful what happened to you.

I'll be fine.

# JEFFREY

And in case you've thought about it, let me be the first tell you... you aint him. Never were, never will be --

NOAH

Yeah, well, he's out of the picture now. For good.

JEFFREY Should have been, a long time ago.

NOAH

(enough)
If you need me, I'll be in my
office.

JEFFREY (leans back) You know, you've got it.

NOAH

Got what?

#### JEFFREY

It. You have it, I don't, but you do. Even on my best day -- my best day -- in court, I was never as good as you. I'm not talking about the money and the charm or any of that other bullshit...I'm talking about inside you. You're a winner. You can't lose, you understand?

Noah silent. Swallowing that. Jeffrey's desk phone RINGS. The moment is ruined by the familiar sound of urgent business.

## INT. POKER ROOM - NIGHT

Forlorn. Empty. A few lit tables, but no one playing. A basement atmosphere, piles of stolen good everywhere. Not the safest place in the world. Richie at the bar -- drinking -- sifting through an envelope. Noah standing next to him, emotions boiling behind his eyes --

Drink?

(insulting)

No thanks. I'm on medication.

Regarding the envelope --

# RICHIE

This is twenty.

NOAH Totals fifty, right?

# RICHIE

We're square.

# NOAH

Are we?

# RICHIE

It was nothing personal. It was just business. If there was any other way --

# NOAH

-- there were a million other ways, Richie. Come talk to me, send me a letter, email me, don't send some asshole to cut me with a kitchen knife. And you think we're square? I've got a hole in my side...

RICHIE

It's just my job.

# NOAH

Just your job... I see. Well, Richie, let me tell you something. My father is dead. Maybe not literally, but you catch my drift. (pauses) If I ever see you again, if you ever talk to me or my sister and her family again, I'll kill you myself.

Richie sets off a nervous grin. Understood.

RICHIE (stands to leave) See ya 'round kid.

# No, you won't.

Noah beats him to it, he's out the door.

# INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT

A piss-hole. Herbert is tying together his bed sheets and pillow case. Tight. Taut. A long string of fabric. His eyes are flaring. Focused.

A chair in the middle of the cell. The string of sheets now tied to a hanging light fixture. Secure. Herbert gives it a tug -- sturdy.

The other end -- a noose. Herbert, standing on the chair, fits it around his neck -- closes his eyes -- kicks the chair away, and --

GASPING for air, feet kicking, the life being choked out from him -- it's working, until --

The light fixture gives in -- ripped from the ceiling. Herbert and the sheets fall to the floor in a messy pile of failed suicide. Seconds later, the room is flooded with SECURITY GUARDS...

# INT. NOAH'S LOFT - NIGHT

Dead of night. WAVE MACHINE by the bed. Noah's phone BUZZES on the night-stand. He slowly sits up -- fumbles to find the phone in the dark -- catches it, answers --

NOAH (into phone) Yeah... (listens) ... when? (more listening) Tell him to keep his mouth shut, I'm getting dressed...

He gets up. Pat fast asleep next to him.

#### INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Noah vs. Herbert. Staring at each other. Nothing gentle about this moment. Noah's eyes say, "you've got a lot of explaining to do!" Herbert's answer, "so, sue me." Noah makes the first move -- NOAH So, what was that all about?

HERBERT In my cell? I know, I'm sorry. I was overwhelmed.

NOAH How do you feel now?

HERBERT Better. Much better.

Noah trying to keep the beast inside --

NOAH So all of the sudden, you're not crazy...

HERBERT I don't belong in here.

NOAH

Too bad.

HERBERT I belong with the girl.

NOAH She's dead.

HERBERT Then I should be too --

NOAH -- soon enough. You see, as smart as you think you are, there's only one way out at this point.

HERBERT They won't kill me.

NOAH So you try to do it yourself?

HERBERT I need to see her again.

# NOAH

## NOAH (cont'd)

You wanna play innocent, fine, you wanna hang yourself, less work for me, but I need you to make up your mind.

HERBERT My mind isn't stable.

NOAH How do I know that?

HERBERT

I'm telling you!

# NOAH

It's not about what you say, it's what you can prove!

## HERBERT

(scary) I'm crazy...

# NOAH

Maybe so, but they're stacking this against you. You need to make up your mind one way or another. Choose to be crazy, choose to be innocent, choose to be guilty. I don't give a shit -- but MAKE UP YOUR MIND!

Herbert sits back. A sudden look of, "you think you're so smart." Noah keeps this fierce gaze --

## HERBERT

In criminal trials, such as the one I am about to embark upon, the insanity defense is a defense by excuse. It's an affirmative defense by which the defendant, Herbert Ramis, can argue that he should not be held criminally liable for breaking the law. I can claim that I was legally insane at the time of the commission of these alleged crimes. You don't think I can pass a mental exam? The legal definition of "insane" in this context is very different from the normal definition of "mentally ill," which I can very easily make sure a jury of my (MORE)

HERBERT (cont'd) peers believes that I am...

Noah is stunned. Fooled. Herbert goes back to his "nutty" persona. Hiding dementia.

NOAH You are lost.

HERBERT (smirk) So are you.

INT. NOAH'S OFFICE - DAY

Quiet. Noah's "good" suit jacket hangs over the back of his chair. He's at the window -- lost in a stare and deep thought. The big day. "D-day." He looks proper. Ashlea from behind --

> ASHLEA (O.S.) The car's here. Everyone's downstairs.

NOAH (turns to her) Tell them to go ahead.

ASHLEA

(concern) You sure?

NOAH Yeah. I'll meet them there.

She turns to leave, Noah stops her --

NOAH How long have you worked here?

ASHLEA

Three years.

NOAH I just realized, I don't know anything about you, yet I see you everyday.

ASHLEA I was told you were a busy man.

Not that busy.

ASHLEA

You never asked.

NOAH I'm asking now.

ASHLEA What do you wanna know?

NOAH Something honest.

#### ASHLEA

(friendly) I'm a single mother. Two boys, three and five. Their father left when I was pregnant with my second. I serve tables on the weekends, part-time. I don't have any family inside the city, and I don't do much in my spare time... if I get any.

NOAH What are their names?

ASHLEA ANTHONY and RODNEY.

Noah saddened by her story.

NOAH Are you proud of yourself?

## ASHLEA

I am.

Noah grins, as if an idea just popped into his head --

NOAH

If anything ever happens to me, here at the firm, I'll make sure Carl assigns you to another partner.

ASHLEA What's that supposed to mean?

Noah puts on his suite jacket --

I just wanna make sure you and your boys are taken care of.

#### INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The low HUM of fifty people all talking at once. REPORTERS and a few SPECTATORS. Pat Klein at her usual Prosecutor's desk -- sharp and ready to roll. Herbert, dressed in an orange jumpsuit is seated on the defense side, next to Noah's Two Associates.

As Noah enters through the double-doors, the entire room SPINS to see him. They're watching him walk toward the bench.

As he walks, his pace slows. His eyes -- he sees Herbert, sitting there, smiling. Noah's mind begins races off somewhere...

Everything he's ever done wrong -- everyone he's ever loved, Marissa and the girls, his father...Jeffrey. Everything gone wrong, writ on his weary eyes. All the things he's wanted to do, but hasn't. Regret. Humbled by the lessons learned of self-inadequacies.

He's stopped now. Center of the aisle. Not moving. All eyes on him. It is to weep.

Noah slowly turns...

# INT. LAW FIRM CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Long table in a narrow room. Jeffrey, Carl and some other ASSOCIATES in the middle of a meeting. Looking over as a RECEPTIONIST enters --

RECEPTIONIST (at the door) I'm sorry to bother you...

CARL

What is it?

RECEPTIONIST It's about Noah Roberts.

JEFFREY

What?

RECEPTIONIST He just walked out of the Ramis preliminary hearing...

JEFFREY You gotta be kidding me?

CARL What do you mean, walked out?

RECEPTIONIST He just... left the courthouse.

Jeffrey sits back. "Holy Shit!" written all over his face. Imploding. Exploding. Face red. Fighting back the urge to scream. Carl with a dumb look on his face --

> CARL Why would he do that?

#### INT. LAW FIRM CAFETERIA - NIGHT

A large, strange break room that could fit every employee if need be. Chairs stacked in the corners. Pretty empty. Jeffrey sits at a table, alone, drinking generic coffee. A broken smile. And then --

> NOAH (O.S.) They said you might be down here...

Jeffrey looks up. Blinks. Freezes.

NOAH Have we even used this room before?

Jeffrey is just stunned. No words. Sips his coffee.

NOAH I came here to talk. (looks down) I figured after-hours might be

best.

JEFFREY (not pleased) Who do you think you are?

NOAH Who do you think I am?

# JEFFREY

Harold Ramis called me an hour ago. They're pulling us out as his legal counsel. There's gonna be a malpractice suit filed by the weekend.

# NOAH

There are tons of dumb criminals out there.

(not afraid) You can always find new cases, but you only get one soul.

#### JEFFREY

You should pack up and get out of my building.

## NOAH

(accepts it) I understand you're angry --

# JEFFREY

-- angry? I'm furious. You played me for a fool. After everything I've done for you, after everything I've said --

## NOAH

-- talk is cheap, Jeff. You know that better than most.

## JEFFREY

So this is what you wanna do with your 'next twenty years?"

NOAH

I'm done. I'm out.

# JEFFREY

You're done alright --

# NOAH

(brings the heat) You see, you just don't get it do you? You're name's on the inside of the building but your brains are outside the door.

## JEFFREY

(explodes) Get the fuck outta my building!

I'm already there. (pours it on) You know, you were right. People like you do give the rest of us a bad name. You ride the money train until it slams into the fuckin' station, then you get off and leave everyone else on board, alone and bleeding. Tell me, did you even mean what you said, about me having it? About me having what you never had? About being better than you, even on your best day? Or was that just a pep talk in case I figured out I was being used as the firm's scape goat? (cooling off)

You know what, you were wrong. I'm not even close to being perfect. Neither are you, or the law, or anything else for that matter. I'm just better at faking it...

# JEFFREY

(blown away) This conversation is over. You're finished, son. You'll never practice law again.

#### NOAH

(the heat) What are you gonna do? Pull my license? Cut me off at the knees? Go ahead. I've already cut you deeper than you could ever do me and you know it.

Jeffrey sips again. Not wanting to talk. Noah walks closer. One final jab --

> NOAH I've seen all the law I need to see. I'm not gonna defend criminals any longer. That'll be your job.

JEFFREY I'm not going to ask you again.

NOAH You don't have to. And with that -- he's heading for the emergency exit. Jeffrey is alone again, looking old for the first time.

#### EXT. CENTRAL PARK - NIGHT

Noah slowly wondering through the park. Passing the green space, the merry-go-round, the lake. He takes off his tie and jacket, trying to shed his skin. Looking up at the high-rise buildings off in the distance. Staggering through. No destination in mind.

His cell phone BUZZES. Noah glances down at it -- "PAT KLEIN."

NOAH (into phone) Hey...

PAT (V.O.) (phone) You left so quick, are you alright?

NOAH (phone/ smiles) Never better.

# EXT. MARISSA'S HOME - DAY

The front door. Noah rings the bell, looking like he's been walking for miles. A second later, Rick swings open the screen door. A less than excited look on his face.

RICK Noah. What can I do for you?

NOAH (hello) Rick. Is Marissa home?

RICK She's in the shower. Is she expecting you?

NOAH No. Not really. (swallows his pride) So, what's it been now, three months and a few weeks? RICK (shocked) Yeah. (befriends) You wanna come in?

NOAH It's your house...

RICK Of course. Come on in.

Noah steps inside, as the door closes behind them --

NOAH Those meetings must be brutal...

The door shuts behind them.

The End