

AMBULANCE CHASER

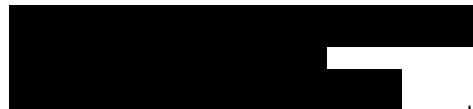
"PILOT"

Written by

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TEASER

NOTE: THIS OPENING SEQUENCE (UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE) IS DONE IN ONE, FLUID SHOT.

FADE IN.

EXT/ESTAB. CLASSIC-LOOKING TV COURTHOUSE - DAY

MUSIC: Some kind of whimsical, storybook *Pushing Daisies* instrumental.

It's a bright, shiny day. Like, textbook "happy" day-- sun, perfect clouds dot the sky in the background, birds are chirping wistfully as they crap on that freshly-detailed Mercedes over there-- the full nine.

The CAMERA SMOOTHLY PUSHES IN and follows the back of MAYA DEVERAUX's head. She's tall, black, and walking like she owns the place. Like a supermodel. Like a supermodel who owns the place.

We follow Maya as she climbs the stairs of a city courthouse. People stop and notice her. Some recognize her and look scared/nervous. Without stopping, Maya is waved through a metal detector at the entrance of the courthouse. The GUARD knows her, he nods.

INT. CLASSIC-LOOKING TV COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - SAME

Maya confidently struts down the marble hallway, never stopping. Pretty, lawyery/detective people straight out of *Law & Order* walk by. We overhear part of the conversation with a be-robed OLD JUDGE talking to an Stephanie March-type D.A., CYNTHIA MCTAGUE. Because we're just passing by, we ride the volume like a cresting wave, low-apex-low; we catch the end of the plea:

CYNTHIA MCTAGUE
Ramirez is a flight risk!

OLD JUDGE
(relenting but tough)
You got your warrant-- this time,
But just know you're on thin ice,
McTague!

We continue on to (and past) a panicking ASSOCIATE, working through a flop-sweaty pep talk as (s)he paces:

ASSOCIATE

(heavy breathing)
Opening statement, opening
statement, deep breath...
(loud, focused exhale)

Maya turns sharply and SHOVES OPEN the door to a courtroom like it was a saloon in the ole west. She crosses into...

INT. CLASSIC-LOOKING TV COURTROOM - SAME

...something out of *L.A. Law* or *Night Court* or *L&O: 31 Flavors*, we find the spectators chattering and harrumphing and rabbling using their indoor voices. The CAMERA FLOATS over the seated area and GLIDES to right in front of the judge's bench where it pauses on the be-robed one, JUDGE PHILLIP BANKS (yes, *that* Phillip Banks, if possible).

Judge Banks bangs the gavel.

JUDGE BANKS

Order! I will have *order* in my
courtroom!

(beat; room quiets)

Now I understand the jury has come
to a conclusion.

JURY FOREMAN (O.S.)

Yes we have, your honor.

The CAMERA PANS around to the jury box, taking the scenic route (past the stenographer & artist) so we can stop and admire two ABC Drama-pretty teams: one PROSECUTION, one DEFENSE. The PLAINTIFF and DEFENDANTS are also standing.

They're all successful ingenues and waifishly thin and blonde and tight in all the right places. And, oh the pectorals.. This is all under their multi-thousand dollar Italian custom tailored (pant)suits, of course.

JUDGE BANKS (O.S.)

Proceed.

JURY FOREMAN (O.S.)

We, the jury, find the defendant...

We finally arrive at the jury box and STOP on the Jury Foreman so (s)he can say:

JURY FOREMAN (CONT'D)

Guilty. On all three counts, your
honor.

The court had erupted in a smattering of simultaneous joy and defeat immediately after the "Guilty," and over the "On all..." and continues over:

JUDGE BANKS (PARTIALLY O.S.)

The defendant will return for
sentencing on the twenty-fifth!
(BANGS gavel to make it
official)

The CAMERA SMOOTHLY PANS BACK over the above line around to the all-too pretty Prosecution team, who are all hugging and embracing, fist bumping and whatever else you can think of.

Over the course of a few moments, the team gathers their briefcases and attachés. They start to make their way down the aisle in the courtroom and Maya gets in the way of one of the forty-something males, MICHAEL NOLAN, the lead prosecutor.

MAYA

Michael Nolan?

MICHAEL NOLAN

Uh, yes?

MAYA

(it *can't* be...)

Assistant District Attorney,
Michael Nolan?

MICHAEL NOLAN

(smiles)

Yes...?

Maya cocks her head and smiles sweetly. She hands him an envelope.

MAYA

You've been served.

The wind has been taken out of his sails. Maya quickly turns and hightails it out of the courtroom before he can respond. The CAMERA follows her again, out the already opened doors of the courtroom...

INT. CLASSIC-LOOKING TV COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...into the bustling hallway. We almost lose Maya in a walking Armani catalogue of lawyers grouped and moving through a crowded hallway like lemmings. There's a cacophony of footsteps on marble, smartphone keyboard clicks and taps, Blackberry beeps and chirps, etc.

The group, with Maya, exits the courthouse through a side door entry/exit...

EXT. CLASSIC-LOOKING TV COURTHOUSE STEPS (SIDE)- CONTINUOUS

...and through it to the outside world, down the courthouse steps. They pass a large group of local news crews and reporters with microphones foisted into the face of one of our pretty prosecution team (not Nolan).

In a nicely choreographed move, Maya effortlessly (and perhaps to the music) jumps from the pretty prosecutors to another group of pretty lawyers...

EXT. MAIN-TYPE STREET - CONTINUOUS

...across the street towards the coffee shop on the corner, Fourbucks Coffee...

EXT./INT. FOURBUCKS COFFEE - CONTINUOUS

...we PAUSE outside of the shop as our group opens the door with that full-blast air conditioner WHOOSH and enters. The group slowly filters in the coffee shop, but Maya keeps walking dead ahead to her PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR'S storefront...

EXT. MAIN-TYPE STREET SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

...down the street a bit to a dingy-looking storefront. Maya walks right past a DIVE STOREFRONT LEGAL OFFICE next door where she unlocks the door. The camera STOPS about six feet behind her and turns toward the storefront's window, which reads RUSS MALACHI: ATTORNEY AT LAW in letters and decals that are peeling and curling at the edges in places.

We PUSH THROUGH (w/ CGI) dingy window into...

INT. DIVE STOREFRONT LEGAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

...the crappiest-looking storefront office you've seen in quite a few decades. It's going for a sort of *Three's Company* chic thing, despite not being the '70s. There's a bit of shag carpeting and tons of wood paneling. And pastels. Those goddamned pastels... Like if *Miami Vice*-era deco swung with The Roepers. Just... just awful.

The world's worst time capsule wearing the skin of an office.

There's a small waiting area with the oldest magazines and a reception desk near the entrance. A half wall separates (mostly figuratively) the reception from the "main" desk, which, incidentally is located *right* next to the dankest bathroom.

The Steadicam will kind of dance around the office as we find (and follow):

In the corner is where a makeshift kitchenette is: mini-fridge, microwave, some packaged food, et al.

But more importantly, in the **ahem** kitchen area is our protagonist: RUSS MALACHI (MUSICAL SWELL/STING?). He's shabby, grimy, bald-- the kind of guy who you'd switch seats if he sat next to you on the bus. He's got the sad brown tie loosened around the collar of a way-past-laundry-day dress shirt (sweat stains galore), the sleeves rolled up. He's just a miserable-looking --which is a visual manifestation of how he feels-- human being.

Russ, in contrast to buying from FourBucks jiggles an old, rusty army surplus percolator on a greasy, oil-spattered hot plate, trying to get it going.

In the distance, a FAINT EMERGENCY SIREN is barely heard. Russ cocks his head like a cat hearing a can opener 14 miles away.

The siren grows louder as it gets closer courtesy of the Doppler Effect.

Russ switches the hot plate off and grabs a handful of business cards off his desk and a pathetic brown wool/tweed sportcoat off the coatrack.

He takes off towards the entrance of the office with purpose, like a sweaty Superman.

As he approaches the camera, he walks past it, which WIPES the screen to black, when we...

SMASH TO TITLES.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

INT. DIVE STOREFRONT LEGAL OFFICE - A LITTLE LATER

Russ re-enters his office, looking down (literally and emotionally). He didn't catch the ambulance. He's out of breath and distracted. So distracted that he goes straight to the coat-rack without noticing he's not alone.

Maya clears her already clear throat. Russ jumps:

RUSS
 Jesus Christ!
 (he turns)
 Dammit, Maya! Can you cut out the
 breaking and entering?

Russ heads for his desk after hanging his coat up, but Maya's sitting in his chair. He sighs, stomping on the remainder of his dignity with a Doc Marten, and then sits on the 'client' side of the desk over the next line...

MAYA
 One: it's not breaking and entering
 if I have a key and two: you left
 your door WIDE open.
 (beat; gesturing outside)
 New client?

RUSS
 Almost.
 (rubs by his foot)
 Rolled my ankle in pursuit.

MAYA
 You'll get 'em next time, champ.

RUSS
 Not that I don't love The
 Emasculation Hour, but is there
 something you need, or...?

MAYA
 We all know the only thing that can
 get me in here is money. Rent
 money. The rent money you owe me.
 Even you can see where I'm going
 with all this...

RUSS
 I, uh, don't know what to tell you.
 (gestures outside)
 (MORE)

RUSS (CONT'D)

My client got away. I'm going to need more time.

MAYA

Tough titty, said the kitty when the milk went dry.

RUSS

I don't have-- wait, are you the titty or am I? I'll be honest, you lost me with the whole cat thing.

MAYA

(stoically stern)

I want my money. All three months of it. By the end of the day.

CUT TO:

EXT. STANDEE'S DINER - DAY; LATER

This is the local eatery we'll probably see quite often. It's a textbook greasy spoon, like Barry Levinson textbook.

INT. STANDEE'S DINER - SAME

From inside the kitchen, we look out into the square-footage of the restaurant. There's vinyl-covered booths, bent stainless steel utensils, a counter, coffee rings EVERYWHERE-- the whole thing.

The music playing in the background is a MUZAK/VIBRAPHONE version of TEEN IDOLS' "KETCHUP SOUP". It'll probably play on loop the entire scene, especially as the song is only 30 seconds.

Sitting at the front counter, however, is Detective Tony Nguyen (yes, pronounced like former San Diego Padre Tony Gwynn and yes, he gets that a lot). He's American-Asian, 40.

A waitress tops off his coffee and the bell over the front door DING-A-LINGS! off-camera. Without looking up from his paper (or police report or whatever he's doing):

TONY

Figured I would've seen you at the crash site. You always seem to know about them...

We WIDEN A BIT (or PAN) to find Russ pulling a stool up next to Tony.

RUSS

How do you do that? Give me the creeps when you do that.

TONY

(deadpan)
It's a gift.

RUSS

(a la Calgon ad)
Ancient Chinese secret, huh?

TONY

I'm Vietnamese, dick, not Chinese.
And you know that.

The waitress brings Tony's breakfast order. He tweaks it with the salt/pepper and other accoutrements diners have every other spot at the counter.

TONY (CONT'D)

So like I said, didn't see you at the bus accident.
(deadpan)
You know how I worry.

RUSS

(feigning hurt feelings)
You think I'm only here to talk shop? I'm hurt! Can't I just hang out with a buddy without wanting something other than friendship?

TONY

Can you?

RUSS

I can be one of the guys, you know.
(beat)
So how's your partner healing?

TONY

Tennison'll be fine. Bullet made a clean exit. Couple weeks off his feet and he'll be back to normal.

RUSS

And the local sports team? They good, too?

Tony gives him a "WTF?" look. Russ claps Tony on the back, overly cheerily saying:

RUSS (CONT'D)
 Look at us! What a pair we are,
 talking about sports and coworkers!

TONY
 Uh... huh.

RUSS
 (that's enough of that)
 So, I miss anything good?

TONY
 Huh?

RUSS
 The bus crash. What'd I miss?

TONY
 (sighing)
 The brakes crapped out when they
 were at speed, so the driver had to
 find a way to stop it.
 (chewing)
 Crashing into a wall of a bank
 seemed to do what the emergency
 brake couldn't.

Russ flips up the coffee cup next to him and reaches across
 Tony for the ketchup. Squeezing a *healthy* amount in:

RUSS
 Yeah? How many passengers?

Russ thins out the ketchup a bit with some water (also free)
 and stirs it with the spoon from the set-up.

TONY
 Seventeen.
 (then)
 And somehow, they've already filed
 twenty-three lawsuits against the
 RTA.

Russ grabs the salt and pepper, sprinkling some of each in,
 stirring...

RUSS
 Any injuries?

He tastes the soup again, tweaking the seasoning.

TONY

A bus crashes into a bank there's probably going to be some people hurt.

Russ shakes a few drops of the hot sauce into the coffee cup.

RUSS

Yeah, but who's representing them? Any cases I could actually *win* in the whole lot?

TONY

THAT'S what I meant to ask, but I was kinda busy doing my job. Detecting, taking statements, you know-- police work.

Russ prepares tuck into his "meal".

RUSS

But any truly good detective could just, kinda, I don't know? *Detect* it? Like sense it? I mean, you could've gotten a *vibe* about them or something, right? I mean you know when I'm around, don't you?

TONY

Usually, I just smell your grocery store brand cologne. It's got a good ten foot lead on you.

RUSS

(sadly)

The stockboy said the Extra-Strength kind would "drive the ladies wild."

Tony's cell phone RINGS (no fancy ringtone). He answers:

TONY

Nguyen.

(beat)

Uh-huh.

(beat)

Now? Like this second?

(beat; sighing)

I'll be there in ten.

Tony stands up. He peels off a few bucks for the tab and pounds what he's able to from his coffee before he has to go.

TONY (CONT'D)
You may as well finish this for me.

RUSS
Pssh... like I need your charity.

TONY
Yeah? How's the soup?
(off Russ' look)
Hope you like huevos rancheros.

RUSS
(glaring; unnecessary ire)
You know I do.
(beat; remembering)
Hey! What about the bus crash?

TONY
Well, you're not going to find any victims here. I'd suggest checking the hospital. They tend to have an abundance of injured people. You're really not good at this, are you?

Off that, Tony backs his way through the door, the BELL DING-A-LING-ing, which we use to...

CUT TO:

EXT. AREA HOSPITAL; ER - DAY

An ambulance with the sirens running pulls into the driveway of the ER entrance.

PRELAP:

The diner bell MATCH CUTS into the kind of BELL you'd find at a reception desk or at a hotel/inn. The kind you can't resist hitting a million times.

INT. AREA HOSPITAL; ER RECEPTION AREA - CONTINUOUS

We pick up inside with a RANDOM PATIENT TAPPING the bell until they're physically stopped by the BURLY FEMALE NURSE. They talk like extras (i.e., silently) and we overhear...

RUSS (O.S.)
(exasperated exhale)
Aw... Ah, jeez... what?

The CAMERA TRACKS to find Russ sitting in the waiting area in a loaner wheelchair. He's got a bandage crown o' thorns haphazardly wrapped around his melon. Pen in hand, he's making faces and syllables like the above at the forms on the clipboard.

A lady with a her wrist bandaged with an icepack held on top also fills out some forms on a clipboard while sitting in one of the molded plastic day-glo chairs. The TV in the corner by the ceiling flickers off-camera, a general news din is barely heard.

RUSS (CONT'D)
 (to woman; feigning
 sheepishness)
 I don't know about you, but I can
 never figure out these forms...

She smiles politely, giving off the "please don't talk to me" vibe.

RUSS (CONT'D)
 So what brings you here?

WOMAN
 Hmm?

RUSS
 Your wrist. What happened to it?

WOMAN
 It's nothing. A stupid kitchen-
 related mishap.
 (embarrassed)
 I burned myself on a skillet lid.
 Cast iron.

RUSS
 Would you say it happened through
 no fault of your own, but rather
 shoddy craftsmanship?

WOMAN
 (subtly skeeved)
 No...

RUSS
 (smiling)
 Just curious, is all.

WOMAN

No. It was my fault. I was watching Alton Brown, following his recipe and I grazed the hot lid with my arm.

(beat)

Like I said, stupid.

Russ looks dejected upon hearing this.

RUSS

Oh. Ok.

He wheels over to another person in the waiting area, this time a man, but just waiting; no clipboard. A large, red bloodstain on his thigh.

Staring his act again...

RUSS (CONT'D)

Aw... Ah, jeez... what?

(to man; feigning sheepishness)

I don't know about you, but I can never figure out these forms...

The man stares at the hanging TV trying to distract himself from the pain.

RUSS (CONT'D)

So what brings you here?

LAWNMOWER MAN

I hit a rock or somethin' with my mower and it knocked the freakin' blade off the rotor and into my thigh.

Russ brightens up, pulling something from his coat pocket.

RUSS

Say, why don't you take one of my cards...

Just as Russ finishes "networking", a MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN walks by with new stitches, holding a gauze-wad against her arm and sits down.

Russ uses the chair next to the Lawnmower Man as leverage to push his chair to the Middle-Aged Woman. Russ is starting to get tired of his 'fishing' process.

RUSS (CONT'D)
 (to M.A.W.)
 So,
 (gesturing generally)
 what's your problem, then?

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN
 (sweetly)
 Oh, there was a horrible accident
 on the twenty-three bus. We
 crashed into MoneyWagon Federal
 Savings and Loan.

There's a bite on his line. Russ immediately brightens/sits up.

RUSS
 Would your injury caused by the
 accident was the result of poor
 performance by the driver of the
 bus, or was another passenger
 pestering them?
 (then)
 Would you like me to represent you
 in your inevitable lawsuit against
 the RTA and the city?

She looks at him and kinda chuckles.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN
 No, I'm quite covered, thank you.
 I've got Joanie and Stuart.

RUSS
 Are they that new firm that has the
 advertisements back-to-back with
 the phone sex ad--
 (he catches himself)
 I mean are they that new firm?

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN
 They're my children. Joanie and
 Stuart. Graduated from Yale and
 Tufts, respectively.

RUSS
 (defeated)
 Oh.
 (rallying)
 Well, if anything changes or...

Just then the Burly Female Nurse from the reception area comes over, interrupting.

BURLY FEMALE NURSE

Are you going to make me call security again, Malachi? You know you can't solicit here. Every other day with you.

Russ looks gutted.

RUSS

Yeah, okay...

He stands up from his wheelchair, and peels his bandage crown off and shuffles away, like Charlie Brown would. Only that's his real 'sad' walk.

BURLY FEMALE NURSE

(muttering)

I got better things to do than kick you out every other day. Need to put a damn ad in the phonebook or somethin'...

The Nurse trails off the further he gets away from her (ad lib to fill).

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY(S) - CONTINUOUS

Russ starts to make his way to the door but a bright light catches his eye from the periphery.

ANGLE ON:

Down the hall, light reflects off of a clipboard being held by NURSE AMANDA, mid-30's, savvy; been around the block (not in a slutty way, necessarily); street smart.

BACK ON:

Russ. He's smitten. Even from all the way down the hall and with his nearsightedness.

Nurse Amanda finishes chatting with a coworker, laughs at something one of them said and starts down the hall (towards the cafeteria).

Russ cautiously follows, keeping his distance. Amanda turns a corner and Russ sidles up to it, just peering around to check the clearness of the coast.

Amanda's stopped to sign another NURSE'S clipboard. She turns around and Russ ducks away just in time so as to remain unseen.

Amanda continues down the hallway and Russ slowly slinks out from hiding. He crisscrosses from side-to-side of the hallway, using various rolling shelves and carts as cover. Amanda's certain she's being followed (well, because she is), and checks behind her a couple times during the crisscrossing.

Eventually, Russ looks up and sees she's disappeared. He comes out of hiding again, saddened and starts down the hallway towards where he/we last saw her.

Russ shuffles past the Nurse's Station (just for landmarking purposes). Just as he's about to pass the door of a room (let's call it rm. 121) a couple further down from the Nurse Station, AN ARM GRABS him around the collar area and yanks him-- HARD-- into...

INT. ROOM 121 - CONTINUOUS

Turns out, Amanda owns the arm that grabbed him (the hands and fingers, too). She's somehow able to drag Russ in from the hallway, slam him up against the perpendicular bathroom door and shut the main door behind him. No sweat broken.

There are a couple patients already sharing this room, perhaps one is in a coma.

AMANDA

Who the hell are you and why the hell are you following me?!

Off that, and Russ' terror, we...

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN.

INT. ROOM 121 - MINUTES LATER

Nurse Amanda still has Russ pinned up against the door. He looks terrified.

AMANDA

Why haven't you said a word in
(looks at her watch)
**[actual length of commercial
break]**? WHO ARE YOU?!

RUSS

(fumbling)
I'm-- uh-- Is this the best place
for this? I-- I mean, there's
people in here--

AMANDA

They're in comas! So unless you'd
like to join them, give me a
frickin' answer!

RUSS

(pointing)
That guy's not...

She turns to find a YOUNG PATIENT (like 10 or under), big smile on his face, watching this whole thing. He waves.

She opens the door and shoves Russ out, following behind...

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Back in the bustling hallway. She finally lets go of his shirt. He smooths himself out (sorta).

RUSS

I'm-- I'm Russ. Malachi. Russ
Malachi.

AMANDA

There we go. Progress. Now let's
go for two-in-a-row: why are you
stalking me?

RUSS
I'm not stalking you. I don't even think I was following you. Where were you going?

AMANDA
The cafeteria.

RUSS
Oh. Then, yes, I was following you.

Amanda looks at her watch.

AMANDA
(sigh)
I only have [15 minus above break] minutes left on my break now, so we're going to have to do this on the way.

She starts WALKING. Russ, caught off guard, catches up.

RUSS
So, like I was saying. I was following you to the cafeteria, but I also *wasn't*.
(beat)
Hey! What if you were following someone else? Like a big chain of people going to the same place, each unaware they were following someone else.

AMANDA
Do you always argue this much? Is that like your "thing"?

RUSS
I don't know that I have a "thing."
I'm a lawyer, but--

AMANDA
Ah ha! That's what I couldn't quite put my finger on. I sensed... something like desperation and Brylcreem.

RUSS
I'm just following orders.

Amanda looks around, feigning searching. Laying it on thick.

AMANDA

Funny-- this doesn't *look* like
Nuremberg...

RUSS

(defensive)

It was all set in motion by my
mother before I was even born. Free
will didn't really play a role. It
was pretty much doctor, lawyer or
business executive.

AMANDA

So... now you're a lawyer with
mommy issues.

RUSS

Well, I'm Jewish, so... of course.
But she did the best she could.
Single mother most of the time.
She's quite proud, believe it or
not. My JD is hanging on her wall.

(then)

Not the *living room* wall-- said it
clashed with the couches-- but a
wall...

(gesturing re: her house)

somewhere in there. Mostly I just
think she wishes it was to a
better, actually-accredited
institution of higher learning.

AMANDA

As opposed to...?

RUSS

(matter-of-fact)

City Law University.

AMANDA

Oh, come on-- you made that up.

RUSS

That's what she said, too!

Amanda's 'forcefield' is flickering (proverbially), as a
smile barely appears. She's about to say something as she
and Russ cross over the threshold into the cafeteria...

INT. HOSPITAL CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

...but before she can get a word out, they're interrupted by the Burly Female Nurse from ACT ONE, holding a stack of metal charts.

BURLY FEMALE NURSE

(to Russ)

Was I not clear before? Should I actually let the door hit you on the ass this time?

AMANDA

It's cool, Bea-- He's with me.

(realizing)

Well, not *with me* with me. Just walking adjacent to me and only annoying me slightly.

RUSS

(under his breath; small fist pump)

Score!

BEA

(to Amanda)

I've got to cut out a little early tonight-- think you can cover my patients?

AMANDA

Oh, c'mon! We're drowning as it--

BEA

(manipulative)

Sam's first day of school's on Wednesday, right? Be a shame if no one was willing to cover for his mother so she could be there on such an important day...

AMANDA

(resigned; eyes rolling)

Alright, alright, just gimme your charts.

BEA

Thanks, 'Manda.

Bea dumps her stack on Amanda. She starts to head off before, almost as an afterthought:

BEA (CONT'D)
 You're WAY too good for this guy.
 You know that, right?

And with that, Bea EXITS, victory practically pouring out of her. Down the hall, she stops a tall, Indian doctor in the hallway passing by and tells him something and pointing directly at Russ. This is DR. RAJ CHANDRASEKARAN.

RUSS
 Did she say 'Manda? That short for something?

AMANDA
 (uh...)
 Yeah. Amanda.

RUSS
 (playing cool)
 Right... Amanda...
 (beat; about to 'pounce')
 So...--

Just then, a HAND CLAPS on Russ' shoulder and he jumps a bit, surprised. Widen to see Dr. Chandrasekaran. He's got a THICK accent.

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN
 Hello, my friend...

Russ turns to face him.

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN (CONT'D)
 I am to be sure that you are aware
 this is Mr. Gabriel's domain.

Amanda checks her watch.

AMANDA
 Crap! I gotta run. Later, Russ.

RUSS
 Wait-- No, don't--

She leaves.

RUSS (CONT'D)
 (to Raj)
 Okay, now... what?!

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN
 Mr. Gabriel has what you Americans
 call "dibs" on this hospital.
 (whispers)
 (MORE)

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN (CONT'D)
 But he doesn't *have* to, if you
 follow my meaning...

RUSS
 (still confused)
 I... do?

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN
 (quiet-ish)
 You see, for every patient I refer
 to Mr. Gabriel, Mr. Gabriel gives
 Rajimeem ten percent of settlement.
 It is what you Americans call
 "finder's fee," yes?
 (Russ nods)
 Now if *someone* were to give
 Rajimeem fifteen or twenty percent,
 then Mr. Gabriel must find another
 hospital, yes?

Nodding like he gets it. He doesn't.

RUSS
 Fifteen or twenty percent.

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN
 (enticingly)
 Twenty percent guarantees at least
 one client per week...

RUSS
 A client a week, huh? Wait-- You
 mean Gabriel Abraxas? The lawyer
 with the commercials and profits
 and German cars and the lack of
 creditors? Never heard of him.

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN
 Yes, yes: Mr. Gabriel.
 (then)
 Partners?

Chandrasekaran sticks out his hand. Russ still looks confused
 but reluctantly shakes anyway.

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN (CONT'D)
 Dr. Rajimeem Chandrasekaran, M.D.,
 please to come with me, sir.

Dr. Raj YANKS Russ' arm and they start off.

RUSS
Hey! Where're we--

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Chandrasekaran pulls back a hospital curtain-- with flair-- to reveal TROY MOSER, a man just as pathetic-looking and poorly dressed as Russ, with a bandage around his head and his arm in a sling.

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN
Mr. Russ, meet new client-- Mr.
Troy.

Suddenly, Russ gets it.

RUSS
Oh! *Partners!*
(beat; realizing)
Wait-- *Twenty* percent!?

Off Russ' look (and Raj's ENORMOUS grin), we:

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - AS WE LEFT THEM

Chandrasekaran carries on without paying any attention to Russ.

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN

Mr. Troy was at the scene of the bus crash today at the MoneyWagon.

(to Troy)

Mr. Russ is a personal injury lawyer. Veddy good. Best in the area.

TROY

Really? The best in the area?

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN

Well, best in

(gesturing around the room)

this immediate area. He can tell you if you have a case.

TROY

Oh, well, how does this work? Is there like a down payment or--?

RUSS

(excited; like he's done this before)

I don't collect, until you collect... I mean...

acashadvancewoudlbeappreciatedbutit snotnecessary.

(anyway...)

So, you were in the bus crash?

TROY

Sure. Well, I was on my lunch break just running errands, ya know. I went to the bank and it was pretty crowded, so I used the indoor ATM by the front. And that's the last thing I remember, really. I think I slipped in a puddle or something. Then I woke up here.

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN

Mr. Troy has sustained injuries to his head, right arm, wrist and knee.

RUSS
 (confused)
 So... You weren't actually in the
 bus crash? Or on the bus?

TROY
 ...no.

RUSS
 So this is your everyday slip and
 fall?

TROY
 Yeah.

RUSS
 (sighing)
 Did they have the yellow "wet
 floor" thing displayed?

Just then an excited, homely woman rushes in through the
 door. This is DENISE MOSER, Troy's wife.

DENISE
 Troy! Honey, I came as soon as I
 could! What were you doing at the
 bank? You weren't hurt in that bus
 crash, were you? I was trying to
 call you all morning, I was so
 worried, you were supposed to meet
 be for an open house, do you
 remember?

TROY
 Uh... what?

Chandrasekaran pulls out a penlight and shines it in Troy's
 eyes, then looks pointedly at Russ.

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN
 It seems Mr. Troy has TBI--
 Traumatic Brain Injury. Confusion,
 memory loss, diminished
 concentration, loss of taste and
 smell. These things can be
 permanent...

Off Russ' look, we DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BANK - DAY

Russ and Maya comb the bus crash scene. Maya appears to be doing all the work-- taking pictures and checking out the scene. Russ remains stationary, and seems to be lost in thought.

MAYA

Traumatic Brain Injury, huh? That doesn't sound even remotely made up to you?

RUSS

Dr. Chandra-- Chendra-- Dr. Raj seems like a good enough doctor.

Maya snaps a picture of the ceiling where it appears to be leaking.

Russ approaches the Check Writing Desk... Thing, to find a head-shaped/sized dent in the wood. Perhaps a dry blood stain.

RUSS (CONT'D)

Besides, Mr. Moser at least deserves compensation for
(re: dent)
That.

Maya snaps a picture.

MAYA

(whatever)
I'm just glad you have a case.
Means I'll get my money soon.
Probably.
(beat; photo)
You remember how to win one of these things? You must be rusty.

RUSS

(cocky)
I've got a plan forming...
(under his breath)
Step one: obtain client. Step two: win case. Step three: profit!

MAYA

Well that seems bulletproof. You *can't* lose.

She rolls her eyes; he doesn't see this.

RUSS
 (surprised)
 That's an unusual vote of
 confidence coming from you.

MAYA
 Look, I've investigated a lot of
 injury cases. I know how this goes
 down: the bank is going to be
 focusing all of their legal
 firepower right at the RTA. A run-
 of-the-mill slip-n-fall case's
 potatoes are considered too small
 for them to care. They'll settle
 right away just to get rid of you.
 Plus, you got that shady doctor
 vouching for you and a pathetic
 client who doesn't remember his
 wife and gets to fall in love all
 over again. Or not, this time
 around.

(dwelling)
 Kinda poetic, actually.

RUSS
 I can't count on poetry, Maya. I
 still need evidence, witnes--

He stops.

MAYA
 What?

RUSS
 It's just... crime scenes make me
 all... oogy.

MAYA
 Oogy. Oh, this Moser guy's in
great hands...
 (beat; exasperated)
 He said he remembered using the
 ATM, right? The one by the door?

She points at what's left of it.

RUSS
 Yes... yeeees...

Maya gives him a moment, hoping he will come around.

MAYA
 And...? Come on, sound it out...

RUSS
 (slowly)
 ATMs have cameras!

MAYA
 The whole bank does. But the bus
 knocked their system out. Except
 for...

RUSS
 The ATM.

MAYA
 Which one...
 (sotto)
 Drink, horse. Drink!

RUSS
 (getting into it)
 The one by the door!
 (laughing)
 This is fun!

Maya sighs and snaps a picture of an indentation in the floor that is collecting water from the ceiling above.

MAYA
 (to herself)
 Trust me, this is never going to
 court.

FLIP TO:

INT. SHABBY COURT ROOM - DAY

A young, slightly nervous, yet aggressive, female attorney paces in front of a jury box full of disgruntled jurors, This is NESSA CHANEY.

Chaney is the best-dressed person in the room. She looks completely out of place in this downtrodden, depressing, borderline-condemmed courtroom (Russ' usual home field advantage). Chaney is delivering her opening statement, PACING ABOUT the room.

Dr. Raj (in attendance) has overdone it a bit with the bandages on Troy.

NESSA
 (sneering;)
 Russ Malachi is a personal. Injury.
Attorney.

(MORE)

NESSA (CONT'D)

In the unwritten, but fastidiously followed legal respectability hierarchy, ambulance chasers are just below bankruptcy attorneys. They hang around hospital ER's like vultures and prey on their elderly and injured victims. Filling their clients with false hope.

Russ sits behind a desk taking notes. He nods in agreement with Nessa and looks unperturbed.

RUSS

(scribbling; to himself)
...vultures. That's *gold!*

NESSA

(ignoring)

We've all been up past two a.m.-- some of us actually *working* at that hour-- when we see their terrible commercials: a sleazy lawyer in a cheap suit standing in front of even cheaper-looking graphics talking well above the appropriate volume for the situation.

(reenacting)

"Have you been bit by a dog? Sue!"
"Been in a car accident? You can get money you don't deserve for that!"

(normal)

They promise big cash settlements for little-to-no money down. They work on contingency. They *se habla Español*. And those are the successful ones. Russ Malachi doesn't even *have* a commercial.

(to jury)

Simply put, Russ Malachi is a loser.

RUSS

(off Troy's worried look)
Oh. Uh, objection?

The judge, who looks tired, shoots Nessa a look.

JUDGE BANKS

Ms. Chaney, if you could please move along to the point...

NESSA

My *point*, your honor, ladies and gentleman of the jury, is that Russ Malachi is a desperate man. And I plan to disprove the quality of his character, which will *undoubtedly* prove that there is. No. Case. Here.

(she holds up case file/
report)

Mr. Moser was rushing at the ATM, he slipped, he fell, he got hurt. Maybe he's naturally clumsy; maybe he tripped over his shoelaces; maybe he was distracted by a *huge freakin' bus* barreling towards him. Is that the fault of MoneyWagon Federal Savings & Loan? Do we have to pay for his clumsiness? Do we have to pay for the RTA's incompetence? What ever happened to self-accountability? People slip in public all the time without threatening to sue-- or following through with it. To err is human, after all...

(then)

Mr. Malachi saw an opportunity to sneak in-- not un-weasel-like, I might add-- while MoneyWagon was focused on the RTA... incident, and when they can rebuild their community-friendly business. Malachi and Moser would have been better off *robbing* the bank at gunpoint, since that's essentially what they're trying to do today in this courtroom.

(sternly)

Well, I'm not going to let that happen. During these proceedings, I will prove to you that MoneyWagon was not responsible for Mr. Moser's fall. Mr. Moser was responsible for his fall. He should take responsibility for his actions. And Mr. Malachi should look into helping those *truly* in need, chiefly himself.

(one last smile to
Judge/jury)

Thank you.

Nessa sits down behind her desk, big grin plastered ear-to-ear. Judge Banks doesn't even look up, deeply in thought over what appears to be a Sudoku.

JUDGE BANKS

(weary)

Mr. Malachi, if you'd please get on with it.

Russ approaches the jury box.

RUSS

(laughs; echoing her line)

"Helping those truly in need..."

Hmm... But Ms. Chaney works for a firm called Deutschen, Barren and Bach. They represent clients like FourBucks, OptimisTech, KarmaTech Pharmaceuticals, and MoneyWagon, just to name a few.

(laying it on thick)

You know, the people in need.

(normal)

True, Ms. Chaney may only be a junior associate, and thus only entitled to a low six-figure salary--with excellent benefits, I might add-- so if she were to err, or be human, she wouldn't have to worry about things like paying her medical bills or rent. Or eating.

(changes tone)

Sadly, it's a different story for my friend Troy Moser over here. Mr. Moser, like me, is a loser. We've had a rough year. The crumbling economy hasn't been kind to either of us, y'know? I think you can relate.

(gestures to Troy)

Troy freelances in day labor. How do you think he's able to provide for his family looking like... that?

Russ appears to be winning over the crowd. The jurors nod knowingly. A few glare in Ms. Chaney's direction.

RUSS (CONT'D)

I realize this isn't the best time for MoneyWagon. Hell, it's not a particularly good time for *any* bank right now.

(MORE)

RUSS (CONT'D)

Especially one that just had a *bus crash* into the side of it. But does that exclude or excuse them from following building codes and doing their best to keep their customers safe.

(quieter; out side of mouth)

And between you and me, MoneyWagon should thanking their lucky stars they even have any customers left after all those bad mortga--

NESSA

Objection, your honor!

Judge Banks shoots him a quick warning look, then back to his puzzle.

JUDGE BANKS

The jury will ignore... whatever Mr. Malachi said to set off Ms. Chaney.

RUSS

(clears his throat; back to it)

I have witnesses, including an expert medical witness to provide testimony. I have photographic and video...graphic evidence, *damning* evidence, even that will prove that MoneyWagon is to blame for my clients injuries.

(laying it out)

In a nutshell, Mr. Moser thought he was safe in the MoneyWagon branch, using their ATM. Next thing he knows an enormous *bus* is headed right for him. And the next thing he remembers? Well, he doesn't, you see, as his memory is affected by his head injuries. But I have a pretty good idea what happened, and I look to prove that it was due to MoneyWagon's negligence.

(one last crooked smile to the Judge/jury)

Thank you.

Judge Banks doesn't look up from his puzzle.

JUDGE BANKS

(whatever...)

Mmmkay then. We're going to take a short recess while I finish solving this four-star Sudoku and reconvene in an hour to hear Mr. Malachi's so-called "damning evidence."

(half-assedly bangs gavel)

Adjorned.

INT. COURTROOM HALLWAY - DURING RECESS

Russ, Maya, Troy and Dr. Raj huddle together in the hallway. Maya seems distracted, Russ and Raj seem energized and Troy looks nervous.

RUSS

I don't want to jinx it, but I think this is going pretty well, right? I haven't felt this good about something since Michael Dukakis ran for president.

This makes everyone else visibly nervous, even

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN

Just let Dr. Raj get up there. I have many, many large medical-sounding words to confuse the jury. Some of it is truly terrifying, sir.

TROY

I don't know how serious my head injury really is, exactly...

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN

(blowing him off)

That is because you are confused. This is normal for TBI.

TROY

(to himself)

What if I *did* just trip over my shoelaces?

DR. CHANDRASEKARAN

(to Russ, serious)

Dude, he's totally falling apart. He's going to, as you Americans call it, "NARC us out." Get him under control, Mr. Russ, sir.

Russ looks back and forth between Dr. Chandrasekaran and Troy. Maya seems distracted and is looking at something or someone off-screen.

MAYA
Something's up.

Maya gestures off-screen, which THE CAMERA FOLLOWS, to Nessa Chaney. She is down the hall arguing with a tallish man in his late 50's/early 60's. This is RICHARD DEUTSCHEN. Richard brushes Chaney off and starts walking towards Russ.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Look sharp, Russ. Remember, you're a lawyer. A professional. Don't forget to use your big boy voice.

RUSS
(annoyed)
What are you even doing here Maya?

MAYA
Just checking up on my money. Making sure I was gonna be seeing it. If it was looking bad, then I was going to go ahead and petition Judge Banks for eviction papers. I'm invested either way.
(semi-genuinely)
But you're actually not crapping the proverbial bed here, so...

She gives Russ a strong pat on the arm.

MR. DEUTSCHEN
Russell Malachi, I presume? Richard Deutschen...

Richard sticks out his hand, Nessa stands behind him with her arms crossed, looking pissed.

RUSS
(*too big* a big boy voice)
Yes, I am Russell Malachi.

Russ realizes he went too big. Behind him, Maya cringes.

MR. DEUTSCHEN
Nice to meet you. Richard Deutschen.
(they shake)
I was hoping we
(Russ, Troy, Chaney & himself)
(MORE)

MR. DEUTSCHEN (CONT'D)
 Could meet privately in Judge
 Banks' Chambers.

RUSS
 (correcting big boy voice
 on the fly)
 Yes. Uh, yes.
 (getting it right)
 Yes, that would be acceptable.

INT. JUDGE BANKS' CHAMBERS - MINUTES LATER

Russ and Troy sit on the Judge's left, Richard and Nessa sit on the other. The Chambers are respectable-looking, fine, wood-crafted furniture, lots of fancy-looking law books, personal affects (Sudoku books?). A big step up from the courtroom.

The Judge 'presides' the same way he did on the bench.

MR. DEUTSCHEN
 Your Honor, it's unfortunate that
 this matter even made it to trial.
 That was an oversight on my part,
 I'm afraid. Too wrapped up with
 this RTA business. Now, at this
 time, my client and I are prepared
 to settle.

JUDGE BANKS
 Uh-huh...

RUSS
 (cocky)
 Weren't expecting me to be quite so
 prepared in there, were you,
 Richard.

Richard shoots him a look.

RUSS (CONT'D)
 Uh, Mr. Deutschen.

MR. DEUTSCHEN
 (forced smile)
 Granted, we're not offering the
 full \$100,000 being asked, but we
 feel it to be an awfully generous
 offer--

RUSS
 (shakes his head)
 Rich, Rich, Rich, Rich, Rich...
 (MORE)

RUSS (CONT'D)

Can I call you Rich? I'm going to call you Rich. You're forgetting I have expert witnesses, video evidence--

NESSA

(to Richard)

Just let me destroy him in the courtroom, Mr. Deutschen. His *amazing* video evidence shows nothing remotely useable. Everything happens off-cam--

Richard holds up a hand to silence Nessa, then slides a piece of paper over to Russ. Russ looks at the offer.

RUSS

(clears throat)

I'll need a moment to look this over with my client.

MR. DEUTSCHEN

Of course.

Russ gestures to Troy to swivel their chairs so that their backs are to Richard and Nessa. They WHISPER when in private conference.

RUSS

It's \$30,000. What do you think?

TROY

I dunno, what do you think?

RUSS

It's a sure thing. And, I'm pretty sure that you're gonna be useless on the stand.

Troy nods in agreement.

RUSS (CONT'D)

But the offer *is* a little low.

TROY

I-Is this like buying a car? Do we make a counter-offer?

RUSS

Hey! Yeah, let's try that.

Russ swivels back around. Troy stays put.

RUSS (CONT'D)

My client has *extensive* medical bills. MRI's, Catscans, X-Rays-- they're not exactly cheap. Then there's the loss of income. I don't think we could settle for less than sixty-thousand.

MR. DEUTSCHEN

I'm afraid \$50,000 is the maximum amount I'm allowed to offer.

RUSS

Well, that could be good, too. Let me confer.

Russ swivels back around to Troy.

RUSS (CONT'D)

(whispers)

We're up to \$50,000.

Troy nods excitedly.

TROY

Yes, yes, for God's sake TAKE IT.

Russ swivels back around. Barely keeping it together:

RUSS

We find fifty thousand to be acceptable.

Richard stands up to shake Russ's hand. Troy remains turned around in his chair.

MR. DEUTSCHEN

Excellent! So glad to get this little *inconvenience* resolved.

(re: Nessa)

I need all my junior associates on hand to deal with the paperwork for this bus accident.

Richard clasps an unhappy Nessa on the back. Russ swivels Troy's chair back around to the table.

MR. DEUTSCHEN (CONT'D)

You wouldn't believe the sheer amount of documents we've accumulated in the office over the past week. We've had to rent out another floor in the tower!

(backhandedly)

(MORE)

MR. DEUTSCHEN (CONT'D)
You're so lucky you don't have to
deal with these types of things,
Russ.

RUSS
Yeah... lucky.

Both Russ and Nessa shoot Richard a death glare.

MR. DEUTSCHEN
Anyway, Nessa here'll draw up the
appropriate paperwork and we'll be
in touch.

Richard rushes out of the room. Nessa stares coldly at Russ.

NESSA
I underestimated you, Mr. Malachi.
You're just as bad as Abraxas.

With that she marches out of the room. Russ looks confused.

RUSS
(to himself)
Abraxas... Where have I heard that
name before?
(shrugs; to Troy/Judge
Banks)
Whatever, we won!
(then)
Well, by default, but I'm gonna
count it.

Troy's adrenaline of the huge payday saps the color from his
face:

TROY
(weakly)
Hurray.

Judge Banks semi-softly uses a paperweight as a gavel,
banging it:

JUDGE BANKS
Case dismissed. Please leave.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DIVE STOREFRONT LEGAL OFFICE

Russ sits behind with a remote control in one hand and a
drink in the other (not in a paper bag, either!).

The camera swivels around and we can see that he is watching the ATM footage on loop.

ANGLE ON:

On the TV, Troy opens the door to the bank, and passes by the ATM/fisheye camera. Moments later, he uses the ATM, so the camera has a clear shot of him. In the camera's periphery, the BUS GETS BIGGER the closer it gets (and fast). Troy sees it, PANICS and runs further inside the bank. We HEAR Troy slipping in the puddle Maya was looking into earlier, SLIDE and THUD HARD (head first) into the Check Writing Station... Thing. Hard enough to CRACK it. The BUS CRASHES hard, completely fucking up the bank and their entryway/lobby. The camera cuts out.

And it repeats, ad infinitum.

Maya suddenly appears at the door. Russ looks up, startled.

RUSS

Would it kill you to knock. Or wear a bell around your neck? How do you just appear like that? Are you a ninja or vampire or ninja vampire or something?

MAYA

Just came to drop off your receipt. Paid in full.

Maya looks at the video and raises an eyebrow.

RUSS

I'm sad I didn't get to show my video.

MAYA

I'm happy I got paid. Keep this up and you might be able to afford a full-time secretary in addition to your rent. Get a respectable business operating.

RUSS

Secretary, what do I need a secretary for?

MAYA

Because I'm not your secretary and I'd like to stop taking your calls.

Russ is transfixed by the TV.

RUSS
(distracted)
Anything good?

MAYA
Just some dude called Gabriel
Abraxas.

RUSS
(still distracted)
Hhmmm. Never heard of him. What's
his number?

MAYA
(sings jingle)
Call 555-ATTY-LAW. Gabe Abraxas is
your lawyer-man, he'll get you your
money as fast as he can--

Russ changes the channel, which picks up right where Maya left off in the commercial's jingle.

ANGLE ON:

On the TV, a sleazy-but-successful lawyer in his mid/high 30's stands in a TV set (fake bookcases, etc) law office. This is GABRIEL ABRAXAS. He's got the huge rapper's chain around his neck, Adidas (no laces) and a Kangol hat. Stage left shows two back-up singers dressed as sexy judges (robes, gavels). Gabriel attempts to look cool co-opting RUN DMC-type hip-hop. In the lower third, a 1-555-ATTY-LAW CHYRON FLASHES, along with SE HABLA ESPAÑOL!

GIRL 1	GIRL 2
(sings)	(sings)
Abraxas, Abraaaaaxas, Abraxas.	Call Gabe, call Gabe, call Gabe.

Gabe steps in front of the camera and throws up signs.

GABE
I'm the man.

BACK TO:

Russ' office, Maya is throwing up the signs along with the commercial.

MAYA
Nothing?

RUSS
(shakes head)
Never heard of him.

MAYA

Well, he's heard of you...

Russ leans back in his chair, kicking his feet up on the desk, hands folded behind his head in a Ferris Bueller power move.

RUSS

(cocky)

Guess I'm coming up in the world.
Finally.

Russ' phone rings. He picks up.

RUSS (CONT'D)

Hello?

(beat)

Oh, hey, Raj--

(beat)

You got a client? I'll be right
there.

Russ hangs and gets up (in one motion), with a bit more purpose than usual and WALKS PAST the camera (like in the TEASER), WIPING US TO:

BLACK OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

END OF EPISODE