ATTORNEY CHASERS

by

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FADE IN:

INT. HUSKERS BAR -- NIGHT

Clusters of dried Indian corn line the doorframe. Iowa State banners cover the walls.

A group of ATTORNEYS celebrate winning a big case. Ties loosened, two and a half sheets to the wind.

DAN TAYLOR, 30s and a bit more jaded than his younger colleagues, nurses a watery scotch and soda.

A PUDGY ATTORNEY picks up his glass and wobbles over to Dan.

PUDGY What's the matter with you? You should be celebrating. Seventeen straight victories, baby!

DAN Yeah. It's really great.

### PUDGY

Great, my ass. (spins around) To punitive damages!

The other Attorneys laugh and raise their glasses.

ATTORNEYS To punitive damages!

They drain their glasses and gesture for another round.

DAN You guys are too much.

He stands and shrugs into his suit coat.

PUDGY Whoa, Danno. You're not leavin' already? We haven't toasted to gullible jurors yet.

DAN I promised Jill I'd be home early.

PUDGY Don't be gettin' too old on us now.

DAN See you guys Monday.

He waves and walks out, leaving their catcalls behind.

### EXT. HUSKERS BAR -- NIGHT

Dan strides toward his BMW SUV, cell phone to his ear.

DAN I'm on my way. Do you need me to pick up anything at the market?

INT. TAYLOR HOUSE - KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Dan's wife, JILL, smiles at their baby, MARCY, who coos in her wind-up swing next to the table. Jill drains noodles in the sink with the phone tucked between her ear and shoulder.

> JILL Some formula. One of the big cans.

She opens the refrigerator and peers inside.

JILL Oh, and some milk.

INT. BMW -- NIGHT

Dan turns the key and starts the car.

DAN You got it. What's for supper?

JILL (V.O.) Tuna casserole.

la Casseroie.

DAN

JILL (V.O.)

Overruled.

Objection!

He hangs up with a smile and pulls out of the lot.

Unnoticed, an AMBULANCE pulls out behind him.

EXT. COUNTY ROAD -- NIGHT

Heavily wooded, lit only by the moon.

Dan cruises along, a grocery bag on the seat beside him. Behind him, the strobe lights of the ambulance flash.

Dan pulls over onto the shoulder to let the ambulance pass.

The ambulance pulls in front of him and SLAMS INTO REVERSE.

CRASH!

Dan's head bobbles like a doll from the impact. He sits there, dazed.

Two EMTs, MARK, beefy and not a MENSA candidate, and LUKE, dead-eyed and gangly, emerge from the back of the ambulance and approach Dan's window. Luke leans in.

## LUKE

# Are you okay?

Dan shakes his head and looks at him in disbelief.

DAN What the hell just happened?

Mark edges closer.

LUKE

Why don't you step out of the vehicle, Mr. Taylor?

DAN How do you know my name?!

Mark points a gun at Dan's head.

MARK

No more questions.

He yanks Dan out of the car and face first onto the pavement. Drops a fat knee into the center of Dan's back.

Luke JABS a syringe into Dan's neck.

INT. AMBULANCE -- NIGHT

Medical paraphernalia: defibrillator paddles, syringes.

Dan is strapped to a gurney. He fades in and out of consciousness.

Mark smiles down at him.

MARK It's a good thing we showed up when we did.

INT. AMBULANCE -- LATER

Dark.

Dan awakens, alone. His eyes dart frantically around the ambulance. Where is he?

Dan's cell phone rings JINGLE BELLS and he gropes in his jacket pocket. The display reads: HOME

Suddenly, the door swings open. Luke shines a bright flashlight in his face.

LUKE Oh what fun it is to ride in a one horse open sleigh... He hops in. LUKE (snatching phone) Hev! (calling) Sleeping Beauty's awake! (off display) There's no place like home. INT. GARAGE -- NIGHT A windowless, concrete block. Creepy. Mark pushes the gurney in. The wheels CLATTER on the floor. DAN Who are you? Where are you taking me?! Sweat streams down Dan's face. Mark walks out the garage door. DAN Somebody help me! Help! HELP ME! The garage door locks with a CLICK. INT. GARAGE -- LATER Dan waits in wide-eyed fear. A few drops of water fall from the high ceiling onto his face. The lock clicks, the heavy door ROLLS open behind him. Mark wheels in a large wooden structure, a makeshift judge's bench and witness stand. Luke and MATTHEW, reptilian and darkly intelligent, set up two tables facing the bench. Dan looks on in confusion. What is going on here? Luke and Matthew carry in folding chairs. They open them and line them up perfectly facing the back wall of the garage. The three men leave without a word. INT. GARAGE -- MOMENTS LATER The door opens slowly. Lights from the house fifty yards away filter in.

4.

Matthew and Mark enter, their appearances altered: Matthew, as an attorney, spiffy in his suit, carrying a briefcase. Mark, as a bailiff, armed to the teeth.

Matthew removes Dan's restraints while Mark aims a hunting rifle at Dan's head. Matthew plunks Dan into a chair at one table and takes a seat at the other.

> MARK All rise for the Honorable Judge Luke Hutchings.

Matthew stands and leers over at Dan. Stand up or else.

Dan rises shakily to his feet.

Luke glides in wearing a judge's robe and powdered wig. Sits ostentatiously at the bench and bangs his gavel.

He sets a tiny pair of reading glasses on his nose and peers at a parchment sheet on the bench in front of him.

> LUKE Please be seated. (looks at Dan) Mr. Taylor, you are charged with the wrongful death of Mr. John Hutchings. How do you plead?

> > DAN

I'm not sure --

LUKE You will address me appropriately.

DAN (befuddled)

Your Honor, I have no idea what's going on here. You got the wrong guy.

LUKE I can assure you, Mr. Taylor, we do not. Once more, what is your plea?

DAN

Not guilty.

LUKE (to Matthew) Mr. Hutchings, your opening statement.

Matthew rises with a proud smile.

### MATTHEW

Your Honor, the defendant is charged with the wrongful death of a fine man, my brother, John Hutchings. Through Mr. Taylor's wanton manipulation of the law, John was driven to bankruptcy and ultimately, suicide. Had Mr. Taylor bothered to research the woman he represented, a Miss Guinevere Beachum, he would have discovered that she pursued three other slip-and-fall lawsuits prior to suing Mr. Hutchings. We intend to prove Mr. Taylor's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Luke looks at Dan expectantly.

LUKE

Mr. Taylor, your opening statement.

DAN

You're not gonna get away with this. Jesus Christ! What the fuck is all this?!

LUKE Bailiff, please calm the Defense Team down.

In one fluid motion, Mark steps toward Dan and BREAKS his nose with the butt-end of the rifle. Dan HOLLERS in agony as dark blood trickles down from his nose.

> LUKE Thank you, Bailiff. (to Dan) It is in your best interest to win this case, as there will be no appeal. I ask you again, your opening statement.

DAN Your Honor, I don't remember the specifics of this case.

LUKE How unfortunate. For you. So you decline to make a statement?

DAN

I just wanna say...whatever I did...I've always acted in the best interest of my client.

LUKE How noble of you. Noble, and reckless. (to Matthew) Mr. Hutchings, the floor is yours.

#### MATTHEW

Thank you, Your Honor. The tragic death of John Hutchings took place nearly two years ago. In this very room. He was a hard-working and ethical man whose life was ravaged by Mr. Taylor's law firm. They stripped him of his money. They stripped him of his business. They stripped him of his home. And they stripped him of his family. Like an angel of death, they took away his life and his legacy.

He gestures dramatically toward Dan.

MATTHEW

I call Daniel Taylor to the stand.

Dan walks gingerly to the stand as Mark glares at him.

Mark approaches and drops a Bible with a THUMP onto the stand.

MARK Put your left hand on the Bible and raise your right hand.

Dan obeys.

MARK Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

DAN

I... I do.

Matthew approaches the stand like a snake-oil salesman.

MATTHEW Mr. Taylor, please state for the court what you do for a living.

DAN I'm a... uh... personal injury attorney.

MATTHEW That sounds fascinating. Please tell us how many cases you have won as a personal injury attorney. DAN

(barely audible)

Seventeen.

MATTHEW Please speak up, Mr. Taylor, so people in the back row can hear.

DAN Seventeen cases.

MATTHEW Seventeen. Well done. And how many cases have you tried?

DAN

Seven... uh... seventeen.

MATTHEW Staggering. You're battin' a thousand. Of those seventeen, how many lives have you destroyed?

DAN (whispers) Objection... (louder) Your Honor, I object.

LUKE

You do what?

DAN

I... object...

LUKE Bailiff, was Defense Team informed of court procedure?

MARK Yes, Your Honor.

### LUKE

Entirely?

MARK I may have left some things out.

Luke shakes his head, can't get good help these days.

LUKE Bailiff, please approach the bench.

MARK Yes, Your Honor.

9.

LUKE

Mr. Taylor, the Court regrets that you were not given proper notification, but objections are not allowed in my courtroom. Not ever. Typically, those who violate this rule pay with the loss of a hand. Since I gather you were not aware of these rules, you will only suffer the loss of a finger.

Mark flicks open a switchblade, and --

Like a lightning bolt, Dan jumps from the stand and makes a beeline for the garage door.

He yanks with all his might and fury, but the door will not budge. The brothers remain idle, merely turn toward a distant Dan with morbid curiosity.

> LUKE Mr. Taylor, I must ask you to return to the stand so we may continue with proceedings...

Dan leans against the metal door, cowering.

DAN

Help! Somebody help!

He POUNDS on the garage door.

DAN

Help! I can't do this. Help! This isn't right! It's not right!

LUKE

Mr. Taylor, for the last time... I ask that you return to the witness stand. If you do not, the bailiff will be forced to leave his post and put an end to you. Might I add that your wife and young daughter will suffer a similar fate.

With tears streaming, and dried blood cracking over his hecticcolored face, Dan approaches the witness stand.

He sits down, broken, peering helplessly at merciless faces.

Mark approaches the stand, knife in hand.

LUKE The ring finger will suffice.

### MARK

## Your hand please, Mr. Taylor.

Dan places his right hand on the stand. Mark moves in.

## LUKE (correcting) Uhhhh -- your *actual* ring finger, Mr. Taylor. More poetic that way.

Dan places his left hand on the stand.

Swift and certain, Mark slices off Dan's ring finger.

His wedding band CLINKS off the wooden stand and onto the floor.

Dan lets out a TORTURED HOWL. Blood sprays from his hand.

He draws his hand in toward his stomach, splashing his starched shirt with blood.

Mark folds the knife and lays it on the bench.

Matthew pops open his briefcase, removes a tourniquet.

He strides nonchalantly over to Dan and applies the tourniquet as Dan FAINTS.

## LUKE Revive the witness, Bailiff.

Mark grabs a bucket of water and unceremoniously dumps it on Dan's head. He awakes spluttering.

Matthew approaches the witness stand.

LUKE Are you prepared to continue with your testimony, Mr. Taylor?

Dan looks up at Luke, sees no chance of reprieve.

DAN

Yes. Your Honor.

### MATTHEW

I'll repeat my earlier question. You've won seventeen cases. How many lives have you ruined to win those cases?

DAN I-- None. I help people.

### MATTHEW

I'm sure you did help the people you represented. But what about the people on the other side of those seventeen cases? What about the people who lost their homes, their businesses...their lives?

DAN

I never thought about that. My job--

MATTHEW You never thought about it. Until now, I bet. (to Luke) Your Honor, I'd like to enter Mr. Hutchings suicide note into evidence.

LUKE Certainly. You may approach the bench.

Matthew hands a plastic-covered note to Luke, who glances at it and places it on the bench.

MATTHEW Your Honor, the prosecution rests.

He sits down, snaps his briefcase shut.

LUKE Well done, Mr. Hutchings. As always.

Dan gapes at Luke, alarmed. He's not the first.

LUKE You may begin your defense, Mr. Taylor.

He stands weakly in front of the bench.

DAN

Your Honor, I became a lawyer because I wanted to help people. I know personal injury attorneys are unpopular, but when people are injured by someone else's negligence, who else can they turn to? Should I have allowed the client whose case I won today, a young lady whose baby was seriously injured by a defective carseat, to suffer without compensation from the company that manufactured that seat, knowing full well that it wasn't safe? (MORE)

### DAN (CONT'D)

I represented her, and I would have received nothing if she lost. All of my expenses would have been out of my own pocket.

## MATTHEW

Tell us, Mr. Taylor. How much money did you receive for winning that case?

DAN (quietly) One third of her winnings.

Matthew looks significantly at Luke.

MATTHEW One third. Does that seem fair to you?

### DAN

Well, yes. She agreed to it, and if I hadn't done a good job for her, I would have been out all of the expenses. Which were...considerable.

MATTHEW

Tell me this... of those other sixteen cases you won, how many of those were victories over large companies?

DAN

Um... I'm not sure.

Luke leans over and peers down at Dan.

LUKE Mr. Taylor, do I need to remind you that you're under oath?

Dan shakes his head.

### DAN

Those other cases were all for people who sued other individuals or small businesses. But I still maintain I helped more people than I hurt!

Matthew shoots him a disgusted look.

MATTHEW Of course you would.

LUKE Let's hear closing statements. Luke SLAMS the gavel down on the bench.

MATTHEW

Your Honor, the defendant, Dan Taylor, has admitted that he has acted, repeatedly, in his clients' best interest, without regard for the livelihoods of the people they sued.

Matthew sneers at Dan and sits down at the prosecution table.

DAN

Your Honor, I am truly sorry for what happened to your brother. Nobody should be made to suffer like that. Being here tonight has made me realize I need to be more responsible about the cases I take. I hope that you will take that into consideration.

Luke narrows his eyes at Dan who sinks into his chair.

LUKE I will now retire to consider my verdict.

Luke sweeps out of the room grandly.

Dan puts his head down. He peers out of the corner of his eye at Mark, who bends to tie his boots.

Dan races over and LEAPS onto Mark's back, gets a strangle hold on him. Mark chokes and drops to his knees as Dan tightens his grip.

Matthew grabs his briefcase, brings it down hard on the back of Dan's head. THUNK! Dan goes down like a house of cards.

MATTHEW Some people never learn.

INT. GARAGE -- LATER

Dan sits, now bound to a chair by duct tape. His mouth is taped, too. Wild-eyed and fearful, he looks around desperately searching for an escape route.

The door opens. Matthew and Mark come into the room.

MARK All rise for His Honor.

Dan doesn't -- can't -- move.

Mark looks dumbly at Dan. Grimaces almost apologetically.

Luke strides into the courtroom. He removes a handkerchief from his pocket and wipes his spectacles. Studies Dan.

LUKE

Would you say, Mr. Taylor, that most individuals in your line of work are... Machiavellian?

DAN

What do you mean?

LUKE

You expect me to believe you don't know who Machiavelli was?

DAN

I don't know.

LUKE You don't know *what*?

DAN I don't know what to say... I'm at a loss...

LUKE Well now... perhaps the winning streak is at an end.

Luke leans forward, eyes unblinking.

LUKE The end justifies the means, does it not, Mr. Taylor? (mocking) As long as our daughter is able to attend the finest university in the nation, to hell with all the other families who might share a similar ambition. Especially those families who've lost their primary wage earner.

His voice rings out.

LUKE

It's safer to be feared than loved. Curious... I wonder if you feel that way today.

Dan swallows.

LUKE I have reached a verdict.

Dan looks up at him, afraid to hope.

LUKE Mr. Taylor, I believe you have acted irresponsibly, recklessly, and with a wavering morality. Regard for human life cannot stop at your client. It must be impartial and allinclusive. Therefore, I find you guilty of all charges.

Dan hyperventilates as Luke's words hit him.

Luke gestures toward Mark, who moves to a crank on the wall and turns it.

LUKE Daniel Taylor, this court hereby sentences you to death.

Before Dan's terrified eyes, a noose lowers from the ceiling.

LUKE Sentence to be carried out at 9:00 A.M. tomorrow, two years to the date after our brother, Mr. John Hutchings, hanged himself. May God have mercy on your soul.

DAN Wait! I can pay, you don't have to kill me. I can help with John's kids' educations, whatever it takes!

The three brothers leave the garage, lock the door.

Dan is alone, only a dim light from up above. His eyes dart around the room.

The NOOSE sways slightly.

He twitches in his chair and hears the rattling of keys in his jacket pocket. He agonizes trying to lower one of his bound hands into it. Struggles mightily, and finally does.

He slowly pulls the keys out of his pocket, careful not to drop them. He nicks away at the duct tape with a key.

Dan blinks sweat out of his eyes as he saws his way through the tape.

He manages to free his hands, tears away the tape from his mouth and ankles.

Dan rises to his feet. He drops his keys back into his pocket, glances bleakly down at the garage door. He notices the gavel on the judges bench. Picks it up, unsure of what to do with it. He slips it into his inside jacket pocket. As he turns away, his eyes catch a metallic gleam underneath Mr. Hutchings suicide note. He lifts it up.

THE SWITCHBLADE.

### DAN

Amateurs.

He pockets it, eyes the noose hanging from the high ceiling. He moves underneath it, sees it is out of reach.

He moves a folding chair just under it, grabs hold of the rope. Winces. Climbs.

Midway up, Dan hears a THUD from outside, freezes. Blood trickles from his injured hand.

He climbs, agonizing, and reaches the ceiling.

Dan grabs the gavel. He looks frantically above him for a weak spot in the wood. The gavel slips from his good hand and RATTLES onto the concrete floor.

DAN

Fuck.

Dan freezes again. Nothing. He spots a patch of wood that termites and the elements have had their way with. He pulls the switchblade from his pocket and flicks it open.

He chips away at the bad wood with the knife. Splinters rain down to the ground.

Moonlight. Hope. Dan gets a burst of energy and carves away at the unresistant wood. With an uppercut, he pops a plank from its moorings. More moonlight. He continues until the hole is big enough for him to squeeze out.

Dan swings on the rope, clasps his hand around a sturdier piece of wood, and pulls his way onto the roof.

EXT. GARAGE -- NIGHT

Dan crawls to the edge of the roof and peers at the driveway, where Mark is lining the trunk of an old Buick with plastic.

A tree limb hangs over the roof. Dan grabs the branch. He eases his way, hand over wounded hand, barely breathing, to the trunk of the tree. Shimmies down to the ground.

He sneaks up behind Mark, knife at the ready. Shakes his head, puts it in his pocket and takes off his tie.

Mark turns too late. Dan wraps the tie tightly around his neck and SQUEEZES.

Mark's face turns purple. He goes LIMP.

Dan shoves him into the Buick, leaving the trunk open.

He creeps toward the driver side door, glancing toward the house for any sign of movement. Peers in the window and sees keys in the ignition.

DAN

Thank Christ.

HOUSE

Matthew appears in the window.

DAN

Shit. Fuck.

Dan quickly gets in, turns the key as he SLAMS the door shut. The engine ROARS, Matthew and Luke are barreling toward him.

Dan GUNS it, narrowly escaping their outstretched hands.

MATTHEW You're dead meat, asshole!

Dan careens through the weeds.

MATTHEW

(to Luke) Come on. You're slower than shit.

They run full-tilt toward the back of the garage.

INT./EXT. BUICK ON ACCESS ROAD -- NIGHT

Dan speeds, swerving all over the road. Glances anxiously behind him. The strobe lights of the ambulance appear.

Hot pursuit. The ambulance gains.

Dan reaches into the back seat. Nothing but beer bottles. He pops open the glove compartment. His eyes light up when he gets his hand around a REVOLVER.

With the ambulance tailing right behind, Dan stretches to roll down the passenger window.

The ambulance THUMPS him. Dan struggles to keep control of the car.

MATTHEW

Stay on him!

LUKE Shut the fuck up!

MATTHEW Tap his bumper, Shit for Brains. On the corner. We gotta spin this fucker around.

INT./EXT. BUICK ON ACCESS ROAD -- NIGHT

The ambulance grazes the corner of Dan's bumper. He swerves, almost spins out of control.

Dan sees headlights in the distance -- an eighteen-wheeler. He skids into the opposite lane and heads right toward it.

The ambulance takes the bait and speeds up beside him. The eighteen-wheeler HONKS. Move now or die.

Just as they pull even, Dan empties the revolver into the driver's side window of the ambulance.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

Luke's head disintegrates into a cloud of red.

Dan swerves the big Buick just in the nick of time off the road to the left and CRASHES into a ditch.

The ambulance, with a limp Luke at the wheel, veers wildly. Matthew reaches for the wheel, but too late...

> MATTHEW Holy Shit, noooooooooo!

KABOOM!!!

Directly into the path of the large truck. The ugly SCREECH of metal on metal and SHATTERING glass. Matthew and Luke are mashed into a bloody mess.

Dan gets shakily out of the Buick, staggers around. He passes the open trunk and sees

MARK

Groggily stirring.

Dan SLAMS the trunk hard.

DAN Case closed. The DRIVER of the eighteen-wheeler climbs down from his rig, surveys the damage. Walks over to Dan.

DRIVER

Hey buddy, you all right? What the hell were you thinkin'? You want me to call you another ambulance?

Dan wipes blood from his mouth.

DAN

I think I'll pass.

DRIVER Would you object to some first aid then? I got a kit in the back.

DAN

Object? (considers it) I see no reason to object.

The two men walk toward the truck.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END