

THE GRINDER

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ACT ONE

OVER BLACK:

TRAILER VOICE (V.O.)
Previously. On "The Grinder."

WE SEE CLIPS from Fox's hit drama (accompanied by amazing theme MUSIC): A HANDSOME DEFENSE ATTORNEY (*aka Mitch Grinder*) pulls up to a courthouse in a flashy muscle car. Grinder gets into a romantic banter with a CUTE COLLEAGUE. Grinder gets in the face of an opposing lawyer:

GRINDER
Then we... will see you in court.

Grinder has a witness on the stand:

GRINDER (CONT'D)
(overly presentational)
Why don't you say that again. So everyone can hear you.

WITNESS
I wasn't in the car.

GRINDER
She wasn't. In. The car.

MURMURS from the court, the JUDGE bangs her gavel.

CUTS of The Grinder in the office: he pours himself a mid-day drink, leads a client meeting, throws files at the feet of an intern, has an important walk-and-talk with the Cute Colleague. Finally, he lays in bed in with her, post-coital:

GRINDER (CONT'D)
What if this is the one? The one I can't win.

COLLEAGUE
What if it's the one you *have* to.

He turns, catches her gaze. They kiss. WE FADE TO BLACK.

TRAILER VOICE (V.O.)
And now. The series finale.

Grinder in a GRAND TV COURTROOM. He's at it again, giving a powerful closing argument. Everyone watches his every move.

GRINDER
I'm gonna ask everyone in the courtroom to close their eyes.
(everyone does)
Do you feel that blackness? That isolation? That's what my client felt every day of his marriage. And how did he handle that?

(MORE)

GRINDER (CONT'D)
 He acted out. Had several affairs.
 Is he a good guy? I don't think
 so. Was he a decent husband? By
 no accounts.

Grinder leans forward, face to face with a JUROR.

GRINDER (CONT'D)
 But that. Doesn't make. Him a killer.

It's a powerful moment. MUSIC SWELLS as the place goes nuts.

GRINDER (CONT'D)
 Grinder rests.

And as he walks toward the exit, he looks around -- *he's gonna miss this place.* Finally, WE FADE TO BLACK.

INT. STEWART'S CAR - NIGHT

STEWART SANDERSON (30's) drives with the family -- his wife DEBBIE, daughter REBECCA (15, chubby, slutty), son ETHAN (13, dorky). Rebecca is texting furiously. Finally:

STEWART
 Bec? The key clicks? Have to be on?

REBECCA
 Dad, I'm almost done! Shhhhh.

Stewart turns on AM RADIO to one-up her, smiles to Debbie.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
 Mom!

Debbie leans forward, turns it up more. They laugh at their kid's expense.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
 You guys suck.

Ethan gets a TEXT. Then another. Then another.

ETHAN
 Whoa, I'm blowin' up back here.

STEWART
 Really? Who we got?

DEBBIE
 Is it a girl?

ETHAN
 Better. It's a group text. Joel Zadak and a few guys from the football team. They wanna hang.

STEWART

Huh. Aren't those the kids who beat you up all the time?

ETHAN

Yeah, but they're not going to anymore. They say they turned over a new leaf.

Rebecca laughs. We get the sense she had something to do with this.

STEWART

I don't know. You sure they're not using you for something?

DEBBIE

Stewart...

ETHAN

He wants to be my friend, Dad. Why is that so hard to believe?

DEBBIE

It's not, honey. I'm sure they just finally realized how special you are.

REBECCA

That's definitely what it is.

ETHAN

Yeah. I mean, I have been coming into my own lately, I've been feeling that? But I certainly didn't expect all this.

STEWART

(beat)

Well, congrats, bud. You deserve it.

Ethan smiles, feeling good about himself. Stewart pulls into a driveway, but it's blocked -- in the middle of it is a brand new, pimped-out, matte black MERCEDES G-WAGON. Stewart rolls his eyes.

DEBBIE

Calm down. It's a parking spot.

STEWART

He doesn't think anyone else needs some driveway space?

DEBBIE

Alright, guys, go help Grandpa.

The kids get out. Debbie tries to be as soothing as possible:

DEBBIE (CONT'D)

It's not a big --

Stewart roughly puts the car in REVERSE, throwing Debbie back in her seat.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)

Oh-kay.

He JERKS the car out of frame.

INT. DEAN SR'S HOUSE - CRAMPED LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON A TV: It's the end of The Grinder finale.

GRINDER

Grinder rests.

CREDITS start to roll. WE PULL BACK -- the Sandersons are watching with the show's star, and Stewart's brother, DEAN SANDERSON. Their father, DEAN SR (75, sweet, old fashioned) is also here. Everyone is blown away by Dean, except for Stewart, obviously not a big fan.

DEAN SR

Wow. Powerful stuff, son.

DEAN

Yeah. Not a bad finale.

REBECCA

Uncle Dean? It's so cool watching you, like, watch the show. That must be like so weird for you.

DEAN

It's strange, Bec. It is. But every once in a while I can kinda separate from it? And watch it like a normal person... watching a show they're not starring in? Does that make sense?

STEWART

I mean...

Totally.

ALL

DEBBIE

You were amazing, Dean. Wasn't he honey?

She nudges him.

STEWART

Honestly amazing, yes.

DEAN

Aw, thanks, Blubber.

The kids laugh, Stewart winces at Dean's nickname for him.

ETHAN

What's Blubber, Uncle Dean?

STEWART

It's nothing.

DEAN SR

When the boys were little, Dean couldn't pronounce *brother*. So he'd call Stewart...

ETHAN/REBECCA

Blubber. / That's super funny.

STEWART

Super funny. Never loses its charm. No matter how many years we do it.

ETHAN

So what are you gonna do now?

The room quiets. Dean milks it. Stewart loudly SLAMS down the handle of the coffee machine. Dean, about to answer, stops, everyone looks over -- *rude*.

DEAN SR

Sorry about that, Dino. Please. Continue.

DEAN

I wish I knew, guys. I don't have the silver bullet on this one. Right now... I'm just drivin'. On the highway of "what the F is my life." There are no exits. No toll booths. And all the other cars are just zoomin' by. Zoom.
(whispers)
Zoom.

Stewart grabs the milk out of the fridge, SLAMS it shut. Again, everyone looks over.

DEAN (CONT'D)

I guess I'm just lookin' for...

DEAN (CONT'D)

...an offramp.

DEBBIE

An offramp?

DEAN

(laughs, re: Debbie)
Still in spiritual sync, all these years later.

Stewart reacts.

DEAN (CONT'D)

An offramp. Yeah. So I can stop the car for a bit... see what's out there.

ALL
 So true. / You gotta stop the car.
 / I love that, I'm gonna use that.

ETHAN
 Maybe here is an offramp?

Dean takes this in, he hadn't thought of it that way.

STEWART
 (laughing at him)
 Bud, I don't think this is what he
 meant by an offramp.

ETHAN
 Why?

STEWART
 Why?! He's been here! He grew up
 here! He's searching for something
 new, haven't you been listening to
 anything he's said??

Silence. Everyone turns. Whoa.

STEWART (CONT'D)
 What?

INT. STEWART AND DEBBIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stewart and Debbie are in bed.

DEBBIE
 You done flipping out?

STEWART
 I think so. I hate that he brings
 this out in me. Turns me into
 "that guy." I'm not that guy.

DEBBIE
 You're not.

STEWART
 Right? But when he's here, and
 everyone's all up his ass. Like his
 show ending is some big dilemma?

DEBBIE
 I know, it's crazy. What's the big
 deal, he was on a TV show, people.

STEWART
 We get it, you're famous...

They laugh. Then:

STEWART (CONT'D)

It just hit me. *That's* why those kids want to hang with Ethan. Because Dean's here. Of course.

DEBBIE

Ohhhh. Right. But we can't tell him that. It'll crush him. They're sleeping over tomorrow night, he's so excited. What do we do?

STEWART

Ahhh, he'll be fine. You get used to it. They use you to get to him. He'll be stronger for it.

DEBBIE

Like you are?

STEWART

Exactly.

DEBBIE

We're terrible parents.

Beat. Stewart can't help himself.

STEWART

You know... for a second there it felt like you were back riding the Dean Train.

DEBBIE

(playful)
Are you serious.

STEWART

(sarcastic)
No, it's perfectly understandable. You guys dated, jinxed on the offramp stuff, spiritually in sync...

DEBBIE

Oh, wow, we're bringing that up? We are spiraling, folks.

STEWART

Oh, yeah. Easily mid-spiral.
(then)
It's just when he's here... he's the star. And I'm a side character at best. It's silly, I know.

DEBBIE

(soft)
Honey... sometimes the side characters are more important than the leads. Not everyone's Tom Cruise. But you can be Hank Azaria. Right? Or like a David Hyde Pierce?

He looks at her, coming around.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)
Sure, you're not Dean. Not a lot
of people are. But he's not you
either.

He smiles, they kiss.

INT. KITCHEN - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Dan enters, goes to the fridge. The light reveals Dean,
sitting by the window with a beer.

DEAN
Couldn't sleep.

STEWART
Yeah. Me neither.

Stewart walks over, sits down next to Dean. They both sip
their beers for a long beat, finally:

DEAN
I like what you got here, man.

STEWART
Oh, thanks. Yeah.

DEAN
The kids... they're growing up real
nice. And Debbie, man. Wow. I
forgot how rad she is. I blew that.

STEWART
Well... thank you for blowing it, I
guess.

DEAN
We were young. And when a
relationship is built solely on sex...

STEWART
(weirded out)
Sure...

DEAN
Ahhh, but you guys have so much
more than that. It's great to see.

STEWART
Aw, thanks, yeah. We're pretty
happy.

Dean chugs the rest of his beer. Then:

DEAN
I got none of it.

STEWART

Well, that's a little dramatic.
You have a lot.

DEAN

Like what? Money? Big deal.
Fame? Wouldn't wish it on anyone.

STEWART

Really? Cause both sound pretty
good to me.

DEAN

You know what sounds pretty good to
me? A couple of kids arguing with
me about texting at the dinner
table. A naggy wife telling me
she's too tired to have sex.
That's the stuff, Stew.

STEWART

It's not really the stuff, actually.
There's so much better stuff.

DEAN

You don't see it anymore. You're
too close to it. But you did it,
man. You made the right choices
that lead you to a meaningful life.

Stewart takes this in.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Congrats on that. I want it too.
And you make me think I can have it.

STEWART

I make you think that?

DEAN

Maybe I'm here for a reason. Maybe
this is where I find what I'm
looking for.

Stewart is trying to contain himself.

DEAN (CONT'D)

(puts his hand on Stewart's)
I need a change. I need to find my
purpose. And I think you're the one
who's supposed to show me the way.

Dean stands, hugs his brother hard.

DEAN (CONT'D)

I love you, Blubber. I love you so
damn much.

ON STEWART, conflicted.

STEWART
Love you too.

EXT. SANDERSON LAW FIRM - A LITTLE LATER

Stewart pulls up, parks. Dean hops out the passenger side. He is immediately recognized by a MAN across the street.

MAN
Grinder!

DEAN
Thanks for watching, bud!

STEWART
I'm not sure this is necessary.
You coming to work with me.

Another FAN asks Dean for an autograph, he signs nonchalantly while he talks.

DEAN
Blubbs, your career is a big part
of what makes you the man you are.
I need to understand that. And
study it.

STEWART
It's boring though. Super boring.
I'm just telling you that upfront.

INT. SANDERSON LAW FIRM - MOMENTS LATER

The elevator doors open to REVEAL the entire office, cheering The Grinder's entrance. Stewart, thrown, slowly makes his way in, followed eagerly by Dean. The dozen or so EMPLOYEES whisper to each other, star struck. Dean makes his way through, shaking hands, taking photos, etc. Dean Sr approaches, excited.

DEAN SR
I never thought I'd live to see this
day. Three lawyers in the family!

STEWART
Well --

He grabs them both in a big hug.

MOMENTS LATER. Just outside Stewart's office, Stewart and Dean pass the desk of CLAIRE, 27, a cute paralegal. She stands -- Dean assumes she wants a photo.

DEAN
(flirtatious)
Oh, absolutely. Where you want me?

CLAIRE
Actually, I need to talk to Stewart.

STEWART
This is Claire, she works for me.
Claire, my brother, Dean.

DEAN
(smiles)
Hi. Dean Sanderson.

CLAIRE
(doesn't care)
Hi.
(to Stewart)
I need to go over the Kopelson brief
with you when you get a chance.

STEWART
I'm done with the Kopelson brief.

Dean takes out a pen and paper.

DEAN
What's the Kopelson brief?

STEWART
Okay, I'm shutting this down right
now. You can't ask a question
every time something happens.

DEAN
But I need to --

STEWART
Silent observation.

Dean puts his hands up -- *you got it*. Stewart goes into his
office, Dean turns back to Claire.

DEAN
Wait, so you were asking me something
about my TV show? Is that...?

CLAIRE
I was not. And I wouldn't have
since I've never seen it.

DEAN
(playful disbelief)
Come on. You've never seen *The
Grinder*. You've never seen me
grind?

CLAIRE
(turned off)
Ew. No. But thanks.

She walks off. Leaving Dean, even more intrigued.

INT. STEWART'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

MUSIC as Stewart stands in front of a mirror, prepping for a case. He's mouthing to himself, reading off NOTECARDS. Dean stands behind him, rubbing his shoulders like a coach.

DEAN
Mmm, you are tight. You nervous?

STEWART
I always get a little...

DEAN
I know you do. Can I pitch something out real quick?

Dean takes the notecards and TOSSES them -- they go all over the room.

STEWART
Uh... why would you do that. I need those.

DEAN
It used to help me on the show. You read the pages, you memorize 'em... then you toss 'em.
(then)
You only *think* you need them. But really you got it all up here.

Dean points to his head, then grabs a random card.

DEAN (CONT'D)
What's the precedent?

STEWART
(right away)
Kemper vs. Manheim, 1997, involved termination of a rental agreement.

DEAN
You don't need the cards, You're an encyclopedia for this stuff! Try it.

STEWART
Now? I have court and the cards are on the floor.

DEAN
Court can wait. Releasing these toxins of yours? Can't.

Stewart pauses, then begrudgingly gathers the cards. Once he's got them, Dean gestures for him to toss them again. Stewart gives him a look -- *really?* Dean nods emphatically. Finally, Stewart CHUCKS the cards across the room.

DEAN (CONT'D)
See? Liberating right?

STEWART
 (not at all)
 Totally.

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

CLOSE ON Stewart's nervous hands clutching his notecards.
 WIDEN TO REVEAL the bland, empty courtroom -- the complete
 opposite from what we saw in "The Grinder" finale.

Our main team is here -- Stewart, Dean Sr, Claire and TODD,
 another lawyer. Along with their clients, the RAMIREZ
 FAMILY. Dean sits in the back, observing. The homely JUDGE
 STEPHANIE ROSSMYRE flatly reads the charges.

JUDGE ROSSMYRE
 Prelim hearing, Krantz versus
 Ramirez. Counsel?

STEWART
 (speeds through)
 Your Honor my client Victor Ramirez
 has resided at 887 Oak for nine years
 at a monthly rental of \$850, on June
 5th plaintiff Albert T. Krantz,
 landlord of aforementioned property,
 attempted to raise monthly rent to
 \$1100 violating section 2-9A...

Dean eyes the plaintiff, ALBERT KRANTZ -- an odd looking man
 in his 50's. Dean squints, studying him.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - LATER

Stewart leads the team in discussing the case with Victor and
 Carmen Ramirez. Dean smokes an E-CIG nearby, listening.
 (The Ramirez family all speak with a thick accent.)

STEWART
 They're not budging. They claim
 that by missing March's payment you
 violated the terms of the lease,
 giving them cause to terminate and
 issue you a new lease at, in
 theory, any rate they want.

VICTOR
 But we didn't miss payment! He
 just never cash it!

CARMEN
 Because he want us out! So he
 could raise rent.

TODD

We hear what you're saying, Mr. and Mrs. Ramirez, we're upset by it, we empathize with it. But this missing check? Frankly, it's crushing us.

CARMEN

It's his word against ours! This our home, Mr. Sanderson.

VICTOR

You suggesting we move?

STEWART

He's offering you a thousand dollars to cover your costs. We recommend you take it and settle.

DEAN (O.S.)

Counsel? May I counter?

Everyone turns to Dean.

DEAN (CONT'D)

We don't move. And we don't pay a cent more in rent.

STEWART

Dean --

VICTOR

I like that plan.

CARMEN

Are you Grinder?

DEAN

I was. Once upon a time.

VICTOR

(to Stewart)

Is he helping with the case?

STEWART

No, he is not --

DEAN SR

Well, no harm in hearing him out.

TODD

Yeah, Stew, you always say a good idea can come from anywhere.

STEWART

Yeah, any lawyer.

VICTOR

He's a lawyer!

STEWART
No, he isn't!

DEAN SR
Well, son, he's no stranger to the courtroom.

STEWART
He's no stranger to a TV courtroom!

Dean starts pacing dramatically.

DEAN
Currently this case is all about rent. And apartments. But what it should be about. Is character.
(then)
We turn this thing on it's head. Put Krantz on the defensive.

CARMEN
That sound smart to me.

DEAN SR
Me too. Stew?

STEWART
Not at all. This is a bad idea.

TODD
I feel like I'm in a Grinder episode right now. So cool.

DEAN
Season four, episode nine. "Settle To the Metal."
(aside to the Ramirez's)
I don't know if you folks got the show down in...

VICTOR
Here? This city?

DEAN
(genuine)
Oh great.
(then)
So, I wanted to find a unique in to the story, the writers were kinda spinning their wheels. And what we came to was -- "This guy doesn't settle. It's not in his nature." So I'm asking everyone here. Is it in our nature? To settle?

Everyone shakes their head, Stewart hangs his.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Carmen? Girls?

All no's. He gets real close to Claire, flirty.

DEAN (CONT'D)
How about you, lady?

CLAIRE
They should settle. Hands down.

DEAN
Ooh, she's tough too.
(then)
Todd? Pops?

DEAN SR
I'm tired of settling. I feel like
all we do around here is settle.

STEWART
What?!

Dean moves on to Victor.

DEAN
Victor, what do you think? You
wanna pack your bags?
(then)
Or do you wanna roll the dice.

STEWART
Okay, we appreciate what you're
saying, it's very noble, we get it.
But sometimes in a real court of
law, avoiding trial is most
beneficial to the client.

DEAN SR
But maybe this is bigger than the
client, right, Dino?

DEAN
That's what I was thinking, Dad.

STEWART
This isn't happening.

DEAN
Vic... it's your call. Why don't
you tell your attorney how you'd
like to proceed.

ON VICTOR, he looks to his family for support -- he's got it.

VICTOR
Mr. Stewart? We want to roll dice.

CARMEN
Go to trial. Like The Grinder say.

The Ramirez's celebrate, Stewart does not.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. LAKE - LATER

The Sanderson men, fishing. Stewart stares at the water, speechless. Dean is on a high, casts as far as he can.

DEAN

It just felt so good! There is just nothing more powerful than connecting with your client.

STEWART

Your client.

DEAN

It's so clear to me now. Dad was a great lawyer. You're a great lawyer, I became a character that was a great lawyer. I need to do this for real.

STEWART

So... you're gonna go to law school?

DEAN

I honestly don't think I'll need it with the show and all.

STEWART

(astounded)

You think acting in a show is the equivalent of --

DEAN SR

Calm down, buddy. It's not a pissing contest.

DEAN

Stew, I did seven seasons of a prime time legal drama. And we went to trial every episode. You pick stuff up, Blubber!

STEWART

I don't want to be called that anymore!

DEAN

Let's say you're in a restaurant... you go into cardiac arrest... Noah Wyle is two tables down. You don't think he could step in and help?

DEAN SR

I like this analogy.

STEWART

No! Because he's not a doctor!
He's an actor!

DEAN

So you'd rather go into cardiac
arrest next to someone who didn't
play a doctor on a TV show... than
Noah Wyle who did and probably
picked stuff up along the way?

DEAN SR

Not me.

STEWART

Okay... no... I guess I'd choose
Wyle but --

DEAN

So you admit he has some skill and is
closer to being a doctor than, say,
the average person?

STEWART

I mean... sure... closer than the
average --

DEAN

Person, exactly, so then you do
acknowledge that the show educated
him to some degree?

DEAN SR

(loving this)
Uh oh.

STEWART

Yeah, but --

DEAN

Like a med school?

STEWART

The worst med school on the planet.

DEAN

But a med school. And by that,
you'd have to agree that "The
Grinder," for me, was like...?

Long beat. Dean and Dean Sr wait for Stewart's answer.

DEAN SR

Nice, Dino. Got him.

STEWART

(finally, defeated)
A law school.

DEAN
 (sips his beer)
 Grinder rests.

Dean noogies his big brother, high-five's his dad.

DEAN SR
 Pretty strong cross wouldn't you
 say, Stew?

STEWART
 (from a headlock)
 Flawless.

INT. STEWART AND DEBBIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stewart and Debbie get ready for bed.

STEWART
 And he makes some dramatic speech
 that sounded like it was lifted
 straight from his show... and
 everyone just ate it up.

DEBBIE
 Of course.

STEWART
 And now we're going to trial, Deb.
 On an eviction case for an \$850 a
 month apartment.

DEBBIE
 Well, what do the clients want?

STEWART
 What do they want?? They want what
 The Grinder wants! They want him
 on the defense team!

Debbie can't help but laugh.

STEWART (CONT'D)
 It's not funny.

DEBBIE
 It's kind of funny.

Just then, Dean knocks, pops his head in:

DEAN
 Hey, Blubbs -- is an Adversary
 Proceeding basically just a trial
 that takes place within the context
 of a bankruptcy case?

STEWART
 (why am I answering this?)
 Pretty much, but...

DEAN
 Yeah, had my assistant hook up the
 BAR for later in the month.

DEBBIE
 Wow, Dean. I'm impressed. You're
 taking this seriously. You have a
 whole new energy about you.

DEAN
 Thanks, Deb. I'm feeling great.

DEBBIE
 You look great. Like younger or
 something.

Stewart turns, can't believe what is coming out of her mouth.

DEAN
 Alright, you two. Be good now.

He goes. After a beat:

STEWART
 Huh. So now he looks great. Has a
 great energy.

DEBBIE
 Oh, please. I was being nice.

STEWART
 (playful but real)
 It's just funny how you say one
 thing behind closed doors, but then
 when he's here it's like Ariana
 Grande is in the room.

DEBBIE
 Is this another spiral?

STEWART
 It is another spiral. Yes, honey.
 Thank you for pointing it out.
 It's just... I worked fifteen years
 to be in this position. Where Dad
 is finally ready to hand over the
 keys. This guy thinks he's The
 Grinder?! He knows nothing about
 the grind! I'M THE GRINDER!

DEBBIE
 I'm going to sleep.

STEWART

Been grinding my ass to the bone!
I am notecarding this, and I am
addressing this... first thing
tomorrow!

Debbie turns her light off. Stewart simmers in the dark.

STEWART (CONT'D)

Hon? You have half a Zanny or
something? Might need to bring
this down.

INT. ETHAN'S BEDROOM - A LITTLE LATER

Ethan sits alone on his bed, obviously upset. Dean walks by,
stops, notices. From the doorway:

DEAN

Hey. You okay? Where are your pals?
Thought they were sleeping over.

ETHAN

They are. They're just... in the
bathroom.

DEAN

Uh huh. Well, I'll keep you
company until they come back.

He walks in, sits next to Ethan. Silence. Ethan looks away,
uncomfortable.

DEAN (CONT'D)

They're not coming back are they.

ETHAN

No. They're with Rebecca. I think
they're taking turns making out
with her.

DEAN

Ah, damn. That's a rough one.

ETHAN

Don't say anything to my Dad.
Everyone at school knows they're
here, I'll get mileage out of that.
It's a good thing big picture.

DEAN

(beat, thinking)
Yeah. But maybe we can get more
out of them.

They share a look.

INT. STEWART'S HOME OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Stewart notecards what he wants to say to his brother.

STEWART (V.O.)

Dean... since you are not
technically an attorney, it makes
me feel like you persuading our
clients into unnecessary trials is
not only inappropriate, but also
somewhat insulting.

(starting to get heated)

It makes me feel like having gone
to law school and slaving away in
libraries and courtrooms all those
years was a giant waste of time.

(can't help it)

WHY ARE YOU EVEN HERE? YOU'RE A
DUMB ACTOR ON A DUMB SHOW AND
EVERYTHING COMES SO EASY FOR YOU!
GO BACK TO LA WHERE YOU BELONG!!!!!!

He stops, tries to calm himself down. Finally, he puts the notecards in his jacket pocket on the chair behind him.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Dean sits surrounded by Ethan, Rebecca, JOEL ZADAK, the coolest guy in school, and his cronies.

DEAN

Let's get all the cards on the
table. Guys -- we know what you're
doing. You say you're sleeping
over to be with my man here, but
really you're here for Rebecca.

JOEL

I don't know what you're talking
about. We're here for E, bro.

DEAN

Ah ah ah, it's fine. We're okay
with it. Right, Ethan?

(off his nod)

We just want to make sure all sides
are taken care of. E needs to get
something out of it.

Beat. It's a showdown. Zadak thinks for a long beat.

ZADAK

Fine. Tomorrow at school, I'll tell
everybody how much fun we had with
him. And he's a solid hang.

ETHAN

That sounds pretty fair.

DEAN

It's not enough.

CRONIE #1

Dude, come on, that's a lot. He can run with that.

REBECCA

What do you want?

ZADAK

Shhh!

(beat, then defeated)

Fine. One tweet.

DEAN

We want a photo. Posted to all your social media accounts. Of you giving Ethan a piggy-back ride, hashtag -- *bestfriends*.

All the guys react in horror.

ZADAK

Are you kidding me, dude?! I'm not doing that! Ethan! Come on, dog!

Ethan shrugs -- *sorry bro*. Dean leans in, extends his hand. Zadak pauses, looks to Rebecca. Finally, he shakes on it. Ethan smiles huge.

INT. STEWART'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - LATER THAT NIGHT

Stewart walks by Rebecca's room, the door is ajar. He can see her laying inside, obviously upset.

STEWART

Hey. You okay?

REBECCA

Yeah. I just feel a little dirty. Making out with six guys all night takes its toll.

STEWART

You were...?

(realizing)

Ohhhh, they were coming for you.

REBECCA

Dad?

STEWART

Sorry.

(this is hard for him)

Bec, we've talked about this... you're too young to be making out with boys.

REBECCA

Dad, I'm sixteen! That's not the problem.

STEWART

Well, what is the problem? Explain it to me.

REBECCA

You don't get it.

STEWART

(puts his arm around her)

Well, I'm trying. Just know -- you can talk to us. We're here for you.

REBECCA

Okay. Thanks, Dad.

He kisses her.

EXT. SANDERSON LAW FIRM - NEXT DAY

Stewart goes to park -- but Dean's brand new G-WAGON is in his spot. Stewart shakes his head, backs up out of frame.

INT. DEAN SR'S OFFICE - DAY

Dean is here in one of Stewart's suits, feet up, chatting casually with Dean Sr. Stewart enters.

STEWART

Uh, Dean, can I... is that my suit?

DEAN

Yep. Wardrobe tells you a lot about someone. Part of my process.

DEAN SR

I love watching the transformation.

STEWART

Yeah, it's fascinating. Can I have a moment alone?

DEAN

Bro, we don't have time for moments alone. We gotta get ready for the case. We need to get the word out around town, let 'em know how unsavory this Krantz character is. Then, we pack that courtroom. Make this thing an event.

STEWART

You're not serious.

DEAN SR

Oh, this is good.

DEAN

I need to question witnesses, I think Vic should set a meet and greet with Krantz and wear a wire. If we play this thing right... that Latino family has Christmas at home this year.

DEAN SR

Stew, isn't it nice to see him excited about something again?

DEAN

And it's because of you, Blubb. You've inspired me. I can see the ocean again, man.

(then)

Did you need to talk to me about something?

Stewart just looks at him -- he can't bring himself to do it.

STEWART

Ah, I don't remember.

Claire pops her head in.

CLAIRE

Stewart, they need you in the conference room.

Stewart exits. Claire turns on some fake charm for Dean.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Ooh, you're here. I was looking for you.

DEAN

Well, you found me.

CLAIRE

Hahaha you're SO funny. So I understand you're looking to learn a few things?

DEAN

I'm a sponge, honey. I want to soak it allllllll in.

CLAIRE

Right... could you do me a favor and file these?

She puts down STACKS of legal briefs in front of Dean.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

(kisses him on the cheek)
Thanks, Grinder.

She goes. Beat, then:

DEAN
Local love interest? Check.

CLOSE ON A TV

The local news.

REPORTER
Well, it looks like Swissvale is getting a little taste of Hollywood this season. Home-grown celeb, and star of the hit series, "The Grinder," Dean Sanderson has been spotted all over town.

SHOTS of Dean around town: getting a cup of coffee, pumping gas in his G-Wagon, shopping, signing autographs, etc.

REPORTER (CONT'D)
What's he doing back home? We caught up with the busy actor to get some answers.

CUT TO an INTERVIEW with Dean:

DEAN
I'm actually here on a case. A real life case. One that's very personal to me.

ON DEAN SR, TODD, AND CLAIRE, watching the broadcast.

DEAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You know, I grew up here, Emily. This is my home. And I know this place to be full of good, decent people. But right now... it's under siege.

ON DEBBIE AND THE KIDS, watching. ON TOWNSPEOPLE, watching at a local bar. ON OTHER FAMILIES, watching from their homes.

DEAN (V.O.)
(dramatic)
There's a snake in the village, people. A viper. Whose poison threatens our very way of life.

ON STEWART as he drives, listening to it on the radio:

DEAN (V.O.)
Albert Krantz... I'm calling you out, sir. This town is pushing back. And we, the people... will see you in court.

Stewart can't believe this is actually happening. He pulls up to the house -- the driveway is lined with paparazzi, news vans, fans, etc.

PAPARAZZO
 (to the others, disappointed)
 It's just the brother.

They all stand down.

INT. STEWART'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Stewart enters the dark house. After a beat, a DIM LAMP turns on revealing Dean, sitting alone. Startled, Stewart turns:

STEWART
 Whoa. You scared me.

Beat. Dean just stares.

STEWART (CONT'D)
 How was your... day of press?

DEAN
 It was hectic. But I think a lot of people heard us.

STEWART
 Great. Thanks... for doing that.

DEAN
 You know... I was giving a lecture earlier today over at the law school...

STEWART
 Of course...

DEAN
 And a student approached me afterwards. It was the usual "love the show, can I get a pic, you inspire me" stuff, but then she mentioned she was a single mom... she's a got a little girl battling for her life. Cutaneous B-Cell Lymphoma. Stage four.

STEWART
 That's... awful.

DEAN
 Yeah, it is. So she asks me if I would sign her daughter's hospital bracelet, says it would mean the world to her. Of course I say yes, so I reach into my jacket pocket for a pen... but there is no pen.
 (beat)
 Just these.

Dean holds up Stewart's notecards, the harsh ones he never read.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Needless to say, that little girl
never got her autograph.

STEWART
Dean, I'm sorry, I didn't --

DEAN
Is this how you really feel?

Stewart is silent.

DEAN (CONT'D)
'Course it is. Because I'm familiar
with your notecard process. You
don't write down what you don't feel.

Dean is crushed, Stewart feels terrible.

DEAN (CONT'D)
So just say it. Tell me you don't
want me here.

Silence. Dean finally stands.

DEAN (CONT'D)
You know what your problem is? You
don't push back. Ever. Krantz
says move out? You say, "Okay
sure." You know what I do? I.
Push. Back.

(then)
Joel Zadak and the guys think they
can use Ethan to get with Rebecca
and he's just supposed to sit there
and take it? Think again, guys.
We're pushin' back.

STEWART
Wait, what? What do you mean get
with Rebecca?

DEAN
Yeah. They were using the kid as a
cover. You didn't know 'cause you
were too busy "writin' notecards."
But it's okay, I got your son a
great deal. Zadak's gonna spread
the word, tell everyone how awesome
Ethan is. Everybody wins.

Stewart hears this, begins to simmer with rage.

STEWART
So... Ethan's friends were using
him to "get with" my daughter...
and your solution was to leverage
her body for his junior high school
popularity?

Beat.

DEAN

The way you're saying it makes it sound worse than it was.

Stewart pauses, then:

STEWART

You're right, Dean. I don't express my feelings well. That's why I've relied on the notecard process. And, yeah, it's become a crutch. So you know what? Here's me pushing back. Off the cards.

Stewart grabs the cards and tosses them all over the room. Then, he walks up real close to Dean.

STEWART (CONT'D)

I want you out. And I don't want you wearing my suits, I don't want you talking to my clients, and I certainly don't want you meddling with my kids!

This hits Dean hard. He takes his time with this.

DEAN

(ironic smile)

Wow. Didn't need the cards after all, did you? You were able to hurt me right to my face.

Stewart feels guilty. Dean starts to walk out, stops in the doorway.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Congratulations, Counsel. You win. I accept your deal. I'll leave first thing in the morning... Brother.

That stung. Hearing "brother" instead of "blubber" for the first time in a long time.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Pandemonium. News vans, reporters, fans, extra security, etc.

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

Trial. It's a town event -- fans are lined up, there's press in the courtroom, the plain Judge Rossmyre is now done up with hair and makeup.

Rebecca sits alone, Zadak and the boys have moved on. PAN OVER to Ethan sitting with a different group of cool kids. PAN OVER to Victor Ramirez and his family:

VICTOR
Where is Grinder? I don't see
Grinder.

PAN OVER to Stewart and his team:

TODD
He probably wants to make an
entrance, huh? Like on the show?

STEWART
I don't think so, Todd. Not today.

Stewart turns to Debbie sitting behind him, she leans forward:

DEBBIE
You got this.

The Judge bangs her gavel, quiets the room. She notices an empty chair at the defense table.

JUDGE ROSSMYRE
Where's our guy?

It's the question on everyone's mind. Dean Sr throws Stewart a look -- *it's your fault, you explain*. Stewart reluctantly stands, addresses the court:

STEWART
He's... uh... not coming.

Gasps. Murmurs. Disappointment all around. Many people get up and leave. The Judge again quiets the room.

JUDGE ROSSMYRE
What happened?

STEWART
(embarrassed, childish)
We... got into a fight.

Beat. The Judge shakes her head with disapproval.

JUDGE ROSSMYRE

Well, sadly for the rest of us, we still need to continue... even without The Grinder. Opening arguments.

INT. SHITTY TOWN BAR - SAME

Dean sits at the bar, his duffel bag on the seat next to him -- the brooding hero on his way out of town. He drinks.

ON THE TV behind the bar: NEWS coverage of the trial. Dean watches. WE HEAR things like --

REPORTERS

Dean Sanderson, a no show. / Where has The Grinder gone? / Word has it the prosecution will be winning this case by the end of day today.

Dean looks up at the TV, sees an image of Krantz on the witness stand. Dean squints, sips his drink.

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

Closing arguments. The Prosecutor finishes his statement.

PROSECUTOR

Is it sad the Ramirez family has to move? Of course it is. It's devastating. But unfortunately this isn't a court of feelings... it's a court of law. And that law states -- if a tenant fails to pay rent, that tenant has broken a contract. And when a contract is broken... the law is broken. It's that simple. Counsel?

The jury seems convinced as the Prosecutor goes back to his table. ON STEWART, defeated, unsure of how he can win this. He slowly stands, looks to Debbie, gets a nod of encouragement. He gets his notecards, again begins to read them fast and monotonous:

STEWART

Uh, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury my clients Victor and Carmen Ramirez are upstanding citizens who never once failed to pay their rent, all the prosecution has proven...

Stewart looks up from his cards, everyone is staring at him.

STEWART (CONT'D)

Uh... all they've proven is that the Plaintiff didn't deposit a rent check for March of last year...

(stammering)

...because my clients sent the check February 18th, ten days before it was due...

He looks up again. He's completely lost his footing. He flips through his cards, trying to find something worthy to say -- he's got nothing.

STEWART (CONT'D)

(defeated)

But there's no way to prove that.

VOICE (O.S.)

Or is there?

Stewart, along with everyone in the court, turns to see Dean standing in the back of the room. Murmurs, photos, etc.

JUDGE ROSSMYRE

(breathy)

Finally.

She bangs her gavel as Stewart and Dean share a knowing look. Then, Dean gestures and mouths to Stewart: *Toss the cards.* Stewart mouths back: *I can't.* Dean mouths: *Yes, you can.* Finally, Stewart builds up the courage and aggressively throws the cards into the air. Everyone watches as they FLY all over the room. Then, Stewart mouths to Dean: *Now what?*

JUDGE ROSSMYRE (CONT'D)

Mr. Sanderson...

(to Dean, with a smile)

Mr. Sanderson...

(then)

Would you care to explain to the court what's going on here?

DEAN

I wish I could, Your Honor. But this kind of cruel injustice -- it's tough to get your head around.

PROSECUTOR

Objection, Your Honor. Dean Sanderson is not an actual lawyer.

JUDGE ROSSMYRE

Oh, please, counsel, this is what we're all here for, come on.

PROSECUTOR

Your Honor!

JUDGE ROSSMYRE

Overruled. I'll allow it. Just this once.

Everyone watches as Dean makes his way to the front of the court. He paces dramatically. Finally:

DEAN

You're right, Counsel, I am not a lawyer. I haven't passed the BAR, I don't have any degrees. You're probably asking yourselves, "What's The Grinder doing here? Are they filming an episode?"

A YELL from the gallery.

DEAN (CONT'D)

No. Because today I am not The Grinder. There are no cameras, there are no episodes. Today... I'm one of you. A concerned citizen of Swissvale, PA... who's tired of being lied to... tired of the system not working for them... tired of being manhandled...

He lands right in front of Krantz.

DEAN (CONT'D)

...by a bully.
(then)
Mr. Krantz? We... the people... are pushing back.

Cheers from the courtroom. Once the Judge quiets the room:

DEAN (CONT'D)

(presentational)
Stew? What are we pushing back on? Specifically?

STEWART

Uh... well, mainly we're pushing back on Mr. Krantz suggesting that Mr. Ramirez lapsed on one month's rent.

DEAN

So it's his word... against ours. Is that fair? Even though we all know Krantz's a monumental scumbag?

PROSECUTOR

Objection!

JUDGE ROSSMYRE

Sustained.

STEWART

Well, it's not about what's fair,
unfortunately. We need evidence.

DEAN

Evidence. Uh huh. That would be
nice. And humor me -- what kind of
evidence would we need, player?

STEWART

Exculpatory evidence.

DEAN

And when we say exculpatory evidence
what do we mean by that exactly? Not
for me to know, but for the court.

STEWART

It's evidence that exonerates the
defendant of all guilt.

DEAN

(to the Jury)

Evidence. That exonerates the
Defendant. Of all guilt.

Dean looks to Stewart, winks.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Your Honor? The Defense would like
to submit a piece of exculpatory
evidence.

JUDGE ROSSMYRE

Mr. Sanderson, these are closing
arguments, we're past evidence.

Dean looks to Stewart -- *is there a way out of this?* Stewart
shakes his head, we get the sense he has the answer but is
leaving Dean hanging out to dry.

JUDGE ROSSMYRE (CONT'D)

Okay, back to closing arguments...

STEWART

Wait.

Dean looks up. Stewart feels bad, decides to save him.

STEWART (CONT'D)

We're pushing back on that too.
Kitzmiller vs. Dover, 1984. Defense
introduced a crucial piece of
evidence during jury deliberation.

Dean turns to Rossmyre, she ponders for a beat. Then:

JUDGE ROSSMYRE

Okay, I'll allow it.

Dean dramatically points to Stewart -- *you saved me*. He hands Stewart an ENVELOPE.

DEAN
The silver bullet. Fire when ready.

Dean hops up and sits on the jury box. Stewart opens the envelope -- he can't believe what is inside.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Let the record reflect Counsel is completely floored by what he is looking at.

STEWART
It's a check. For \$850.

More murmurs.

DEAN
From whom? To whom?

STEWART
Victor Ramirez to Albert Krantz.

DEAN
Dated?

STEWART
(big smile)
March 1st.
(then)
Player.

ON KRANTZ, he looks away, ashamed. As the place goes nuts:

DEAN
Your Honor, now the Defense rests.

Pandemonium in the courtroom. Debbie runs up and hugs Stewart.

DEBBIE
Oh my God, you did it! That was like "A Few Good Men!"

STEWART
(shrugs)
How was my... Kevin Pollack?

DEBBIE
No. You were Tom Cruise.

STEWART
(humble)
I was not. But it's okay. Cruise couldn't have won without Pollack.
(then)
It's Pollack's story, really.

They laugh, she kisses him. Dean Sr approaches.

DEAN SR
I'm proud of you. You did it.
(then)
You know, you two weren't bad together.

He smiles, walks off. Stewart nods, knows he's right.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

Stewart, Dean and the Defense team with the Ramirez family.

VICTOR
What do you mean we didn't win?

CARMEN
Grinder had check!

STEWART
Right. But because of the way
Grinder obtained check, it was
ruled inadmissable.

DEAN
Such garbage. Eight seasons, never
ran into that once.

STEWART
Dean, you broke into his apartment,
ransacked the place. No warrant.

DEAN
And I would do it again. For
justice.

VICTOR
So what do we do? We have to move?

STEWART
I'm afraid so.

DEAN
The system failed the Ramirez
family today. I'm terribly sorry.

Victor hugs his wife and crying children.

VICTOR
I'm glad we push back. Felt good.

He hugs Dean hard. Just then, Albert Krantz walks up,
introduces himself to Dean. He actually comes off as a
pretty genuine guy.

KRANTZ
(resigned)
Hey. Sorry to interrupt.
(MORE)

KRANTZ (CONT'D)

I just wanted to say thanks. You moved me in there. Made me realize I haven't been a great guy lately. It's just been rough, my wife's sick, the bills... I guess I've just been chasing that paper a little too hard, you know?

DEAN

We all do it.

KRANTZ

Victor... I targeted your socioeconomic status and attempted to exploit it. I'm sorry for that. I hope you'll stay. Same rate.

DEAN

And that's... character.

The Ramirez's thank him, celebrate. Stewart watches, can't believe Dean somehow pulled it off.

CUT TO MOMENTS LATER. At Dean's G-Wagon. The family says goodbye to Dean. Dean makes a meal out of it.

ETHAN

Why do you have to go, Uncle Dean?

DEAN

(toward Stewart)

I just do, buddy.

DEAN SR

I think it's a mistake.

REBECCA

Me too.

DEAN

I hear ya. But life's funny like that. Sometimes you find exactly what you're looking for, you stumble upon a clear path to happiness...

(toward Stewart)

But for whatever reason, you're not allowed to pursue it.

Stewart looks away.

DEAN (CONT'D)

(to Rebecca)

Come on. Say goodbye to your uncle.

Rebecca hugs him.

DEAN (CONT'D)

You know, I wasn't leveraging you in that deal. I was trying to make you see what was happening.

REBECCA

I know. And I see it now. Thanks,
Uncle Dean.

Stewart reacts -- *HE made you see that??*

DEAN

(moves on to Ethan)

E. I like your new crew.
Remember, they have to love you...
but they also have to fear you.

ETHAN

Got it.

They hug. Debbie slowly turns and nudges Stewart. He feels it, doesn't acknowledge it yet. Dean looks at Debbie, smiles.

DEAN

Get over here, you.
(as they hug)
Ahhh, the one that got away.

She laughs it off. Stewart rolls his eyes. Finally, Dean gets in his car. Debbie throws a look to Stewart.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Look after each other. Love each
other.

As he starts the car, all eyes are on Stewart. He looks around -- his wife shrugs, his dad pouts with puppy dog eyes. He sees Ethan with his new buddies, happier than ever. Stewart can't help but smile -- *Dean oddly did okay*. Finally:

STEWART

Wait.

Dean immediately shuts the engine.

DEAN

What? You say something, Stew?

STEWART

(begrudgingly)

Maybe... this is an offramp. And you
should stop, look around for a bit.

Agreement all around.

DEAN

So you feel it too?

Long beat.

STEWART

Yeah... I feel it.

DEAN

And you think we make a good team?

Another long beat.

STEWART

(no choice)

I do.

DEAN

And I should maybe join the firm
and be a real lawyer?

STEWART

I mean... possibly. In time.

DEAN

But probably sooner than later?

They all look to him.

STEWART

Sure. Sooner than later.

DEAN

(emotional)

I'm getting out of this car, and
I'm coming over there to hug you.

STEWART

That's not --

But Dean already has him in his grasp.

DEAN

We did it, brother.

STEWART

(goes with it)

Blubber. It's okay.

DEAN

You bet it is.

(hugs him harder)

Two lawyers. Different styles,
came up different ways. But meet
in the middle for justice.

They break, Dean extends his hand. Everyone looks to Stewart
with anticipation. Finally, he shakes it. Everyone cheers.
ON STEWART -- *fuck me.*

THE END