

THE MAN WHO SUED GOD

Screenplay by John Clark and Don Watson

Current revisions by John Collee

EXT. THE OCEAN - DAWN

Silence. Dark

Then music: "In the depths of the Temple" from the Pearl Fishers.

EXT. WHALEBOAT BAY

A line of creamy foam marks the sand bar at the entrance to a bay. Beyond the foam A FISHING BOAT paints itself into the ether.

The sun is about to rise. A man and his daughter are singing.

The sea reflects a STUPENDOUS SUNRISE. Clouds shimmer into fantastic shapes. The world turns apricot.

EXT. FISHING BOAT - DAYBREAK

The boat is a sea-borne home. Washing hangs from a line above lobster pots piled on the deck. A bicycle is chained to the rail.

In the wheelhouse - we see, A MAN, his 12 year old daughter REBECCA and his dog, ARTHUR

CLOSE STEVE - 40, dark, weathered and stubbly enough to resemble a fisherman. But he looks more like something else - a sociologist or a wine-maker for instance.

STEVE

So what do you reckon? Better than running a caravan park.

REBECCA

Its not a competition dad.

STEVE

Did your mum say that

REBECCA

No, you did.

STEVE
(long pause)
How they getting on anyway?

REBECCA
Fine

STEVE
You think she loves him.

REBECCA
(Sings)
...always take the weather with you

Then the phone rings and she goes below decks, still singing.

INT. STEVE'S CABIN - LATER

In the cabin there's a primus stove, pots and Pans, wine bottles, some weighty novels. Rebecca rummages for the phone in Steve's UNMADE BED as...

EXT. ON DECK

Steve looks ahead. He has seen something

EXT. HEADLAND - DAWN

ON A HEADLAND high above the bay, waves breaking below, a woman, NINA, stands silhouetted.

CLOSE NINA standing right on the edge of the cliff. The giddy drop at her feet

NINA (V.O.)
They say as you get older that you learn to forgive your parents. I find the opposite. The older I get the more I know myself, the more defects I find to blame them for. For my temper, my laziness, my insecurity, and the sense that somewhere just out of reach there's a far better life I might have led if things were slightly different. For all that I blame my dad. Goodbye you old bugger. I love you anyway

EXT. THE BOAT

Steve stares as - with an achingly graceful sweep of her arm, NINA casts something into the sea.

For a second she seems to stare back at Steve. Then she turns, and walks up the hill, disappearing. For a moment Steve remains transfixed - and moved.

Rebecca re-emerges.

REBECCA
Whatcha looking at?

He doesn't answer. She hands him the phone

REBECCA
Its the co-op.

STEVE
Oh, thanks.

STEVE
(on the phone)
Yeah, hi... No we got some. More than last time.Yes, its definitely worth coming. We'll keep them on ice.

REBECCA
Both of them.

STEVE
(mouths)
Shuttup

He switches off the phone as they approach the jetty.

EXT. FORESHORE - MORNING

Whaleboat bay has charms which bad taste and bad planning has not entirely spoiled. Motels, mini golf and trampolines suggest a seasonal tourist trade. It's the off season - nothing stirs.

Retired couples sit in their cars, facing the sea and sharing tea from thermoses, and fish and chips from the kiosk by the jetty. Seagulls fight for chips.

But Paradise is threatened. Behind Steve's approaching boat, BLACK CLOUDS gather menacingly out to sea

RADIO
....Reports coming in of severe

electrical storms causing
widespread damage along the eastern
coast line. Farmers are advised
that a sheep weather alert is
imminent...

EXT. JETTY - MORNING

MEN are working on the fishing boats - sluicing decks and
packing crayfish. One of them stops for a moment -
watches Steve with MILD DISDAIN as he and Rebecca unload
their gear. Steve looks back at the clouds

STEVE

Something tells me it's not a day
for fishing, Arthur.

REBECCA

Oh Yeah

STEVE

Fisherman's instinct
Fishermen know these things

A car arrives and Steve's ex-wife JULES gets out, checks
the horizon

JULES

Doesn't look too good.

STEVE

Just a bit of sheep-weather, eh
Arthur.

The dog barks in agreement.

JULES

Are you going to unload the catch

STEVE

I already have.

The catch, two plastic crates of crayfish, is sitting on
the jetty. Jules shakes her head.

STEVE

The barometer said "fair".
Paradoxically enough. I'll moor
her out till this lot blows over.

He whistles his dog off the boat then jumps on board.
Rebecca casts him off.

STEVE
(to his daughter)
See ya Princess

REBECCA
See ya Fat-arse

EXT. THE BAY.

The Lull before the storm. The sky is darkening. The water is un-naturally smooth.

Steve motors out to where the other fishing boats are moored as....

Rain dimples the surface of the ocean. Then suddenly...

EXT. STEVE'S BOAT

The storm is on us.

Steve has double-anchored the fishing boat and lowered the dinghy. Now he hurries around on deck in driving rain, making sure the pots are secured and all the hatches are battened down.

The wind is almost strong enough to make him lose his footing

He closes and secures the door, then lowers himself into the dinghy.

EXT. THE DINGHY

He starts the little outboard and casts off.

The thunder is directly overhead, so loud as to make him duck involuntarily.

INT. JULES' HOUSE.

From the little weatherboard home-office on the edge of a caravan park Rebecca is looking down at the harbour. Jules comes to stand beside her.

JULES
Isn't he back yet?

REBECCA
Can't see

Opaque veils of rain obscure the bay. Suddenly a flash

of sheet lightning reveals:

Steve in the little boat, struggling to reach shore against the wind and the tide. The engine has cut out and he seems to be having trouble

JULES

Les?

Les emerges from the kitchen, a big happy fellow, several years younger than Jules

JULES

I'm going back down

LES

What for?

Jules is already half way through the front door. Rebecca hurries after her.

EXT. DINGHY - DAY

Halfway between his fishing boat and the jetty, Steve is trying to start the motor. Huge waves buffet the dinghy.

CLOSE - he's mad and desperate. He grabs the oars and tries to row - but it's futile.

LONG SHOT - he is swept along 100 yards out from the shore. The boat FLIPS, disappears.

EXT. UNDERWATER - DAY

Soundless. STEVE'S FACE BLOATED, eyes wide - he swings back, pulling and twisting his LEG - his FOOT is trapped between the seat and the floor.

EXT. DINGHY - DAY

A hand claws at the side of the boat - Steve's HEAD emerges. CLOSE - he gets his mouth clear enough to fill his lungs and goes down again as a wave throws the boat wildly.

EXT. UNDERWATER - DAY

Steve twists, desperately trying to lever the boot off.

EXT. DINGHY - DAY

He surfaces, gasping, then goes down again, then re-emerges and sinks again. He comes up slowly, eyes

vacant, EXHAUSTED. Then he goes down for the third time - flailing hopelessly.

THUNDER AND LIGHTNING is simultaneous - and terrifying.

EXT. UNDERWATER - DAY

SWIRLING ROPES and STEVE'S LIMBS dance like seaweed. He swipes at his boot with a GAFF. His movements are slow - a drowning ballet.

INT. LANDCRUISER - DAY

JULES POV: Suddenly illuminated in a lightning flash, the DINGHY, upside down. No sign of Steve

JULES
Christ - the idiot!!

As the dinghy itself is swamped by a wave and vanishes and...

EXT. LAND CRUISER. FORESHORE - DAY

JULES gets out of the car, fighting the gale.

JULES
(faintly over the
wind)
Stay there!

She struggles toward the beach as....

EXT. SEA - DAY

With a massive gasp, Steve surges clear of the boat. Arms flailing, lungs screaming, he strikes out for the shore.

EXT. SHORE - DAY

Jules runs along the shore trying to see him.

Steve's dog Arthur is in the water barking. Jules looks to where he's looking. Sees:

Steve flailing, then on his feet, on his knees, dragging himself ashore.

She wades out to him.

EXT. SHORE - LATER

Steve lies gasping. Jules is beside him, wind ripping through her hair. Rebecca is huddled in front of her looking at Steve. Thunder.

STEVE

Sorry.

Arthur licks his face.

They don't notice Steve's slashed boot with blood seeping out of it.

And then, with a TREMENDOUS CRACK, a dazzling bolt of lightning hits Steve's boat which explodes in flames, and sinks.

IN THE LOCAL CASUALTY DEPARTMENT.

Steve lies on the hospital trolley.

A nurse pulls his boot off with a horrible sucking sound. Steve yells. Blood and sea water spills out of it. The doctor glances down.

DOCTOR

We'll need to take that off.

STEVE

Take what off?

DOCTOR

The sock Mr Myers. Try to relax

The nurse pulls off the sock. Steve yells again, louder. Rebecca's eyes are like soup-plates

REBECCA

Oh my God...

JULES

Ssh!

REBECCA

...Your toe!

STEVE

(craning)

What about it. Which one?

DOCTOR

Head down Mr Myers.

(To the nurse)

Must be inside

The nurse shakes out the sock and something plops out on the tiles. Les turns green. Steve flops back on the trolley

DOCTOR

The little one. You were lucky.

STEVE

(lying back)

You're right. Its been a brilliant day for me. All things considered

Les swigs from a hip flask, passes it to Steve.

DOCTOR

(Over this)

Suture tray, and the bone nibblers

(To Steve)

I'll need to give you an injection

STEVE

Excellent.

The doctor draws up some local anaesthetic. Steve takes a covert swig of rum. The doctor looks up sharply

DOCTOR

Excuse me. Not in here. Thank You.

As he stabs Steve with the needle

STEVE

...Yeeoww!!

Steve's knee jerks upwards, knocking over the suture tray. Blood sprays everywhere. Rebecca faints.

FADE TO BLACK, sea sounds over.

EXT. FORESHORE - DUSK

Steve leans on his crutches staring out to sea.

Where his boat was once moored there's nothing but an oily stain and some charred bits of flotsam.

RADIO (O.S.)

...now taking stock of the extensive damage caused up and down the coast by yesterdays storm.

The sun is setting behind a grey sky. The dinghy lies on its side, ropes strewn all around.

EXT. HOME OFFICE - DAY

RADIO

(CONT'D)

The weather bureau was at a loss to explain the failure of their long-range forecasting...

Rebecca is playing hop scotch in the gravel and talking to Jules through the open door.

REBECCA

I think you should marry Dad again.

JULES

Do you now?

REBECCA

Yes...

(jumping)

... I do.

JULES

I don't.

A car with a boat on the roof swings into the driveway.

JULES (cont'd)

Hop out of the way.

She smiles at the couple in the car.

REBECCA

Why not?

JULES

Because ... on balance, Les is a much better bet for both of us.

Excuse me

Rebecca gets out of the way.

EXT. CARAVAN PARK - DAY

With an enormous heave, Les rights a fallen caravan. Steve watches, leaning on his crutches.

STEVE (cont'd)

(describing its
passage with a
crutch)

The wind must have come through
there and got in under this one.

Les looks in the direction the wind came from - nods.

STEVE

You insured?

LES

Yeah. Are you?

STEVE

Of course.

(looking around)

The place stood up pretty well.
You don't mind me coming in and out
just to use the phone and stuff.
Till this is all sorted.

While they've been talking Les has already chocked both
wheels, re-connected the gas and put the TV aerial back
together again. Les is a marvelous worker.

STEVE

... I don't want to crowd you and
Jules. You know, the ex hanging
around.

LES

Its never bothered us up till now

Steve looks at him - now screwing the door back on its
hinges, FOREARMS AND BICEPS flexing stupendously.

STEVE

Jules know you guaranteed my loan?

Les stops working for a moment.

LES

Are you sure you're insured - I
mean have you looked at your
policy?

STEVE

It was on the boat.

Les's stare is interrupted by Arthur barking.

Up the lane at the entrance to the park a MAN IN A DARK SUIT with a briefcase stands silhouetted.

EXT. JETTY - DAY

The man in the suit, an insurance investigator named HAVERS stands with Steve and Arthur on the pier, surveying the bay and scratching his chin

STEVE

The premiums are up to date. I checked

HAVERS

So did we. Just wondering what it comes under.

STEVE

I was insured against loss. It's lost. It was comprehensive insurance...

The investigator shrugs.

HAVERS

Lightning you see. Not caused by human action....

EXT/INT. REGIONAL INSURANCE OFFICE - DAY

A sign out the front says Mutual Perpetual. A butcher shop next door has a special on mince. Arthur is looking in the window.

INSURANCE BRANCH HEAD (cont'd)

...classic Act of God.

STEVE

But I could've stayed out fishing. The boat was where the lightning struck because of me. It was an act of me for fuck's sake!

INSURANCE BRANCH HEAD

It's in your policy. Look...

STEVE

I don't want to look. The bloody assessor said...

BRANCH HEAD

He wasn't an assessor Mr Myers. He was an investigator. There's nothing to assess

INT. JULES HOUSE. DAY

The door flies open. Steve heads for the bedroom

INT. JULES AND LES' BEDROOM - DAY

On Jules' side there's a pile of books, Anita Brookner, Tim Winton, Sylvia Plath, and a bottle of massage oil.

Steve comes in, grabs the phone, swearing under his breath with each number he punches in.

STEVE

Bastards bastards. Fuck Fuck fuck fuck fuck.

It rings. Someone answers.

STEVE

David Myers please. His brother.

As he's transferred he glances at a photo: Rebecca with Les and Jules in a happy family group

STEVE

David. About my boat insurance. What's this Act of God bullshit?

INT. LEGAL FIRM. DAY.

The glass wall of David Myers' work space looks out into the open-plan offices of a busy legal firm.

The other side enjoys a panorama of the city

DAVID

Good thanks for asking

STEVE

Alright, how are you. Progress still of an upward nature. Going to be a partner soon. Good? Good. Now what the fuck are they trying on here?

DAVID

They're "not trying" on anything Steve. An Act of God is an Act of God

STEVE

Ah, well that explains it.

DAVID

Force Majeur. Its a legitimate legal fiction for, things that aren't predictable.

STEVE

"Unpredictable" is what I was paying for. If life was predictable why would I need bloody insurance.

DAVID

Look, by all means speak to them but...

STEVE

I intend to. I'm coming down.

DAVID

What for?

STEVE

I'm going to sort this out. Tomorrow

DAVID

Are you listening. There's nothing to sort out Steve

Jules and Rebecca come home to find Steve on the phone. He affects an unconvincing air of confidence

STEVE

(To David)

Good.

DAVID

(continues)

Call them. Write a letter if you must, but I'm telling you, from a legal point of view....

Steve is smiling and nodding, pretending for Jules benefit that everything is rosy

STEVE

...and you'll put me up

DAVID

No. Listen. The best you can do
is throw yourself on their mercy
but the truth is...

STEVE

See you then then.

DAVID

Steve!!

INT. HIS OFFICE

David curses and punches a number on the phone.

EXT. UNDERWATER

Somewhere in the sorry pile of wreckage which was once
Steve's boat a mobile phone bleats damply.

INT. DAVID'S OFFICE.

David slams the phone down, exasperated.

INT. JULES HOUSE

Steve wanders through to the kitchen where Jules is
unloading shopping

JULES

So what's the problem?

STEVE

No problem

JULES

They're not going to pay

STEVE

Sure they'll pay. Its all quite
straightforward.

Jules looks at him

STEVE

I just have to go into the city
and...deal with a couple of things.

JULES

What couple of things?

STEVE

Um. Signatures.

JULES
So what do you need David for

STEVE
To witness them

Les comes in.

STEVE
Les. I couldn't borrow your car

JULES
No.

LES
Sure
(to Jules)
Why not.

STEVE
You're a pal.

Jules is scowling at Les

LES
(To Jules)
What?

EXT. STEVE'S PLACE. DAY

The foundations have been laid for a beach house with a perfect view of the bay. There's a half-finished frame and some builders' junk, but nothing much else has been built. Steve's caravan is parked in the centre of the slab.

INT. STEVE'S CARAVAN. DAY

Steve drags a suitcase from some dark corner, then opens the rusted latches with difficulty.

Rebecca watches, intrigued

REBECCA
What was it like. Almost drowning

STEVE
Scary at first.

The contents of the suitcase include plans for the house, somewhat faded with age

REBECCA

Then..?

STEVE

Everything went quiet and I began
to remember all the good things and
people in my life...

He unpacks Some law books. Some files. His old Law
degree

STEVE

....Your mum, Les, Arthur.

(beat)

What's your name again?

REBECCA

Rebecca Eloise Myers.

STEVE

Yeah and her.

Finally he finds what he's looking for: A black suit. A
white shirt (slightly mildewed) and a pair of black city
shoes

EXT. STEVE'S PLACE. DAY

Steve washes under a hose

REBECCA

Mum thinks you and her should get
married again.

STEVE

Oh yes. What does Les think?

Rebecca ignores him, walking through the frame of the
house.

REBECCA

(of the house)

How long ago did you start this?

Steve ignores her back, switches on the radio - MUSIC

INT. STEVE'S CARAVAN. DAY

MUSIC OVER, as Steve shaves in front of a scrap of
mirror. He puts on the shirt. Ties the tie. Puts on
the suit, which was tailored for a younger man.

EXT. STEVE'S CARAVAN. DAY

Steve emerges on crutches into the late afternoon sunlight. Looking almost respectable. He heads off.

EXT. LES'S CARAVAN PARK. DAY

Les's car is an old Toyota Landcruiser.

Steve opens the door. Arthur jumps into the passenger seat.

STEVE

I'm going to the city, Arthur, it's
no place for a dog.

Arthur gives a pleading look which doesn't work so he jumps out. Steve closes the door, starts up the engine and heads off.

Raindrops slap on the wind screen.

INT. THE CAR.

Its raining heavily. Steve drives, unblinking, thinking back to....

EXT. BEACH. FLASHBACK. DAY

Steve, his foot newly bandaged, sits with Jules watching Rebecca playing with Arthur in golden light.

JULES

Has it occurred to you - maybe -
that just maybe this was a wake-up
call? Hmmm? A grow-up call.
Hmmm? Steve?

Arthur lollops up to them with a stick

STEVE

Possibly something of that nature.
What do you think Arthur? A
message...

JULES

Stop talking to the bloody dog, for
God's sake!

Steve throws the stick. Arthur and Rebecca chase after it

INT. CAR

Steve remembering

EXT. BEACH. (CONTINUED)

STEVE

You've never forgiven me, have you?
For giving up the practice.

JULES

It's your life.

STEVE

Does it ever occur to you that I
might still love you?

JULES

No. You indulge yourself and think
it's love - but it's not. And I
don't love you, Steve - does that
ever cross your mind?

STEVE

Frequently.

JULES

I adore you like everyone else
does. But I refuse to love you.

INT./EXT. LANDCRUISER

It has stopped raining to reveal: City skyscrapers
dominating the horizon

CLOSE STEVE - he lights up and fills the cabin with
smoke.

STEVE (O.S.)

I'm very grateful for your time.

Reverse on Steve. He's rehearsing.

STEVE

I appreciate the difficulty of your
position...

EXT. INSURANCE TOWER. DAY

A towering edifice to Mammon. The Landcruiser is parked
across the street

Steve disappears on crutches through glass doors into the atrium. Move up to...

EXT. FIFTH FLOOR. DAY

STEVE (O.S. CONT)

To reconcile the interests of your shareholders with your customers'. A man like me can only wonder...

INT. FIFTH FLOOR OFFICE. DAY

Steve is being ushered out.

EXT. THE INSURANCE BUILDING.

Pan up to fifteenth floor window

STEVE (O.S.)

Normally I wouldn't bother you, but I have a daughter, and my wife's partner has guaranteed the loan on my only asset - a boat which now lies at the bottom of the sea. He may lose his business. Four people face ruin.

SENIOR MANAGER

You make a very persuasive case, there's no doubt about that, Mr...

INT. FIFTEENTH FLOOR OFFICE. DAY

Steve is being shown the door again

STEVE

...Myers.

SENIOR MANAGER

Yes. We'll be in touch.

STEVE

I want to speak to your boss

EXT. INSURANCE TOWER. DAY

PAN TO the very top of the building

INT. PIGGOT'S WAITING AREA - DAY.

Steve is sitting on a couch. He checks his watch. The secretary ignores him. Steve takes out a cigarette.

This gets her attention. He runs it under his nose, inhaling the smell. She gives him a pinched look of warning, then looks away

He puts it in his mouth. Takes out his lighter. Flicks it on, flicks it off, puts it within an inch of the tip.

VERY SENIOR EXECUTIVE
(suddenly looming
over him)
Mr Myers?

Steve starts. The man's name is Piggot.

INT. PIGGOT'S OFFICE - DAY

Steve sits facing PIGGOT who has a DIABOLICAL MODERN ARTWORK behind him and Steve's paperwork in front of him. He glances up at Steve.

STEVE
That's a wonderful painting.

Piggot nods, looks at the documents. Looks up again.

PIGGOTT
Did you read your policy Mr Myers

STEVE
I did read it: It says "Fully comprehensive."

PIGGOTT
"Excepting Acts of God" it says it right here.

He passes the document for Steve's inspection. Steve has seen it many times before

STEVE
Yes but where does it say what an Act of God is. It doesn't.

PIGGOTT
That's because its widely understood. Events of natural destruction, whirlwind, tidal wave....

STEVE
...locusts. Pillars of fire. Plagues of boils? I mean it -

Gods not in charge of these things
now.

Piggott smiles. Steve doesn't

STEVE

Storms are caused by global
warming. Global warming is mostly
caused by car exhaust and aluminum
smelters and cattle farms. The
weather is an Act of Man.

PIGGOTT

Well that's a novel argument
but....

STEVE

I'm not interested in being
"novel", Mr Piggott. Its the
beginning of the crayfish season
and I have lost my work my place of
work, my ability to work and the
ability to pay off the hundred and
fifty thousand dollars that's owing
on my boat. So my bottom line is
I'm not going take no for an
answer...

PIGGOTT

Well our bottom line is sorry but
that is the answer. The answer is
no.

He presses a buzzer on his intercom

PIGGOTT

Sorry

STEVE

(taking up his
crutches)

You believe in God, Mr Piggot?

PIGGOTT

In this business one sees too many
things which defy any other
explanation.

STEVE

This might seem an obvious
question, but tell me, if I sort of
slipped just now, and in trying to

regain my balance, one of these
crutches went down your neck and
stuck your epiglottis through your
rectum -would that be an Act of God
do you think?

Piggot seems to ponder it.

PIGGOT

...Grey area.

As he speaks two burly security men appear. A moment
later,

Steve is being forcibly escorted from the room.

STEVE

(struggling)

Hey! You low brow, bad taste,
sanctimonious peasant! I'm not
fin...

(Piggot opens the
door)

...ished with you!

EXT. STREET LEVEL

Steve is ejected onto the street, still shouting

STEVE

I'm gonna plague you! I'm gonna
drive you mad! You'll be jumping
out of your fuckin' windows.

He hobbles across the road, narrowly avoiding a screaming
fire engine.

The parking meter is in the red. Les's car has been
clamped.

STEVE

SHIT!

INT. RESTAURANT.

A ripple of civilized laughter

The decor is minimalist, the conversation muted, the
prices exorbitant.

Steve's brother David, whom we last saw talking to Steve
on the phone introduces himself at the front desk

DAVID
I'm meeting my brother

HEAD WAITER
(Slightly strained)
He's at your usual table Mr Myers

FOLLOW DAVID as he weaves his way through the tables to where Steve sits, a rip in his jacket and a smudge of wasabi on his shirt, swigging alternately from a glass of wine and a cup of saki

DAVID
Steve, sorry I'm late

STEVE
Sit down. I've just been having a little aperitif

He reaches to pour David a cup of saki. The bottle is empty. So is the wine bottle

STEVE
(Calls)
Mr Akari! Another bottle for my brother the lawyer.

DAVID
You're drunk.

STEVE
Not yet. I can still feel pain

He pops some pills. Washes them down with what's left in his glass

DAVID
Should you be taking those with that

STEVE
"As required" As long as I don't operate machinery
(shouts)
Mr Akari!

Heads are turning. Among them a svelte lady journalist(NINA) who is lunching nearby with her editor-in-chief (HAL) and the paper's CARTOONIST

DAVID

(recognising them)
Lets go somewhere else.

STEVE
No. I like it here. Kind of
comforting Nazi simplicity don't
you think. Piggot would approve.

DAVID
Piggot.

STEVE
Mutual Perpetual. The bastard I
spoke to this morning

DAVID
You spoke to Edward Piggot

STEVE
A free and frank exchange.

DAVID
Steve I've got to work in this
town.

STEVE
Good. Because I've got a job for
you. We're going to sue Mutual
Pestilential from here to kingdom
come.

DAVID
I've told you that's not possible.
They've bashed out these policies
with whole armies of lawyers.
Their liabilities are defined in
minute detail...

STEVE
What? As compared to Gods
liabilities. Did they define them
too. Did anyone consult Him!

He leans back and falls off his chair.

STEVE
Woahhh!

From the adjacent table Nina shoots him another poisonous
look. The cartoonist starts sketching on a napkin.
David gets up

DAVID

Steve I love you like a brother
but...

STEVE

You are my brother. You love me
like a lawyer.

He struggles up from the floor

DAVID

Come on we're going .

The wine waiter, Mr Akari arrives with a bottle. David
tries to wave it away

DAVID

No more drink.

STEVE

(accepting it)
About time

DAVID

(To Akari)
I apologize.

Steve recovers his crutches, tries to put weight on his
foot and stumbles into Nina's table.

STEVE

Pardon. Sorry.

The cartoonist glares.

STEVE

What? Fuck off. Its three pm dont
you have jobs to go to?

DAVID

Please, Steve.

STEVE

I'm coming

He upsets the ice bucket which crashes to the floor
sending, ice and water under the feet of nearby diners

STEVE

Bugger sorry. Sorry.

Reversing into another table

STEVE

Sorry. Sorry.

A man gets up in a temper to protest, stands on a piece of ice and falls to the floor

STEVE

Act of God.

David is already half-way to the door

STEVE

David!

He leaves the scene of devastation, walking into a mirror, en his route to the door, finally pressing a five dollar bill into the head waiter's hand

STEVE

Send me the bill. The name's Edward Piggot.

INT. DAVID'S SPARE BEDROOM. MORNING.

The room is in darkness. A door opens

DAVID

"Is it just me or is it a bad thing to be drunk and abusive in public? With its designer haircut and its tight black suit. It looked like another consultant or an I.T person, or a fund manager or some other variation on this new species emerging from the free market ooze. But then it spoke. And drank. Then it drank some more. Abused the waiter, abused the other diners, got loud and crass. The Big Dickhead is not yet extinct.

David flings open the curtains, brutally illuminating the dickhead in question: Steve, lying comatose, half-undressed on the bed.

David resumes, quoting from an article on the back page of the newspaper

DAVID

Unfortunately, it seems the rest of us have evolved to the point where

we'll put up with absolutely anything. Not me. Next time someone does that in my favourite restaurant, I'm going to break a chair over his head.

David drops the newspaper on Steve's head and leaves the room.

INT. DAVID'S PLACE. DAY

Steve sits alone at the aluminum breakfast bar in David's painfully bright apartment, gingerly introducing muesli to his rebellious stomach.

The newspaper is full of depressing reading - a war. An earthquake. A hurricane. On the back page there's Nina's column with an unflattering cartoon of Steve.

He finds a number on the editorial page, dials it.

STEVE

Nina Denmark please

He's transferred to her message bank.

NINA

Hi leave a message...

STEVE

Did you know experiments on rats have shown they'll recognize the truth long before most journalists. They reckon that with a bit of training a squid can demonstrate a deeper grasp of moral principles. I know. You're just doing your job. Its not your fault you're a professional petty assassin. You really wanted to be a nurse in Africa but you failed the medical.

(click)

It was the same with Goebbels!

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE

Steve's message is recording on the answering machine as we PAN UP to reveal NINA talking in the next door office to Hal, her editor

HAL

I don't get it Neens, You're on the

radio. You've got a popular column. You've never had more influence

NINA

...on the dinner party circuit.

Hal drains his coffee and looks at her

HAL

Alright. If you must, go back to the big stories. Prove your reporting skills. Again.

NINA

Ah, reporting skills. I didn't realize they were still valid currency. Pomposity, sliminess, blokishness on the other hand....

HAL

You know what your trouble is Nina.

NINA

What, pray?

HAL

You. You're your own worst enemy.

Nina bites her tongue

EXT. CAR POUND. DAY

Steve rummages in his pockets, scraping together the funds to have his car released,

STEVE

...hundred, hundred and ten,
hundred and fifteen, seventeen,
eighteen, ...eighteen fifty...
(rummaging through
his pockets)
Hundred and nineteen...

INT. EXT TRAFFIC. DAY

Stuck in traffic, Steve glances at a Church. Slowly the words on its notice-board focus: GOD WATCHES OVER ALL.

Someone honks. Steve is lost in thought. More car horns. Steve drives on, still thinking.

STEVE
(abruptly)
Bugger them.

He veers across traffic, back into the city-bound lane.

EXT. LAW SOCIETY - DAY

Lawyers in gowns and wigs stroll by. Steve, carrying a large envelope, walks down the street and into a door marked "Law Society of Australia".

INT. REGISTRAR'S OFFICE - DAY

Steve slides some FORMS across to the clerk who peruses them perfunctorily, stops for a second and with one bird-like eye looks up at Steve.

Steve stares back. The clerk reads on - a thin smile forming on his lips. His hand reaches out for the STAMP, brings it close, puts it back, brings it close again.

At last he looks up at Steve, raises his eyebrow and stamps the first of many pages.

INT. NINA'S OFFICE - DAY

Nina stands looking out the windows of the newspaper building. The setting sun casts an ORANGE GLOW. Lights flicker in the DARKENING SUBURBS. Her face is sad. She walks back to her desk in the vast open plan office. A colleague calls across the room.

REPORTER

Night Nina.

She doesn't answer. Presses a BUTTON ON THE PHONE, skims back through tape and stops at Steve's message. It plays the last part.

CLOSE NINA - it seems to hurt.

NINA

(softly)
Fuck you.

STEVE (O.S.)

Soon - let's just see the moon
rise.

EXT. WHALEBOAT BAY - DUSK

A majestic sunset frames Steve's DINGHY on the water.
Plovers and gulls fly west into the dying rays

STEVE (O.S.)

Wag your tail if you reckon I've
done the right thing, Arthur?

CLOSE - Steve and Arthur in the dinghy. Arthur wags his
tail

STEVE

I hope you're right.

He reaches for the oars

STEVE

Better go break the news

INT. CARAVAN PARK, FRONT OFFICE. SUNSET

As Steve enters, Jules is attending to two tourists
paying their bill.

LES

How did you go up in town?

STEVE

Kicked buttock.

LES

That's the way.

JULES

(To the tourists)
Thanks.

They leave. She turns to Steve

JULES

Are they going to pay?

STEVE

No.

Les looks at Jules whose back is turned.

STEVE

I re-registered.

JULES

Good.

Then a chilling thought occurs to her

JULES

Tell me you're not going to sue
them

STEVE

I'm going to sue.

JULES

You're going to sue one of the
world's biggest insurance
companies.

STEVE

Apparently I wouldn't stand a
chance.

She nods at his impressive grasp of the obvious. Steve
goes to the bar fridge

STEVE

...so I'm suing God.

Jules looks at Les. Steve is rather enjoying the effect
he's having

STEVE

I've issued writs. To his most
prominent representatives.

He opens a beer.

EXT. CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL - DAY

The Gloria from a stirring Catholic Mass as..

A DARK HOLDEN CAPRICE pulls up at the front steps and
GERRY RYAN, an Irish-Australian Machiavelli - florid
face, dark, old-fashioned suit - gets out and marches
inside.

His DRIVER listens to the radio.

NEWS READER

And a fisherman from the south
coast has issued writs against God.
Apparently his insurance company...

The Driver shakes his head in disbelief and has a
coughing fit.

INT. CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL - DAY

EARLY WORSHIPPERS kneel in the VAST AWE-INSPIRING INTERIOR. The music resounds.

Gerry genuflects without breaking his stride.

EXT. CATHEDRAL

The Driver waits, listening to the radio. DIRK STREICHER a talkback know-all is on the air now.

DIRK (O.S.)

Its time for our weekly comment
from Nina Denmark. Morning Nina.

NINA (O.S.)

Hello Dirk.

INT. CATHEDRAL VESTRY - DAY.

An opulent office, awash with history

CARDINAL

It's a summons, isn't it?.

GERRY

That's the gist of it

CARDINAL

It's not a prank?

Gerry shakes his head

CARDINAL

Some religious fanatic, I suppose.

GERRY

Something of that order, quite
probably. Leave it with me, Your
Eminence.

CARDINAL

Sometimes I don't know what the
world's coming to.

GERRY

Should you be admitting that - in
your position?

CARDINAL

(smiles)

I'll try to keep it under my hat.

The Mass surges over.

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE - MORNING.

A GORMLESS YOUNG LAWYER, pores over a DOCUMENT.

The Anglican Primate, and the Moderator of the Uniting Church, sit in front of him. The Moderator checks the share markets in the Financial Review.

PRIMATE
(to the lawyer)
So what's your advice.

MODERATOR
(without looking up)
Sell, I'd say.

The Primate gives him an odd look.

EXT. - ANOTHER OFFICE - DAY

Long shot to a distant window. Closing slowly to reveal TWO MEN looking out. One's a RABBI. The other's a LAWYER called SAM COHEN. The Rabbi's reading a document.

RABBI
What do you think?

SAM
How do I know what I think? Will you let me look at it?

The Rabbi gives Sam the document. Looks out the window.

RABBI (O.S.)
There are a lot of very strange people out there, Sam.

EXT. CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL - DAY

The Credo of the Gounod Mass plays as Gerry strides out of the church. The driver gets behind the wheel.

Nina on the radio is giving her weekly commentary.

NINA
What do I want? What does anyone want, power and money. Its nice we're all so predictable

INT. RADIO STUDIO - DAY

Nina's commentary continues.

NINA

*I tell you the other nice thing.
Most of us are pretty unambitious.
Most of us just want enough power
to stop some greedy developer
building flats in our back garden,
enough money to pay the rent, buy a
car that doesn't stall, take a
holiday now and then. But there
are people who see that as a
threat. Because they figure if
everyone has that much power and
money, they'll lose their slice of
the pie. So what they have to do
is squash the little man*

EXT. GERRY'S CAR/CITY STREET - DAY

Gerry sits in the back seat, ruminating.

NINA

*Anyone gets ideas above their
station: Cut him off at the knees.
For those few people, the five per
cent who do have power and money.
That becomes their life's work.*

CLOSE GERRY - taking in the streets with a steely gaze.
A NEWSPAPER BANNER says "Man Sues God".

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

THE CHANNEL 6 OUTSIDE BROADCAST VAN races south, pulling
level with another vehicle with a radio station logo
plastered all over it.

A news helicopter roars over both of them, heading in the
same direction.

INT. HELICOPTER.

The helicopter wheels away from the main highway. Ahead,
the picturesque sweep of whaleboat bay appears on the
horizon.

EXT. FISHING TOWN - DAY

RESIDENTS of Whaleboat Bay stop and look as the van arrives

FX HELICOPTER. They look up.

EXT FORESHORE - DAY

Steve is cycling home when he sees the TV Van ahead. He turns and rides back towards the jetty. Arthur follows.

The chopper is on the beach. A NEWS TEAM runs across the road towards the caravan park.

INT. PARK OFFICE - DAY

Jules is behind the counter talking on the phone.

JULES

For once I agree with you, David.

INT. DAVID'S OFFICE - DAY

David is at his desk.

DAVID

A complete idiot, Jules. A dolt.

INT. PARK OFFICE - DAY

JULES

But, David, you know Steve. He won't go through with it.

Jules sees the TV circus go down the drive.

JULES

Christ Almighty!

EXT. STEVE'S VAN - DAY.

Les looks up from the tap he's fixing.

LES

There's a couple of nice vans other side of the toilet block.

MALE REPORTER

Which one is Steven Myers'

LES

He lives over there.

He points them in the wrong direction and they all rush off

EXT. END OF JETTY - DAY

Clunk of boat on pylon and lap of water.

STEVE (O.S.)

O for a beaker full of the warm
South, the blushful Hippocrene,

EXT. UNDER JETTY - DAY

Steve drains a can of beer, tosses it with the half dozen others in the bottom of the boat.

STEVE

With beaded bubbles winking at the
brim. And purple stained mouth.

(opens another can)

That I might drink...

As he tips his head back and drinks Steve sees, through the cracks between the planks: a woman's legs and snow white pants beneath a flowing skirt.

STEVE

(softly - enchanted)

...and leave the world unseen. And
with thee fade away into the forest
dim.

GULLS SHRIEK in battle - a CHIP lands in Steve's lap. Steve puts it in his mouth.

EXT. END OF JETTY - DAY

STEVE (O.S.)

That was a bloody good idea of
yours, Arthur - coming down here.
Not many dogs would have had that
good an idea.

He emerges onto the jetty from the landing.

A FISH AND CHIP WRAPPER is stuffed between the planks near the railing - flapping in the breeze.

The CULPRIT, in flowing dress, is standing at the end of the jetty looking across the bay toward the bottom of the cliff. Steve stares - half-recognising her.

She begins to walk toward him. It is Nina. There's an ELEGANCE AND MELANCHOLY about the sight of her which unnerves him.

She doesn't seem to see him. He coughs when she's adjacent, but she walks straight past.

STEVE

Giddy.

(she turns)

Just passing through are we?

She looks back and shakes her head in sorrow at his lame bucolic line - then she walks on.

STEVE

You left your fish and chips behind.

She stops, looks at the wrapper he's holding.

NINA

You couldn't pop it in a bin for me?

Steve looks at the wrapper.

STEVE

There's a piece of fish in it.

NINA

Its yours if you're hungry.

She walks on.

STEVE

Don't tell me you don't know who I am?

She stops again, with a sigh, looks back at him.

NINA

I don't know who you are.

She notices the crutches leaning on the rail.

NINA

Yes I do, I think.

STEVE

Get out of it, Arthur.

Arthur briefly withdraws his nose from Nina's crutch, then tries again.

NINA

Down boy!

Arthur obeys immediately

NINA

(to Steve)

So. Okay. Sorry, about the article. What else would satisfy? Should I beg forgiveness. Jump in the sea and drown?

(Steve's half-entranced)

Look... you didn't like what I wrote. I didn't care for your message. See you!

STEVE

Sorry. I thought you'd come to do a story.

NINA

Um... no. You want another story?
(she smiles)

They often do. It's very addictive.

STEVE

Not in this case.

Arthur is grinning at Steve.

STEVE

But the press is here, they are after me - really.

NINA

(a condescending pause)

Yes. I'm sure for you it's very real. But reality is what we have to cope with, isn't it? Take a deep breath and ask yourself - why would the media be chasing me?

STEVE

Because I've sued God.

NINA

(thinks)

Ah.

(thinks)

Ah.

(thinks some more)

You're whathisname - Myers.

STEVE

Yeah. Shit!

He's seen a TV CREW coming along the jetty.

NINA

I see... really?

She sees the crew.

NINA

You don't want to talk to them?

STEVE

No!

NINA

You really don't? How curious.

Steve's caught like a rabbit in a spotlight.

NINA

You'll have to sooner or later.

She glances at the TV crew swarming onto the pier - turns aggressively on Steve.

NINA

Stop it!

STEVE

What?

NINA

(advancing on him,
shouting)

Where's your jacket, then? Hmm.

With all the flap and straps on it

Steve's bewildered. Arthur's bewildered. Nina takes Steve's by the shoulders, turns him round.

NINA

Where are the backing singers?

Show me.

(clips him over the
head)

There aren't any.

(she stares in his
face)

Do me a dance. Go on. Do the
moonwalk for me

She slaps him cruelly. The crew stop, embarrassed by
real life.

NINA

What's this? Your microphone stand
- what is it really? Tell me.

CONTEMSTEVE

My ... crutch.

She gently wrests it from and hurls it into the sea. The
crew grimace. Arthur runs to look. She grabs Steve by
the shoulders and puts her brow against his, affecting an
agony of despair.

NINA

You can't sing, can't dance and
you're white all over Say - I am
not Michael Jackson. Say it.

STEVE

I am not Michael Jackson.

NINA

(slapping him)
Louder. Shout it.

STEVE

I am not Michael Jackson!

The crew turn away in embarrassment. Steve attempts to
play along by doing a moonwalk (Very badly).

NINA

Stop it

She slaps him again

NINA

That's right. You're my brother.
Come home, Simon. Come on.

He takes her hand. She leads him past the crew, hobbling

and much reduced. The crew look mournful.

STEVE

Thank you.

NINA

I'll drive you home, but I don't want that dog in the car.

EXT. CARAVAN PARK. DAY.

Steve steps out of Nina's car.

NINA

I'll be in touch

Arthur arrives, running behind the car with his tongue hanging out from exhaustion.

JULES (V.O.)

So tell me again, what did you agree with her.

INT. JULES HOUSE. NIGHT.

Steve stands in the kitchen, explaining things to Jules. Rebecca eats, keeping her head down and letting the adults talk over her

STEVE

I didn't agree to anything with her. I don't even like her. We talked. What's wrong with that?

JULES

It's called an exclusive, Steve. She holds the rest of them at arms length, wines and dines you then writes a three page colour feature showing you up as a complete moron.

STEVE

Remind me. You've been an expert media consultant for how long.

JULES

I read. I watch TV. Its all I do with my bloody life since you got us all trapped here with your "who cares about money"

STEVE

Jules. Please. Do you think its good that we argue in front of Rebecca. I'm worried she'll grow up never wanting to get divorced.

Les comes in, kisses Jules and starts washing his hands

LES

Guess who I saw at the corner store. That columnist. Whatsitsname. Nina Denmark. You only ever seen her from the neck up but she's actually got quite a good body.

Jules stares at Les.

LES

What?

INT. JULES HOUSE. NEXT MORNING

A RADIO drones. Jules is in the kitchen. Steve enters

RADIO

Since issuing the writs Mr Myers has remained silent. But the churches have been quick to react.

PRIMATE

A zealot of some description most likely, chap with a grievance. I wouldn't worry. His wheels have come off somewhere, poor chap, I imagine. I'm surprised you people don't have more important things to report on.

Jules turns the radio off. Rebecca bounces in.

REBECCA

You're famous!

JULES

A famous idiot. David rang. He said you've got to stop this.

STEVE

Stop this and do what? What else can I do?

JULES

Get a proper job. Work. Earn money.

Steve looks at Arthur, who doesn't understand these concepts either.

EXT. WHALEBOAT BAY

Locals shake their heads as Steve walks Rebecca to school. As they pass the church, he waves to the local pastor, who ignores him

STEVE

If any kids make fun of you because Dad's name's in the papers tell them I'll hang them from the end of the jetty all night, and when the sharks have finished with 'em, I'll give their bones to Arthur.

Steve kisses Rebecca goodbye and carries on into the local library.

INT. STEVE'S CARAVAN

Steve has a LARGE PILE OF BOOKS in front of him - legal and theological. He's taking notes.

INT. CARDINAL'S OFFICE - DAY

GERRY

Whether he's a crank or not the press are running with it. I think you have to respond.

CARDINAL

You don't think we should keep a respectable distance

GERRY

No, your eminence. I think he could be dangerous - depends if he knows how dangerous. And I think you'd get more respect by getting stuck in there. He may be deluded but he's not to just give up and go away.

CARDINAL

You're sure of this.

GERRY

My source is impeccable.

INT. NINA'S OFFICE - MORNING

Nina stands by her desk, looking at a TABLOID HEADLINE which says - Myers the Mystery Man. She looks out the window, thinking. A TINY SMILE creeps across Nina's face.

INT/EXT. STEVE'S CARAVAN - DAY

Steve, UNKEMPT like the van lies on his bunk staring at the ceiling. Arthur's on the floor, head on his paws, a copy of Proofs of Existence by his nose. LAW BOOKS, THEOLOGICAL BOOKS, RUMPOLE BOOKS strewn about - all signs of the huge task he's set himself.

A KNOCK. Arthur growls. Steve gets slowly to his feet - his trousers undone. Arthur barks.

STEVE

Shut up, for Christ's sake!

He opens the door - it's Nina.

NINA

Hello.

Steve's startled - and pleased. Nina wards off Arthur who is doing his nose trick.

NINA

You didn't think I'd be back

STEVE

No I knew you would. Or hoped you would. I mean nice to see you.
Come in.

She follows him inside

STEVE

I'll make some coffee.

He clears papers, clothes and crockery - makes a space for her.

She picks up one of the theological books and leafs through it, then looks up to see Steve just standing there looking at her.

NINA

You mentioned coffee.

STEVE
I haven't got any.

INT. CARAVAN PARK OFFICE - DAY

JULES watches Steve and Nina leave Steve's caravan and drive away - with Arthur running along behind.

Steve's passing eyes meet Jules.

EXT. NINA'S CAR - FORESHORE - DAY

The car is parked on the beach front. The grey clouds and the sea seem to blend together. Nina has a crayfish on the hood.

STEVE
So last time. It was a coincidence, your being here.

NINA
My father had a thing about this place. I inherited the sentiment.

She wrenches the tail off. Looks up at Steve who is watching, impressed by her technique.

NINA
You probably hate them - catching them all the time.

STEVE
No. I could never afford to eat them.

She splits the underside of the tail with a nail file.

NINA
It's not a stunt is it... this suing God? I'm not interested in a stunt.

STEVE
No, no... it's not a stunt.

NINA
Because if it's not a stunt, it's a great story.

STEVE
What - like a three page feature at the weekend...?

She passes him some lobster and salad.

NINA

Better. The more I think about it.
The more I think: this is the best
idea, possibly ever. I mean he's
not just taking on the insurance
companies - he's going after God.
He's going in the cave at the core
of the kernel of existence - and
he's going to pull the little wire.

Steve puts some lobster in his mouth

NINA

It's not Galileo quite - but in
these uninspired times.

(Steve shrugs)

And I thought no one will
understand it, and everyone will
misrepresent it, and the whole
thing will be lost like everything
else that's any good.

Steve stares at her - surprised by her passion.

NINA

And I thought maybe I could help.

STEVE

I'm not really suing God you know.
It's the idea that these people are
using God as a huge all-purpose
lying mechanism.

NINA

I know exactly why you're doing it.
Behind these human faces they put
on TV there are human dickheads.
Which is why you need me.

STEVE

I'm just not sure I want to work
with the press... speaking as a
dickhead.

NINA

You want them working against you -
I see.

STEVE

I don't want them anywhere.

NINA

Ah, the big bad media. The vile, vulgar, sinful media.

STEVE

You mean there's another media. The highly principled, fair-minded, deeply insightful media.

NINA

You can't win without us.

Absently, she gives him the parcel of leftovers.

NINA

But then again it does take a particular type of person.

She jumps into her car , starts to move off. Steve catches up and bangs on the roof

STEVE

What I want is to get this settled by law.

Nina turns off the engine, slides down the window

NINA

That's funny. That's what their lawyers want as well

STEVE

You realize the media shareholdings of the insurance industry are considerable, relative to mine.

NINA

God's power is awesome, relative to yours. Has it stopped you?

Silence.

STEVE

Right.

Silence.

NINA

I'll coach you.

EXT. THE CITY AT NIGHT

Applause, cheering, stamping feet

Red tail lights stream along the blazing arteries of the city.

WARM-UP MAN (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen put your hands together for the woman of the moment Cressida Roache

The applause continues into.

INT. TV STUDIO

Cressida Roache takes her seat in front of a pumped-up studio audience

ROACHE

So what have we got. Another Nuclear crisis in Pakistan. Listen guys, get over it. And what about those Weather forecasters. Do they really know anything!

(applause)

And the home-grown fisherman who wants to bring a lawsuit against God.

(boos)

Settle down, feeding time's later.

(laughter)

First off do you ever get that feeling that....

INT. MAKE UP ROOM.

Steve sits sweating in his fisherman's jersey, with bits of tissue paper sticking out of his collar as a make-up lady dabs foundation on his face and a technician threads a microphone lead down his front.

Nina glances at the clock.

STEVE

OK For time?

NINA

Minute to get you in there. Then a couple of minutes for the get-to-know-you

STEVE

Two whole minutes. And who says TV folk are shallow.

NINA
You're still talking too fast.
About two words a second is normal.
Like I'm doing now

MAKE-UP LADY
Chin up.

The assistant floor manager comes in

AFM
You're on in three. How is he?

Steve opens his mouth to respond just as the make up lady dabs powder on his face. Steve inhales a cloud of talcum, gags.

NINA
He's fine.

AFM
Lets go then

STEVE
(gasps)
Water.

AFM
We have to go

INT. CORRIDORS.

Moving fast through ill-lit corridors lined with cables and equipment. The PA follows the AFM. Steve follows the PA. Nina follows Steve.

NINA
Remember. Don't let her set the agenda. Answer the questions but get your key points in.

AFM
Watch the cables. Step.

NINA
You remember the key points

STEVE
Remind me.

PA
This way. And sharp right. Feet.

INT. STUDIO. CONTINUOUS

They emerge through tangle of wires and scaffolding into the vast hangar which houses Cressida Roache, her stage set and her audience.

FLOOR MANGER
Mr Myers. I'm Brian. You're on next. Stand there

NINA
I'll be right here. Good luck.

She vanishes. So does Brian. The PA spots a piece of tissue sticking out of Steve's collar and whips it out.

CRESSIDA
(to camera)
Don't go away. Be back just after this break

The cameras roll back. Cressida Roache beckons Steve, then pumps his hand

CRESSIDA
(warmly)
Steve. Cressida Roache. Hi.

On the monitor there's an advert for Mutual Perpetual insurance.

CRESSIDA
Nina's given me the background. Good to have a fresh story from out of town. Usually its the three horsemen of the boondocks: fire, flood and illegal immigrants....

FLOOR MANAGER
Fifteen seconds

Cameras reposition, moving in like predatory beasts. The Floor Manager counts down

FLOOR MANAGER
Five four three..

Then he gestures silently "Two. One. On Air."

CRESSIDA

Good question...

(To Steve)

...and indeed "Where is God", when
it comes to putting him in jail.

The studio audience laugh louder

STEVE

That's not what I'm proposing.

CRESSIDA

Though arguably he's in jail
already, given that he's
everywhere.

A warm up man is urging the audience to laugh louder

STEVE

Yes well if all you want to do is
make a joke out of it.

CRESSIDA

But isn't that your intention

Nina's increasingly complex hand-signals have lost him.

STEVE

Isn't what my intention.

CRESSIDA

Its a joke, obviously

Nina tries to mime "Take the initiative". Steve frowns

CRESSIDA

You having a problem Mr Myers?

STEVE

(losing his temper)

Yes I am having a big problem as a
matter of fact...

Nina holds her breath.

STEVE

....Mostly with types like you
trying to make this into popular
entertainment while there's
actually a serious issue at stake.

CRESSIDA

Namely..?

STEVE

(hits his stride)

Namely the supposed right of insurance companies, the richest institutions in this city, to take my money for fifteen years on the pretext that they cover all risks, only to tell me after the event, that God is responsible for what happened.

CRESSIDA

But logically, if your argument is with the insurance company, should you be...

STEVE

No. Forget logic. Logic doesn't apply here. Its like when a man has a car accident and his daughter is injured but the insurance company won't cover it. So the child is obliged to sue her father. It doesn't mean the girl hates her father, any more than I hate God.

STEVE

Its just the way things are - you have to go sideways to go forwards. I think most ordinary people can identify with that.

The studio prompter looks doubtful for a second then switches on the sign saying "laughter"

The audience ignore it. Many are nodding agreement.

CRESSIDA

And how would God feel.

STEVE

If there is a God up there, I reckon he'd be on my side.

A smattering of applause

STEVE

Because belief is an individual thing and my God is the god of individuals. He's not someone who

can be used as a conveniently vague
escape clause, by the same
corporate bodies who have corrupted
every other thing of meaning and
value in our lives!

The audience start to clap. It starts slowly and then
builds. Pretty soon everyone in the audience is
applauding and shouting encouragement.

Cressida manufactures a perfect professional pause.

CRESSIDA

Steve Myers, thank You very much

Nina smiles.

IN THE CARDINALS HOUSE

The Cardinal frowns, turns away from his TV set, picks up
the phone.

CARDINAL

Gerry. You watching this?

INT. TV STUDIO CORRIDOR.

Nina and Steve make their way back from the studio.
Everyone Steve passes wants to shake his hand.

PASSERS BY.

Good on you mate. Way to go.

RIVAL PRODUCER

Mr Myers I wonder if we could book
you in for an appearance on...

NINA

Not now. We'll be in touch.

She hands out a couple of business cards then hurries to
catch up with Steve as he heads for the door, wiping off
makeup with his handkerchief

NINA

You seem very popular.

STEVE

Not with anyone I know.

NINA

Fancy a drink

STEVE
That's the first sensible
suggestion you've made.

INT. NINA'S CAR.

Nina's car is weaving through traffic. Ahead emergency services are trying to control a burst water main ahead

Steve is on the phone to Rebecca.

STEVE
Princess? How are you doing?

REBECCA
All right

STEVE
Mum all right

REBECCA
Sort of. Bit tense.

STEVE
You see me on TV?

REBECCA
No. I was washing my hair. Course
I saw you. When are you coming
back?

STEVE
I don't know. If we create enough
fuss they should settle out of
court. That's the plan anyway.

A sidelong look from Nina.

REBECCA
What if they don't take any notice.

STEVE
They will. Trust me.

INT. JULES HOUSE.

As Rebecca gets off the phone

JULES
What did he say

REBECCA

"Trust me"

JULES

Never trust anyone who says "Trust me"

INT. COCKTAIL BAR.

Steve and Nina clink glasses

NINA

To your performance

STEVE

Thanks for your help.

NINA

(smiles)

Its a control thing. I'm sorry.

STEVE

I suppose it helps in your job.
The control thing.

NINA

I don't get to do it in my job.
That's the problem. I express
opinions but I don't get to make
things happen.

STEVE

The glass ceiling

NINA

Actually I don't believe in the
glass ceiling. A woman wants it
bad enough, she can get it. That's
my philosophy.

She drinks

NINA

There is something up there though,
don't you think? We can't see it
but it's there. You've got to
close your eyes - you know what I
see?

Steve shakes his head, fascinated.

NINA

Men's arses. Row after row of

hairy, smelly, talc-encrusted
arses. Jammed together like a huge
duvet across the world. Every time
I get up

She mimes bumping her head.

NINA

Ooops, sorry, I bumped your arse.

Steve laughs. Nina laughs.

NINA

Ooops bumped it again.

They laugh again. Then stop.

STEVE

Is there anything more I should
know about you. Now we're partners

NINA

(long pause)

Maybe some day. If you behave
yourself.

EXT. HOTEL

Nina drops Steve on the pavement in front of a budget
hotel, then and drives away. He watches her tail-lights
recede.

RADIO

Despite the outrage of many church
groups Mr Steve Myers seems to have
struck a nerve with the wider
community.

EXT. COUNCIL OF CHURCHES.

RADIO

Meanwhile the national council of
churches convene today to discuss
the much more serious issue of
charity and the urban poor.

INT. COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The meeting to discuss the problem of urban poverty is in
progress, but most of the clergy sitting around the
conference table are discussing Steve Myers in whispered
voices

ARCHDEACON

So the fellows been seen on TV.
What's so great about that? It
doesn't mean we have to take it
seriously. Actually the reverse
normally applies.

BISHOP

He's also in every newspaper in the
country. "Does God have a case to
answer?" ... "Is there anyone up
there?" Its monstrous. Gratuitous
religion bashing .

MODERATOR

Its the "me" society. God is dead.

Everyone looks at him

MODERATOR

Figuratively speaking...We've lost
our mystery

RABBI

Mystery schmystery. Clout is what
we need.

MODERATOR

Mystery and clout.

RABBI

Well which? The money or the box?
Because if you want to keep the
money, its best to say that God
doesn't exist.

The others are shocked

CARDINAL

I think we can take it as read that
God exists.

RABBI

I hope he does. I spent most of
the morning singing to him.

BISHOP

I wonder can we be serious for a
moment

RABBI

I am serious. If God's
responsible, we're responsible.
Yes or no.

The bishop looks stumped.

MODERATOR

We need a lawyer

CARDINAL

We've got a lawyer. If Gerry Ryan
can't get this nonsense thrown out
of court then no-one can

The assembled company take some comfort from this.

From above the mantle-piece a picture of Jesus looks down
doubtfully.

EXT. COURTROOM - DAY

One by one, the various interested parties arrive at the
federal court and go inside: Gerry, The Insurance people,
Steve and Nina, The Churchmen.

Over this: Nina's latest radio commentary.

NINA

*Here's an interesting statistic.
"80% of Americans disagree with the
proposition God does not exist."
Think about that. In the country
that has more of its population in
prison than anywhere else in the
world, where its regarded as a
basic civil right to shoot anyone
who intrudes in your home, where a
third of the population lack access
to basic health care. This is a
place where the vast majority claim
to believe in the existence of God.
Isn't it time we held that God to
account, or at least started to
examine what God means for these
people. He may not be the cause of
all these problems but objectively
he sure as hell ain't helping.*

INT. FEDERAL COURTROOM.

The federal court is in session. The public gallery is
full of journalists. The judge enters.

USHER

All rise. The federal court is now
in session, Judge Boniface
presiding

JUDGE

Gentlemen?

GERRY

Gerry Ryan on behalf of Mutual
perpetual.

STEVE

Steve Myers on behalf of myself

JUDGE

And the defendant is...

GERRY

There is no defendant your honour,
we're moving for a strike-out on
that basis

STEVE

The defendant is God

GERRY

Who is not a person.

STEVE

He's an entity, with nominated
representatives, like a company.

JUDGE

You're suing the church then.

A few churchmen, including the Rabbi and the Cardinal are
standing at the back of the hall, taking a keen interest
in proceedings.

The CARTOONIST is sketching the scene as NINA enters and
sits behind Steve.

STEVE

I'm suing God. Mr Ryan, who is
defending Him, will tell you who
he's taking instructions from

This gets a laugh from the gallery. Gerry is riled.

GERRY

Your honour I am here as a private individual, to defend nothing less the justice system itself against a flippant and frivolous case which patently does not merit a hearing.

JUDGE

Yes, well I'm sure the justice system appreciates your concern but what I want to hear is your legal arguments.

GERRY

Apart from the absence of a defendant...

STEVE

Objection

JUDGE

Upheld

GERRY

... and the fact that Mr Myers lacks any assets

JUDGE

You may demand security for costs.

The court recorder writes this down. Steve looks worried by this ruling

NINA

(whispers)

What does that mean?

Steve waves her away, concentrating.

GERRY

....there's the fact that if such a case ever came to court it would be entirely inappropriate for a jury trial

JUDGE

Why so.

Steve jumps to his feet

STEVE

Because most ordinary people realize the "Act of God" clause is

a scam....

JUDGE

Mr Myers!

GERRY

(answering the
question)

Because your honour, the emotive
and theatrical nature of this
financial implications of this
lawsuit...

STEVE

(continues over
this)

....the kind of blatant scam
increasingly perpetrated by large
corporations who with the passive
collusion of the churches have come

STEVE

to think of themselves as entirely
above the law!

The audience cheer. The cardinal and Rabbi look at each
other.

JUDGE

Mr Myers if you and your supporters
persist in flouting court protocol
I'll have you disbarred before this
thing even starts.

GERRY

Thank You your honour. As I was
saying....

JUDGE

And you can save you're breath too
Mr Ryan. The bench will allow a
jury trial.

(gets up)

I think that deals with everything.
See you in court gentlemen.

CLOSE on the cardinal.

EXT. THE COURTROOM.

Steve and Nina emerge in a crowd of supporters and press

PRESS

Mr Myers have you got any comment?
Mr Myers, on that issue of
costs....? Mr Myers have you
spoken with the churches about....

INT. NINA'S CAR.

As Nina and Steve drive off. Dirk is taking phone-ins on
the radio.

DIRK (V.O.)

Maisie from Dubbo. Your thoughts
on this suing God business.

MAISIE (V.O.)

Well I've been a church-goer all
my life....

DRIVE TIME HOST (V.O.)

So understandably you're offended.

MAISIE (V.O.)

Not half as offended as I was when
that insurance company cheated us
out of our farm.

DRIVE TIME HOST (V.O.)

So your message to Steve Myers
would be.

MAISIE (V.O.)

You're a battler, mate. Get in
there and stick one on them.

NINA

This is great. We're going to wipe
the floor with them

Steve is less convinced

EXT. THE CAR

As they continue through the city the Radio talk-back
programme continues in VO

TEENAGER (V.O.)

The guys cool. He's standing up to
bullshit. Its about time someone
said no the bullshit

INT. CAR.

They stop opposite Nina's flat. The radio show continues.

PIGGOT (V.O.)

He is a sad little man with a
grudge.

STEVE

That's a familiar voice.

PIGGOT (V.O.)

The ordinary policy holder can't
afford this kind of nonsense.

Nina switches him off

NINA

Come upstairs. I've got something
to show you.

Steve follows, intrigued

INT. NINA'S FLAT.

The decor is surprisingly bare and spartan. A lot of
books and papers. Not many home comforts.

Steve notices a picture of Nina with her arm round a much
older man.

NINA

My father.

She tips a bag of letters on the table

STEVE

What's this?

NINA

Your fan mail. Mostly from people
who got shafted with the Act of God
clause. Read them.

STEVE

No.

NINA

You know what you've got here?

STEVE

Yes.

NINA

And...

STEVE

This is my case, Nina. Its not a class action.

NINA

You could talk to them. Get some ideas. What's wrong with that?

STEVE

What's wrong is that I'm unable to support myself or my family. As it is I could be up for hundreds of thousands of dollars of costs. I have no money. The last thing I want is eight hundred people who are also flat broke depending on me to win.

NINA

We'll have a fighting fund. The others can contribute.

STEVE

Watch my lips Nina. There aren't any others.

He goes out on the balcony.

EXT. BALCONY

Steve admires the view. Nina joins him.

NINA

Just answer me one question.

NINA

Why did you give up the law? Because you were good, you must have been. You went in there with no preparation and you had Gerry Ryan on the ropes

STEVE

We got lucky. The judge obviously sees himself as a colourful eccentric.

NINA

It wasn't luck. You did it.

(beat)

So I'm asking myself, why did he chuck it all away for the higher purpose of killing fish.

Steve says nothing

NINA

Is he lazy? Did he stuff up some big case and lose his nerve.

Still no reply

NINA

Or is he just one of those blokes who can't help himself. Soon as things are getting too tough, bang! He shoots himself in the foot. "I don't want the pressure. I can't stand the responsibility." Bang in the foot. The will to fail. Don't want money. Success. Commitment. Bang in the foot every time. Sound familiar? Because sometimes you have to take a stand and actually shoulder the burden you know.

Steve makes to move away again. She puts a hand on his shoulder

NINA

Look you're not the only who's put a bit of effort into this.

(pause)

Just meet a couple of them. For me.

Steve begins to waver.

GERRY (V.O.)

You're making a mistake

INT. CARDINAL'S ROOMS

Gerry is with the Cardinal.

CARDINAL

I don't think so Mr Ryan. Maybe if you separate in your mind the

interests of the church, the
interests of the insurance industry
and your own interests...

Gerry purses his lips

GERRY

May I at least ask why the change
of heart.

CARDINAL

Its a matter of public perceptions.
We don't want to make a martyr of
him. Now do we?

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICES

Steve and Nina walk through the newspaper offices
together. People stop what they're doing to stare.

STEVE

You sure its OK to be doing this in
here

NINA

Relax. They're all scared of me.

INT. NEWSPAPER CONFERENCE ROOM

Steve and Nina settle at the conference table. The room
is otherwise deserted.

STEVE

I'm only doing this for you

NINA

Yes. You're only doing this for
me.

A knock on the door. One of the co-plaintiffs, enters

PLAINTIFF 1

Mr Myers?

THE SAME. LATER

They are looking at photos as they talk. A house, then a
house destroyed by a landslide.

PLAINTIFF 1

They said it wasn't our fault but
they wouldn't pay us anyway. They
called it an act of god.

STEVE

Afterwards.

PLAINTIFF 1

Yes. Afterwards

THE SAME LATER

An elderly couple sit in front of them

OLD MAN

We paid our premiums for thirty years.

OLD LADY

They said they'd look after us

OLD MAN

They said the water has to come from above, otherwise its not a flood. How can a flood come from above?

The old lady starts to cry.

OLD MAN

We just don't understand.

THE SAME. LATER.

A Russian man and his family

RUSSIAN MAN

It was humiliating. They treated us like criminals. You say how can this be right and they make you feel like your trying to cheat them.

THE SAME LATER.

Steve and Nina sit at the conference table. Documents and photographs are scattered in front of them.

Steve looks at Nina. Nina looks at Steve. The evidence of injustice is spread before them

The door opens and a secretary comes in, breaking the moment.

SECRETARY

Excuse me. Line three.

NINA
(on the phone)
Hello. ... Actually he's right here

She passes the phone to Steve

STEVE
Yes. Yes. Mm. Yes. OK. Fine

He puts the phone down

STEVE
(To Nina)
Gerry Ryan. He wants to meet me at
his club

NINA
OK. Lets go.

EXT. GERRY'S CLUB

Steve and Nina turn up on the steps of some Bluestone
establishment.

STEVE (V.O.)
I'm not sure they allow women...

NINA (V.O.)
Oh really. I'll just wait on the
step.

She sweeps inside.

INT. GERRY'S CLUB - DAY

Nina is indeed the only woman. A MOTH-EATEN WAITER is
serving coffee and cakes on a silver service.

GERRY
We don't as a rule. Never mind.
Everything has a precedent. The
camels moan, the caravan moves on.

Smiling at Steve and Nina

GERRY
Such a clever pair. A regular
Bonnie and Clyde.

Reaching in his briefcase

GERRY

My clients have instructed me to offer settlement. Full replacement value of your boat, and you will cease all proceedings.

Nina snorts and glances at Steve.

STEVE

What's "full replacement value"?

GERRY

Oh, it'll set you up nicely, don't worry.

GERRY

Unless you're planning to give it to the mission for the homeless.

He passes them a typed agreement.

GERRY

There's an undertaking not to pursue this in the press or in the courts jointly or separately. Its all laid out. Just sign here and here and here.

He offers a pen

STEVE

We'll discuss it

GERRY

Its on the table now. When I leave here my instructions are to take this with me.

STEVE

You've still not said how much.

Nina can't believe Steve's attitude.

GERRY

160,000 dollars is the valuation.

Steve is favourably impressed. Nina glowers. Gerry is content: divide and rule

GERRY

I suppose many people will say good luck to you. In the world of dog eat dog - you saw a dog. And

clever - embarrass the churches
into paying for you, the churches
being the only people with
conscience enough to be capable of
embarrassment.

He rises.

GERRY

Its a generous offer Mr Myers.
Personally I'd be delighted if you
refuse it. Would you excuse me for
a minute.

He leaves

NINA

(gets up)

Lets go.

Steve stays seated

NINA

You're not seriously considering
this. You can't be.

STEVE

Why not?

NINA

Of course. Not as if you were
trying to establish a precedent or
anything.

STEVE

Nina we met them. That's all. I
didn't promise anything. Why
shouldn't I take it?

NINA

You don't think you're betraying
everything we agreed

STEVE

I think that's slightly overstating
the case.

From another part of the club Gerry, glimpses them
through the leaves of a rubber tree, stubs out a
cigarette in the tub, smiles and returns to the fray.

They're staring away from each other as Gerry sits down.

NINA

He accepts.

She gets up, takes her bag and marches to the door.

GERRY

(eyeballing Steve)

Of course he does. 160 thousand
for the boat. 200 for the story Ms
Denmark has doubtless organized
with a TV station. Eh? Print
follow up.

(holds up his glass)

Congratulations - a brilliant scam!

Steve joins the toast with a salt cellar.

EXT. GERRY'S CLUB - DAY

Nina is pacing up and down on the pavement, very agitated. When she sees Steve come out of the club she puts on a very false smile.

NINA

All done?

STEVE

Yep.

NINA

Explain to me how you could do what
you just did.

STEVE

Easy: I just said it "Gerry: stick
it up your arse."

He gives her a little handful of rubbish. The torn-up pages of the agreement. Nina throws her arms around him and kisses him.

STEVE

You didn't think I'd take the money
did you?

As the torn pages fall around them like confetti

EXT. MUTUAL PERPETUAL OFFICES. DAY

In a park opposite the insurance giant, Steve and Nina are holding a press conference.

STEVE

A class action... yes... about a hundred and twenty. So far.

JOURNALIST

What are you after Mr Myers. Some kind of moral victory

STEVE

Yes I'd prefer it to be moral

JOURNALIST

Do you have lawyers

STEVE

Yes. Me. I'm a lawyer. This is not a benefit for the legal profession

JOURNALIST

Who's picking up the bill?

STEVE

Is that an offer because we've got a public fighting fund if any of you want to contribute.

JOURNALIST

You're not paying for it are you Nina?

Nina ignores the question

INT. MUTUAL PERPETUAL.

Gerry, Piggot and a couple of insurance bigwigs are looking down on the press conference from the 25th floor.

PIGGOT

Its absurd. Anyway, he's the church's problem.

GERRY

You think so? And if they lose, who do you think the churches are going to come after?

Piggott ponders this.

TV NEWS BROADCAST/ MONTAGE

A shot of bush fires

NEWS READER
...more on that story later.

CUT BACK to studio

NEWS READER
Meanwhile the suit against God
gathers momentum, religious groups
around the country are gathering to
make their voices heard

INT. CHURCH. WHALEBOAT BAY.

The local pastor is whipping up emotion in a large
congregation.

PASTOR
*"Thou shalt not take the name of
the Lord in Vain." That's the
sixth commandment, "...for the Lord
will not hold him guiltless that
taketh his name in vain". And
neither will I. And neither, I am
sure, will you*

EXT. LARGE PUBLIC RALLY (NEWS FOOTAGE)

FEATURE Steve and Nina in the thick of the action,
surrounded by placards with Steve's name on them.

RADIO (V.O.)
But with each new protester there
seem to be a dozen new supporters
for My Myers and his cause.

CUT
TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN COTTAGE - DAY

Nina switches off the portable radio she's been listening
to

Silence reigns.

Nina stands framed in the doorway of a Hall, looking out
to a sunlit desolate backyard.

INT. COTTAGE

The emptiness is palpable. When she turns and steps into
a room, her footsteps echo.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Nina's POV: The place is spotless, museum-like. A double bed, but only one pillow; bedside tables on either side, but only one lamp. She looks around the bare walls of the room, then leaves.

EXT. FRONT OF HOUSE - DAY

She emerges from the little weatherboard house. On the front fence - an estate agent's sign advertises a forthcoming 'executor's auction'.

NEWS READER

Latest polls show support for Mr
Myers at a record high of 71 per
cent

INT. CARDINALS HOUSE

The Cardinal is watching TV

NEWS READER

....With some experts predicting
that, if successful, this action
will change the shape of how we
deal with the church, God and our
insurance companies.

EXT. STREET.

Steve is being interviewed. The reporters surrounding him seem more heavyweight than before, national and international crews, rather than local media. Steve deals with them more confidently than before.

STEVE

Yes we've not had the response to
our last mailshot but we're looking
at around 800 co-plaintiffs, and a
final figure in the vicinity of 550
million dollars.

EXT. SYNAGOGUE

The chief Rabbi is talking to some of his flock.

RABBI

They're all praying. That's all
they're doing. They should be
praying for better lawyers.

INT. DAVID'S APARTMENT. NIGHT.

Lit by the open fridge, David yawns and swigs milk. The clock says 3am. He curses

In the lounge he flicks on the TV and stares at the ethnic news. The newsreader speaks in Polish without subtitles.

We hear the name Steve Myers and we see film of the pope making a pronouncement.

David can't believe it.

EXT. CARAVAN PARK.

Mayhem. A band of religious extremists, some of whom we recognize from the local pastor's congregation, have attacked the place and are pushing over caravans

The local Police are overwhelmed

Les is trying to strangle a man holding a placard

Jules stands comforting Rebecca.

INT. RENTED OFFICE

Bedlam of a different sort. A photocopier, a fax machine, a couple of volunteers fielding calls, men walking in with files. A courier waiting to take a delivery. Another phone line being installed.

ASSISTANTS

...Yes. I'll get him.

...Yes, he'll be with you shortly. ...Steve! Line three!

...You'll have to ask him yourself ...etc

With so many conflicting demands on his time, Steve is finding it hard to concentrate on any one thing. He closes a law book, slumps back exhausted.

STEVE

I need help

DAVID (V.O.)

Forget it.

INT. DAVID'S APARTMENT. NIGHT

Steve is slumped forwards

STEVE

I can't just forget it. There's other folks depending on me

DAVID

You're damn right. I'm depending you not to make us into a laughing stock. You want me to tell you what to do? I told you right at the start! Stay in Whaleboat bay. Do whatever, legal drafting, a bit of conveyancing and earn the cost of your boat in no time, but oh no you've got to come down here, make the grand gesture. Jesus!.....

STEVE

(placatory)

David...

But David is beyond reasoning with. He's been building up to this rant for some time and now he's on his feet, jabbing his finger at Steve like he's a prisoner in the dock, while denouncing him to some imaginary jury

DAVID

...He says he hates it. Says the law stinks says we all stinks. There's a place for us. Cue song. He gives it all up, heads off into the wilderness to breed crayfish. Fucks up his career, fucks up his marriage then suddenly he reappears as a fully formed human rights lawyer, appearing on chat shows, Taking on Gerry Ryan in the high courts...

STEVE

Oh its jealousy. That's fine. Everyone needs a hobby

DAVID

...While the rest of us run around trying to clear up all the shit, apologizing for having the same surname.

STEVE

David. I came here for your help.
I'm asking you to join me.

DAVID

Oh yes. Phone 1800-ACT-OF-GOD and
join mad Steve Myers in his totally
insane patently unwinnable case
that's going to put him hundreds of
thousands of dollars in debt. So
he can spend the rest of his life
fighting counter-suits and
defamation and incitement to civil
unrest. That's your mess. You
brought this on and now you're
going to get the lesson you should
have got when you were...

STEVE

When I was what?

DAVID

When you were ten. When you were
born.

EXT. DAVID'S APARTMENT BLOCK.

Steve leaves feeling bruised.

REBECCA (O.S.)

Daddy!

He turns to see Jules and Rebecca coming down the street.

STEVE

What are you doing here?

Then he sees Jules' expression

STEVE

What's the matter.

Rebecca cuts in excitedly

REBECCA

We were attacked by a bunch of
loonies. They smashed all the
shower blocks, pushed over the
empty vans...

JULES

Rebecca.

REBECCA

They put weedkiller in the water tank and I almost drank it.

STEVE

What!

REBECCA

...and Arthur did and was sick

JULES

We have to talk.

INT. PUB.

Rebecca is playing a nerve-jangling pinball machine while Steve and Jules try and discuss things.

JULES

The bank rang. We can't pay your loan. We made one payment, we can't pay any more. The caravan park's trashed. The insurance company are giving us the runaround of course. There's no money coming in....

STEVE

I'll see what I can do.

JULES

Oh we've seen what you can do. David says you had an offer.

STEVE

Who told him?

JULES

The question is why didn't you tell us. That was our money Steve and you turned it down.

STEVE

I did it because...

JULES

Because what? You're down here running around after that journalist. Promising God knows what while we do everything we can to...

She becomes tearful.

STEVE
(consoling)
Jules...

JULES
(withdrawing)
No. We've had enough

STEVE
I've got a plan....

JULES
I don't want to hear it. Let me
tell you the plan for once.

JULES
We're going to sell up. Les
reckons he'll get something cheaper
back in Perth.

STEVE
Perth!

JULES
His family's there

STEVE
So how do I see Rebecca?

Rebecca calls over from the machine.

REBECCA
I'm not going to Perth.

JULES
We don't have any choice.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE. NIGHT

Nina's newspaper editor, Hal, is in conversation with
Gerry.

Gerry is doing most of the talking.

On the other side of the desk Hal's mood changes from
light to serious.

INT. OFFICE NIGHT.

Papers everywhere. Steve lies on the couch, unable to

sleep.

INT. NINA'S APARTMENT. EARLY MORNING.

Nina is searching through the newspaper for an article she wrote. She can't find it

The doorbell rings. Nina throws down the newspaper and answers the door. Its Steve, looking agitated.

STEVE

We need to talk.

NINA

(lets him in)

Fine. So talk.

STEVE

I can't do it. I want to go back to Gerry.

NINA

OK. Have a seat. What happened?

STEVE

Nothing. Its just mad Nina. This whole class action. We're going to get roasted.

NINA

Well we will if we don't even fight it. No?

Steve is shaking his head.

NINA

Someone's got to you. What? Tell me.

STEVE

Maybe if I spoke to him. Get some kind of out of court settlement for everyone....

NINA

Steve. You think he'd agree to that now? With 48 hours to go?

STEVE

The family are stuffed. They don't have a bean.

NINA

So. You need money.

She gets up, agitated

STEVE

I don't know what I need. I need to rewind the clock. I need a different life. God.

NINA

You think I pushed you into this

Steve is shaking his head. Nina puts a hand on his shoulder.

NINA

Well I did. And if that's how you feel I apologize

STEVE

Its not that...

NINA

So what I'm saying is do what you have to do. Because its not going to work unless you're committed. So. You know....

He looks up

NINA

Do whats you have to do. And I'll be here for you.

STEVE

You're so unlike my wife I can't tell you.

INT. GERRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Steve crosses to reception.

STEVE

I've come to see Mr Ryan

RECEPTIONIST

Is he expecting you?

STEVE

No. But he'll want to see me. My name's Steve Myers

Follow Steve to a waiting area where he sits as the receptionist talks on the phone.

After a while he looks down the corridor to his right and notices Gerry Ryan coming out of his office in conversation with another man.

Steve gets up from his seat. We follow him down the corridor. As he approaches, he realises to his horror that the man talking to Gerry is his bother David.

At the same moment David looks up.

STEVE

David. What are you doing here?

David looks up.

STEVE

I mean sibling rivalry is one thing but this is fucking ridiculous

DAVID

Rivalry? Its always about you. This is for me.

STEVE

What. Whoring for Gerry Ryan.

GERRY

Is there something I can do for you Mr Myers?

STEVE

No. You've just clarified a few things for me.

GERRY

Fine. We'll see you in court.

As he looks to David and smiles.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE.

Nina comes into her editors office with a copy of the newspaper.

NINA

Why didn't I get called about this?

She lays the newspaper on his desk, as small quarter page feature about Steve Myers uppermost

NINA

It was two thousand words, like you ask for, supposedly for the front of the Review section. Look. They've massacred it and buried it next to the crossword.

HAL

It wasn't the subs, it was me.

Nina blinks

NINA

Do I get to know why.

HAL

Because I don't think its as objective as it might be.

NINA

Its an opinion piece, Hal, like you asked for. And the facts are all facts. You can check them yourself.

HAL

And the fact that you're sleeping with him, where's that written?

NINA

Oh. I see. So what's really going on here?

HAL

I was hoping you'd tell me.

INT. GERRY'S ROOMS - DAY

THE CLERGY are assembled. David watching from by the window. Sam is also there.

GERRY

(respectfully)

You have invested me with a very grave responsibility, gentlemen. If we lose - the church - established religion - will never again be safe.

The clerics look rather startled.

GERRY

This is no mere matter of perceptions...

(he looks at the Cardinal)

It is not a matter for compromise. It is not even a matter of money. It's a matter of belief, of what is truthful, what is right, what will endure or crumble.

(he looks around them)

If you lose, every soul with a grievance will come after you. You'll be penniless within a year. And what would be the price of ignominious defeat? Would you ever be credible again?

They seem to think not.

INT. GERRY'S ROOMS - LATER

Piggot and other insurance types are gathered. Gerry is giving them a similar pep talk, though his tone is less deferential.

GERRY

If the churches lose, they'll hold you responsible. Right? You've stolen their figurehead - "Act of God!"

(he scoffs)

You'll be fighting them till the second coming and juries being what they are you'll lose more than you win. But not if I win this one. Which I will. And I know you won't forget who I did it for.

They look like they won't forget.

EXT. BALCONY OF NINA'S APARTMENT. NIGHT.

Steve and Nina watch the sunset.

NINA (O.S.)

Who are your heroes?

STEVE

Jonathan Swift, William Blake and

Shergar.

NINA
Shergar the racehorse?

STEVE
Now you.

NINA
Didn't he get nobbled.

STEVE
Disappeared, passed into legend.

NINA
Like Elvis

STEVE
Like James Dean. But better on the
corners

NINA
Mine all turned to have feet of
clay. Albert Schweitzer, Ghandi...

STEVE
All men? Interesting.

NINA
....Mother Theresa.

STEVE
She was a man.

NINA
Ah well that explains it.

Steve puts an arm around her. She doesn't seem to
object.

STEVE
You got an explanation for this.
Someone as perfect as you hanging
out with this washed out fisherman

NINA
I don't know. Maybe you remind me
of someone.

STEVE
Oh thanks.

NINA

My dad. Snuggled up in his jumper,
smelling of fish and diesel. This
big rumbling laugh. Jokes. Get
rich schemes. He was mad as a
brush of course.

STEVE

So it runs in the family

She looks up and Steve. Steve looks down at Nina. They
kiss

EXT. COURT HOUSE - DAY

Under a sweltering sun, police struggle to hold apart the
crowds of RIVAL PROTESTERS.

PRO-STEVE DEMONSTRATORS

(Chanting)

No "Acts of God". No "Acts of God"

MAN WITH MEGAPHONE

(Over this)

God is not a criminal! God has
nothing to apologize for!

(Sings)

We shall overcome. We shall over
come!!.

Journalists are broadcasting from just outside the melee,
struggling to make themselves heard above the chanting,
shouting and singing.

JOURNALIST

....Feelings quite obviously
running high here as we wait
outside Court number One for the
appearance of...

Then a car pulls up and Steve and Nina disembark

As they head up the steps to the courtroom, protesters
are trying to break free from the police cordon and
ambush them.

MAN WITH MEGAPHONE

Judas! Judas!

EXTREMIST

Curse God and die!!

Missiles are thrown. Reporters jostle for position

REPORTERS

(Ad lib)

...Mr Myers, are you feeling confident?

...Mr Myers, are you in any way regretting your decision to...

CLOSE ON STEVE as microphones are thrust in his face, flashlights explode around him, placards collide, a thrown bottle shatters on the steps. Its a war zone

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The GALLERY is packed. On one side sits David, Sam, Gerry and their LEGAL ASSISTANTS. On the other side sits Steve.

The opposition have a hundredweight of PAPERS neatly bound with red ribbons. Steve has a computer and a Bible.

INT. JUDGE'S ROBIN ROOM.

The judge is drinking tea and reading the sports pages of his newspaper, waiting for things to settle down. From outside he can hear the sounds of the continuing angry protest. An assistant knocks and enters.

ASSISTANT

Ahem. Its ten past your honour.

JUDGE

I know what time it is. You don't get to be judge without developing a certain range of abilities.

He folds his paper and proceeds to....

INT. COURT - DAY.

CLERK

(announces)

All stand.

The judge enters and takes his seat

CLERK

Steve Myers versus God. Judge Boniface presiding.

Steve gets up to present his case

INT. COURTROOM - DAY.

Steve is examining the first of several insurance executives.

He starts off shuffling papers, trying to find his handwritten list of questions

STEVE

So you've been a board member of
Continental Allied for...

Steve should know this but embarrassingly he's lost the bit of paper

INSURANCE EXECUTIVE 1

Eleven years

STEVE

Yes. Thank You. So tell us....

He pauses briefly to collect a paper he's dropped. Gerry is shaking his head: Steve looks like such an amateur

STEVE

...during these board meetings.
Who decides whether an event is an
act of God?

The Insurance Executive is superior, patrician, relaxed

INSURANCE EXECUTIVE 1

Its not decided on the board. We
have a committee of experts within
the company.

LATER: Another expert on the stand, the same line of questioning

STEVE

Religious experts - they'd be
religious people. These experts.

INSURANCE EXECUTIVE 2

No, not particularly.

STEVE

But they are - um - Specialists

INSURANCE EXECUTIVE 2

Yes.

STEVE

They're specialists in Acts of God?

INSURANCE EXECUTIVE 2

Yes.

LATER. Now PIGGOT is on the stand. The dialogue is continuous

STEVE

By which you mean an Act determined by God?

PIGGOTT

I mean Acts of God.

STEVE

These "specialists": you'd expect one of them to be qualified in Theology.

PIGGOTT

I don't think that follows

STEVE

So you're happy with the fact that these "experts" of yours know nothing about God.

GERRY

Objection. Leading the witness

JUDGE

Sustained.

Steve looks at the jury "How do you get a straight answer from these guys?"

STEVE

(to Gerry)

Your witness.

Gerry rises to cross-examine. He speaks fluently, without notes.

GERRY

Mr Piggot, you are the Vice-Chairman of the Board of Mutual Provident.

PIGGOT

Yes

GERRY

Your distinguished career in insurance spans three decades.

PIGGOT

It does.

GERRY

You are a graduate in history and law, and a lifelong christian

PIGGOT

I'm a member of the board of the Continuing Presbyterian Church. I think that speaks for itself

GERRY

Perhaps you will tell the jury what an "Act of God" means to you?

PIGGOTT

It is a legal expression which is as old as the concept of insurance itself.

GERRY

But it doesn't require, in law, that God caused an event to occur?

PIGGOT

Not at all.

GERRY

It's not to be read literally?

PIGGOT

Certainly not. What it describes is events which do not seem to have a human cause. They constitute risks, therefore, which are unassessable.

GERRY

So why call it God?

Piggot answers in Latin. Gerry says something in Latin. Then the judge says something in Latin which the clergy who all speak latin find incredibly witty and apt.

CARDINAL

Consummatum est!

Piggott is preparing to leave the stand when Steve gets up again.

STEVE

Mr Piggot....

GERRY

Objection. Re-examination.

STEVE

New material your honour. I didn't know Mr Piggot was an historian.

JUDGE

Is it a history question?

STEVE

It is as a matter of fact.

(To Piggot)

Was the sinking of the Titanic an Act of God?

PIGGOT

I'm not that old.

Laughter

STEVE

You mean you don't know.

PIGGOT

It wasn't our company I can't....

STEVE

Well I'll tell you. The Titanic hitting an iceberg was deemed an Act of God.

GERRY

(appeals)

Your honour

STEVE

(continues)

But the insurance company paid anyway, which suggests to me that it has no consistent meaning whatsoever. It means what you decide it will mean, depending how you feel on the day

Cries of 'Hear hear'. Applause in the gallery.

EXT. COURT HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Lawyers and journalists stream out of the courtroom past a great bank of satellite dishes

Reporters from various countries are excitedly filing their reports as Nina and Steve fight their way down the front steps and into a waiting car.

REPORTER#1

... once Mr Myers hit his stride, he displayed the qualities of a formidable lawyer.

(FADE)

REPORTER#2

Some are claiming victory. Some merely saying that he has survived to fight another day

INT. COURTROOM. NEXT DAY

Steve is interviewing the Church of Scotland Moderator. A genial, bespectacled man with dog collar and crucifix

STEVE

We were told yesterday that 'Act of God' is a figure of speech, not meant to be taken literally. Would you agree with that?

MODERATOR

Well if you asked me in church that would be one thing but this is a court of law which makes it an entirely different question.

STEVE

Right. So God means one thing here and another thing there.

The moderator opens his mouth to answer

GERRY

(interrupts)

Objection

Steve Sighs.

LATER

The Primate of the Anglican church is now in the dock.

STEVE

God is the creator.

PRIMATE

Of course.

STEVE

God made the static electricity
which made the lightning that
destroyed my boat.

PRIMATE

Yes and No. .

STEVE

Well what's the No. Because
frankly I'm beginning to wonder
whether the clergy really believe
God exists.

Uproar.

STEVE

If he does exist then surely he's
the same everywhere and responsible
for everything. So why not admit
that.

LATER

Now the Rabbi is in the dock.

STEVE

Let me just establish this. Does
God ever do bad things

RABBI

(long pause)
Define "bad"

LATER

Its been a long day for Steve and he's looking a bit
frayed. The cardinal is in the dock

STEVE

What I'm trying to get, your
eminence is some acknowledgement

that God in his wisdom might do things that we in our ignorance might regard as destructive.

CARDINAL

Yes, but its not that simple, you see...

STEVE

(Interrupts,
frustrated)

Then let me make it simple. God makes unsafe things.

The cardinal won't commit to this

STEVE

He's responsible for loss. Yes or no.

The cardinal is also a bit fed up with all this beating about the bush. He looks across to Gerry, who is shaking his head. The cardinal decides to ignore this.

CARDINAL

Yes.

In the press gallery, bored journalists pick up their pens again as..

Gerry leaps to his feet

GERRY

Objection.

JUDGE

(impatiently)
Over-ruled.

STEVE

He's responsible, in your view for the lightning that sunk my boat

CARDINAL

Yes. And much else beside.

The journalists are scribbling all this down. Gerry turns and whispers to his advisers. The defence is obviously moving into uncharted territory. Meanwhile the cardinal continues, confident of his argument.

CARDINAL

You want to sue him for damages?
Then why not pay him for all the
good things you enjoy. Pay Him for
the air you breathe and the water
you drink. For all the blessings
he bestows. Why not pay for that?

Gerrys team relax. It seems for a moment that the
cardinal has pulled it off.

STEVE

But we have paid. Haven't we?

Rifling through some papers from his desk

STEVE

The global assets of the church are
what. A few hundred billion.
Enough to pay off the third world
debt and more. Wasn't that our
money once?

CARDINAL

No. Its partly donations which the
church accepts in order to do good
works, and ...

STEVE

(waving the figures)

Well either we've overpaid or
you're not doing enough. How else
did you explain these vast profits?

Gerry is on his feet

GERRY

Objection your honour. Mr Myers is
abusing court privilege to indulge
in gratuitous slander.

STEVE

No. I'm asking a question: Why are
there profits if the money's for
good works.

CARDINAL

Well obviously in the modern world,
you can't do good without
possessing assets

STEVE

OK. Let me understand this: You

keep this money for God so he can be effective. So there's a difference between the things he does himself and thing you do as his representatives And the things he does on his own, like lightning, aren't really Gods doing.

He turns to the rest of the clergy, who are looking at the cardinal. The Cardinal doesn't respond

STEVE

I mean why be so selective about what constitutes Gods work, other than because you're afraid of the financial repercussions?

When the cardinal finally speaks his tone is gentle and benign

CARDINAL

Mr Myers. I just want to say this. We sympathize with your loss. We understand your frustration. We recognize that you have a need to apportion blame. Its a normal reaction in times of stress to lash out at the very thing that nurtures and supports us. That's what God does. He provides the spiritual dimension to our lives. He is what gives purpose and meaning to our existence. Can you really conceive of a world without the church? You want to pull down the cathedrals, St Pauls and Notre Dame. To destroy every bible, every religious text, every statue. You really think the world would be richer for it?

INT. BRIEFING ROOM.

The clergy are congratulating the cardinal on his performance.

RABBI

I thought that was pretty good.

PRIMATE

Positive, compassionate.

MODERATOR

It was excellent, just what I wanted to say myself.

GERRY

Yes well I sincerely hope you wont.

His arrival puts a sudden dampener on things

GERRY

All of you. I'm sorry. It might sound good from the pulpit but in court its the last thing we want.

Taking off his wig and his robes, getting tough with the cardinal in particular

GERRY

The point is we don't sympathize with him. We don't understand him. We regard him as a menace to society. We want to crush him, cut his head off. You start arguing about the existence of God or the value of religion, with due respect gentlemen, you've lost before you start.

CARDINAL

So you want us to appear in court but not to say what we believe

GERRY

No I respect your beliefs. I'm asking you not to lower yourself to arguing about them. Your position is simply that God cannot and will not appear in court, and to put him in the dock, to even put his representatives in the witness box, is not only a blasphemy its a damned impertinence. Agreed? Agreed. Excuse me

Then he leaves.

EXT. THE COURTROOM.

Gerry makes for his car, batting away the journalists who try to question him, as if they were so many troublesome mosquitoes

INT. NINA'S FLAT.

A hot, airless evening. Nina is in her underwear, channel surfing on TV.

TV REPORTER

.... the recent spell of hot weather, lightning and constant dry wind from the interior resulting in bushfires in several locations around the state Meanwhile in the high court today, no clear winner emerged after series of...

Steve wanders through shot in Nina's dressing gown studying written depositions.

NINA

Its a good look.

He smiles.

NINA

What have you got

STEVE

Little people getting bludgeoned by big people.

Steve gives her the papers.

STEVE

Arrange the following in order of unfairness.

He gives her the papers then sits in his ridiculous dressing gown, watching her as she reads, as though admiring not just her appearance but the way her mind works.

Finally she looks up, hands the pages back.

He smiles.

INT. COURT-ROOM. DAY

Photographs of the house demolished in the mudslide are being passed around the jury.

CO-PLAINTIFF#1

Its the house I was born in. If we could have rebuilt a part of it...

(tails off)

Steve looks at Piggot

STEVE

But they wouldn't pay

CO-PLAINTIFF

"Act of God."

The audience are moved. Gerry rises to cross examine

GERRY

Mr Jessop. You recognizes the
policy here

Handing an insurance contract to the co-plaintiff

CO-PLAINTIFF

Yes. My one had their slogan on
the front: "We'll look after you."

GERRY

Yes. But there was much more
written inside, wasn't there.

LATER

Another co-plaintiff is on the stand. The photos are of
smashed greenhouses

CO-PLAINTIFF# 2

It was three generations of the
family. Me my son, my grandson.
That garden centre was part of the
family.

STEVE

And not a cent of compensation

CO-PLAINTIFF 2

"Act of God"

Gerry nods sympathetically, rising to cross-examine.

GERRY

Mr Galbraith. When a fire
destroyed your offices, you
received compensation then.

CO-PLAINTIFF

Yes.

GERRY

You still pay insurance on your house, your family car, your life.

O-PLAINTIFF

Yes but...

GERRY

Thank You, no further questions

As he sits, the insurance men learn forwards and whisper to him. "Be tougher. Demolish them " Gerry waves them away. He knows exactly what he's doing

LATER

Another testimony. The Jury are looking at photos of flood damage

CO-PLAINTIFF 3

...It drowned my husband and my daughter. Its took everything I own. And I don't just mean the property. If God did it. Its not the God I pray to.

Steve returns to his seat, casting an accusing look at the insurance men. Gerry gets up, approaches the witness.

GERRY

Mrs Macmahon. I know its very painful for you to be forced to revisit these memories. I'm just wondering why, after a gap of ten years you decided to bring this to court.

CO-PLAINTIFF

Well Mr Myers got in touch and said...

GERRY

I see. So Mr Myers contacted you and pressured you to appear in court alongside him.

STEVE

Objection

CO-PLAINTIFF

Well, not "pressured" but...

GERRY

Thank You that's all

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE

Nina knocks and enters. Her editor Hal is waiting to speak to her with another man, the newspaper owner.

INT. GERRY'S ROOMS.

Its the lunchtime recess. Gerry eats prawns and salad. Piggot isn't feeling hungry

PIGGOT

To hell with no further questions.
Its right there in their policy!
They signed it. Act of God. Tell
them to bugger off!

Gerry smiles at this, which makes piggot even angrier

PIGGOT

And fuck the church's
sensibilities. You keep saying
that we're the ones who are going
to lose 300 million in claims if
this circus backfires. Meanwhile
Steve Myers hauls in Tom Dick and
Harry to give their testimony. And
the media treat him as some sort of
hero!

Gerry slowly puts down his food

GERRY

But we know differently

PIGGOT

Yes. So what are you going to do
about it

GERRY

I promise you, before I'm finished
with Mr Myers he'll be begging for
a merciful death. I think you'll
find then that the others are
largely irrelevant

INT. NEWSPAPER. DAY.

PIGGOTT (V.O.)
What about the girlfriend?

GERRY (V.O.)
I think she might still prove to be
our best asset.

Nina is being escorted from her office by security guards. A junior carries boxes of files. The staff witness her departure with sympathy.

EXT. COURTROOM.

Strong winds are building. A gust blows over a statelite dish as one of the reporters tries to file his report as, once again, the trials main protagonists fight their way up the steps to the courtroom.

AUSSIE REPORTER
Unprecedented hot, Westerly winds from the red centre continue to fan the bush fires which have broken out in the north and east of the state. Meanwhile, as the trial enters its second week

USHER (V.O.)
Call Steve Myers

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY.

Steve walks to the stand, not entirely surprised at being summonsed. The gallery is enthralled.

STEVE
I swear to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth.
So help me God.

Gerry pauses to let this oath sink in. Then:

GERRY
Tell me Mr Myers, have you ever been in the witness box before

STEVE
No

GERRY
You've never been in trouble with the police.

STEVE

Not really. No.

GERRY

Or with any other authorities.

STEVE

Not that I can remember.

GERRY

You obey the law, get on with your neighbours, pay your taxes...

STEVE

I think so.

GERRY

How much tax

STEVE

The normal amount

GERRY

Normal for a fisherman.

STEVE

Yes.

GERRY

And you're quite a successful fisherman.

STEVE

Average.

GERRY

Thank You. That's all for the moment.

Steve returns to his seat, surprised that this was all so painless.

GERRY

Call PC Dixon.

LATER

A uniformed policeman in the dock

GERRY

So in fact this was a conviction for possession of marijuana.

POLICEMAN

Two separate convictions on that count actually.

GERRY

But otherwise a blameless life

POLICEMAN

No. He had one drunk and disorderly. One obstructing a bulldozer...

This is all news to Nina

GERRY

So. Four criminal convictions, that's quite a lot isn't it?

STEVE

Your honour, its not me whose on trial here and besides....

GERRY

(Over this)

Your honour, Mr Myers has brought a case which in many countries would be a capital offence. Surely the almighty has the right to question the characters of his accusers.

JUDGE

I'm not sure its the almighty you're speaking for Mr Ryan

GERRY

I am but his instrument, your honour.

The judge raises an eyebrow, but waives the objection.

JUDGE

I'll accept that character is relevant

GERRY

So, Constable Dixon, Would you say Mr Myers had a grudge against society.

Steve jumps to his feet again

STEVE
Objection. Leading the witness

JUDGE
Sustained

GERRY
Sorry
(To the policeman)
In your own words, describe Mr
Myers attitude

POLICEMAN
I'd say he had a grudge against
society.

Steve shakes his head in disbelief. Nina is looking for
the jury's reaction to all this.

LATER.

A Tax Officer is in the dock

GERRY
So you're saying that he paid no
tax at all in the last three years.

TAX OFFICER
None

STEVE
Objection

JUDGE
Over-ruled.

GERRY
And this is normal for an averagely
successful fisherman.

TAX OFFICER
Not if he wants to avoid
investigation

GERRY
So you're planning to investigate
him?

TAX OFFICER
He's being investigated as we
speak.

GERRY
No further questions.

Steve puts his head in his hands

GERRY
(Over this)
Call Pastor Keenan.

Nina looks across at Steve: "Now what"

We recognize Pastor Keenan as the minister from Whaleboat Bay. As he heads for the witness box, Gerry takes another file from his team and whispers to David as he does so.

GERRY
We need to talk. I'm putting you
on the stand later on.

DAVID
When? To say what.

GERRY
To confirm that your brother told
you he was running a scam.

DAVID
He didn't.

GERRY
Yes he did. Don't you remember?

Then he turns to examine Pastor Keenan

INT. JULES HOUSE. WHALEBOAT BAY.

Sitting among the packing cases, Les, Jules and Rebecca are watching a news report on the trial, featuring a court artists drawings of the people involved.

REBECCA
Makes him look like a criminal

JULES
I think its quite a good likeness

REPORTER (V.O.)
Under questioning, the Pastor for
Whaleboat bay diocese, admitted to
doubts about domestic arrangements
involving Mr Myers, his ex wife and

her de facto husband.

JULES

What!

REPORTER (V.O.)

...and queried whether this was a suitable environment for a twelve-year old girl to grow up in.

JULES

I don't believe this. Switch it off.

REBECCA

Wait. He's talking about me.

Jules switches it off herself.

EXT. COURT HOUSE. DAY.

The reporters are battling to file their reports in strong, dusty winds.

FRENCH REPORTER

...rumeurs de scandale, quelques uns bien serieux..

CNN REPORTER

.... questions about Mr Myers motives and character which threaten to derail the entire prosecution ...

INT. JULES FLAT.

Steve comes in, raving indignantly, Nina follows

STEVE

Its classic character assassination. Make me look like some kind of psychopathic, drug-dealing, child-molesting, mass murdering...

NINA

Its alright. I understand. We all did a bit of mass murder when we were younger.

Steve smiles, appreciating this

STEVE

Just as long as there's nothing
else

(thinks)

My cooking.

NINA

Then we really are sunk.

INT. COURTROOM. DAY

Steve and Nina look like they've weathered the storm .
Gerry gets up to summon his next witness

GERRY

I'd like to call....

His gaze lingers on David then shifts to....

GERRY

....Nina Denmark.

Nina is caught of guard. Steve squeezes her hand
reassuringly as she gets up to take the stand.

GERRY

Your name is Nina Denmark.

NINA

That's right.

GERRY

And your current occupation?

NINA

Unemployed.

This is news to Steve.

GERRY

You were formerly employed as....?

NINA

I was a leader writer on the
Courier.

GERRY

And you decided to leave or...

NINA

I was fired.

Steve is shocked.

GERRY

Do you know why?

NINA

No

GERRY

Might it be anything to do with your involvement with Mr Myers campaign.

NINA

It might be

GERRY

...his campaign to extort as much money as possible from the churches and insurance companies by

STEVE

Objection your honour.

JUDGE

Sustained.

Gerry changes his line of questioning

GERRY

Denmark. Interesting surname. Tell me. Was Anton Dienmarik any relation?

NINA

He was my father.

GERRY

The court may not remember Anton Deinmarik. Perhaps you could remind us what your father did.

NINA

He was a fishmonger.

GERRY

I don't mean his career Mis Denmark. I mean the crime that put him in Long bay jail for five years.

Steve looks at Nina. He knows nothing of this

GERRY

Miss Denmark?

NINA

He faked his own death.

GERRY

Sorry can't hear you.

NINA

He had a car crash and pretended....

GERRY

Ah yes I remember now: he insured himself for what was it, two hundred thousand dollars then drove his car off the road and did a runner

A shock-wave runs through the audience. Steve looks stunned. Nina's response is addressed to him more than anyone

NINA

All he was trying to do was....

GERRY

Is that what he did or isn't it?

NINA

Yes but...

GERRY

And the crime would have gone unnoticed but for the insurance investigators from Mutual Perpetual, the very company Miss Denmark's "friend" over there first tried to extort money from....

Steve is in shock, too gob-smacked to object

JUDGE

(prompts)

Mr Myers?

STEVE

(weakly)

Objection.

JUDGE

Sustained

GERRY

Actually the story's not finished yet. Is it Miss Denmark? Because the money your father swindled from his insurers was never recovered. Was it. Which raises some interesting questions about how you may have been funding this court case.

NINA

Its my own money

GERRY

My question is where you got it from

NINA

I earned it.

GERRY

And how did you earn it? By staying quiet for daddy? By protecting his little nest egg? By digging it up after he died and giving it to Steve Myers here!

Steve can see the whole case toppling around him

JUDGE

Mr Myers?

STEVE

I'd like an adjournment please.

JUDGE

Yes I think that's enough for one day.

Everyone gets up to leave.

INT. COURTROOM CORRIDORS. DAY

Steve and Nina walk down the corridors to a briefing room, past a number of co-plaintiffs who urgently want to know whats going on. Steve barely notices them

INT. BRIEFING ROOM. DAY

NINA

It was my money. I remortgaged the flat.

Steve says nothing

NINA

He's talking about my father Steve. Its not about me. Its irrelevant

STEVE

Nina. Its totally relevant. Obviously it is.

She hangs her head

NINA

Well. I guess we were both economical with the truth.

STEVE

(furious)

Mine had nothing to do with the case. This is major insurance fraud!

(beat)

You didn't tell me you were sacked. You didn't tell me about your father. What else don't I know? Is everything a lie. What am I supposed to believe

Nina looks away. Steve storms out, slamming the door behind him.

EXT. DOWN-TOWN DUSK

An hot, unpleasant, murky evening. A pall of smog from the approaching bush fires is turning the evening sky brownish yellow

Steve walks past a bank of TV screens in a shop window.

On TV: Alternating images of a soot-blackened FIREMAN describing a rampant bush-fire and STEVE fielding questions

from reporters. They both wear the same desperate, embattled expression.

Arthur licks Steve's hand

STEVE

I'm dead meat, Arthur - you may as well eat me now

INT. RADIO STUDIO.

Nina sits in twilight, talking to the microphone

NINA

Well we all make mistakes. My dad made a mistake, I guess that's public knowledge now, and I've made a few myself, like not levelling with people who are close to me and, conversely, trusting people who couldn't care less, like the bosses of this radio station who have just regretfully asked me to clear my desk

He bosses are watching from the adjoining suite. Nina smiles at them.

NINA

Thanks guys for at least giving me the opportunity to appear on air one last time. Personal regrets aside I will always associate this station with atmosphere of venality, corruption and persistent low-grade sexual harassment. I'll be sad to leave.

INT. DAVID'S FLAT

The doorbell rings and David answers it. Its Steve

STEVE

Can I come in.

David hesitates

STEVE

I'm fucked.

DAVID

Join the club

As he stands back to let Steve in

LATER

Steve stands looking out towards the city outskirts and .
On every side we can see the lights of bush fires.

DAVID

Gerry's putting me on the stand
tomorrow - he wants me to testify
that you told me the whole thing
was a scam.

STEVE

That's a lie

DAVID

Makes no difference. If I deny it
he'll accuse me of perjury, make it
look like I'm protecting my
brother.

STEVE

Sorry David. Really. I should
never have thrown myself across
your career path.

DAVID

Well Nina did the same thing to
you.

STEVE

No, no. She was right. If she'd
told me before I'd have seized on
the excuse to bale out. She knows
me too well.

DAVID

You seem quite fond of her.

He's more than that but he says nothing.

DAVID

So what's the plan now.

STEVE

God knows

INT. DAVID'S SPARE BEDROOM

Steve lies alone, not sleeping.

INT. NINA'S BEDROOM

Nina lies alone. Not sleeping.

INT. DAVID'S ROOM

David lies alone, not sleeping.

INT. DAVID'S LOUNGE

Arthur snores, dreaming of rabbits

EXT. THE CITY. DAWN

High shot: A great mass of smoke and cloud has gathered above the city outskirts and is beginning to blanket the town. As with the Ash Wednesday fires in Melbourne, it looks like the end of the world.

REPORTER#1 (V.O.)

...a record high combined with strong Westerley winds producing what the state government are now describing as a natural disaster, with fires penetrating as far in as Hornsby and The pall of airborne dust and cinders extending all the way to the coast.

EXT. SUBURBAN HIGHWAY

Les's car is part of a long tailback of traffic being diverted by police and fire brigade, away from an area of bush fire and towards the centre of town. We see Rebecca Jules and Les looking agitated

REPORTER#2

With rescue services already stretched to breaking point a state of civil alert has been declared in the suburbs of Glenhaven, Blacktown, Waroonga, Hornsby, Smithfield....

EXT. THE COURTROOM

Covering their faces against wind-blown ash and dust the protagonists hurry up the steps.

Behind them, Jules, Les and Rebecca are recognized and accosted

REPORTER#3

Meanwhile in the high court, Steve Myers Case against God seems certain to collapse following yesterdays revelations about his constant companion, journalist Nina Denmark...

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

The wind howls outside, rattling the courtroom windows.

Steve arrives at his place in front of the crowded courtroom. He looks suddenly lost and alone

BESIDE HIM: The seat previously occupied by Nina is now empty.

BEHIND HIM: The co-plaintiffs can no longer meet his eye

ACROSS THE PASSAGEWAY, Gerry's team are confident of success. David sits hemmed in amongst them, like a hostage.

IN FRONT OF STEVE: Someone has left a paper on the desk. It reads: *Stress reduction kit: 1. Place on firm surface. 2. Bang head here.*

Steve recognizes the handwriting. He smiles despite himself, Turns and scans the gallery.

IN THE GALLERY: Rebecca, sitting between Les and Jules. The home team. Rebecca gives him the thumbs up. Steve is moved

USHER

All rise.

The judge takes his seat. Gerry strides onto the floor, impatient to deliver the coup de grace.

Steve is nervously looking for Nina.

GERRY

Your honour I'd like to call...

He's interrupted by a slight kerfuffle at the back of the courtroom.

NINA (O.S.)

Sorry. Sorry.

Nina has arrived late. Coming up the centre aisle she meets Steve's eyes.

Steve and Nina face each other. Nina looks fragile and underslept. Everyone is looking at them. Steve's face betrays nothing of his feelings. He turns to the Judge

STEVE

Actually, your honour. I've still
to cross-examine Miss Denmark.

With a dismissive shrug, Gerry vacates the floor.

Steve rises as

Nina takes the stand. She's nervous, half suspecting
that Steve is going to turn on her

Outside the wind is raging like a monster. Throwing dust
and cinders at the courtroom windows.

Jules can hardly bear to watch. Steve looks very exposed
and friendless down there

JUDGE

Mr Myers?

Steve looks at Nina

STEVE

Maybe we should start with your
father.

NINA

Well, what's to know. He drove a
fish truck up and down the ocean
road for twenty years, selling from
the back of the truck. We weren't
rich but we got by. Then Mum got
sick and he had to give up work to
look after us.

But for the rattling of the windows, a hush has fallen
over the courtroom

NINA

The medical bills were more than he
could handle. Normally he was
honest as the day is long but I
guess we all have a breaking point.

Somewhere a window blows open and is slammed shut again

NINA

Its true he faked his own death.
And he made money from it That's
true as well. But it cost him.
Because afterwards he could never
see us again.

She looks up at Jules, who finally understands what her
departure will mean to Steve

Outside the wind stronger, battering at the windows like
a wild beast trying to gain entry.

NINA

He finally showed up at Mum's
funeral. After all that time, and
us all believing he was dead. The
police came the next day. He got
five years. Died before he was out
of prison.

She's trying to keep herself together.

NINA

(directly to Steve)

You asked why I never told you.
Maybe because I never really saw it
as a crime. I didn't. I saw it as
an act of love.

Steve smiles. Its a smile of forgiveness. In that
moment, for the two of them its as if the courtroom, the
storm, all these other people don't exist.

A long silence

JUDGE

Ahem. Do you have a question for
the witness Mr Myers.

STEVE

Only one that matters
(Still staring at
Nina)
Do you love me.

GERRY

(guffaws)

Oh Pl-ease! Objection your honour.
What is going on here?

STEVE

I wasn't speaking to you Mr Ryan.

Gerry is momentarily deflated. Nina smiles

NINA

Yes. I do

GERRY

Your honour I think you'll agree
this has so little relevance to the
proceedings that

STEVE

No. This is all that's relevant.
I suddenly realize. Don't you see
it This is the one bloody thing
that matters!

As he speaks there's a massive crash and one of the side
windows blows in. People scream, flee, duck for cover as
dust smoke and debris swirl round the courtroom.

The Judge looks stunned. The clergy mutter prayers as...

A BIRD is flung into the court-room through the hole
where the window once was.

It flaps around, in the swirling dust and screaming
confusion finally coming to rest on the desk in front of
the judge

PRIMATE

Its a sign

MODERATOR

Its a miracle.

GERRY

Its a fucking seagull for goodness
sake.

(shouting above the
din)

Your honour I move for an
adjournment.

JUDGE

No damn it. I'll hear the last of
this. Mr Myers. My Myers.

A couple of security men manage to slam the shutters
closed. A semblance of order is restored.

JUDGE

(To Steve)
You were saying.

Steve looks around him. The court has changed. Everything is comically askew. Papers and debris float gently to the floor. In the midst of it, Nina, hair all tousled, smiling.

JUDGE
(to Steve)
You were saying...?

The bird alights in front of the judge

STEVE
I was thinking. What a miracle it is, that in all this crazy confusion two people can just find each other.

Gerry sits down in protest but Steve isn't talking to him, He's talking to the jury now, to the gallery, to the whole court:

STEVE
Its just suddenly struck me how incredible that is. I mean more than lighting hitting a boat, more than a drowning man being spat out by the sea. Its astonishing.

Sun is lancing through the shutters, dancing in the dust-filled air, like the room is full of gold

STEVE
I do love you. I really do.

GERRY
You're honour, forgive me. I thought we were discussing Acts of God.

STEVE
We are, you just don't understand the words. You people talk about "God". You mean - what - some dried up clause in a legal contract you can point at when you're arguing about money.

He's inspired, suddenly full of certainty

STEVE

You really think that's what God
is.

He throws this at the clergy. At the insurance men. At
piggot in particular

STEVE

Because I think God is Love. And
much as I hope this trial will
continue the truth is I can no
longer be part of it. Partly
because I now realize I've been
more than compensated already.

As he speaks the shutters swing open again. The storm
has passed. The bird leaves its perch and flies out into
daylight.

AT THE FRONT OF THE GALLERY, Rebecca stands up and
applauds.

Jules joins her, blinking back tears, then Les and
then...

THE REST OF THE AUDIENCE, row upon row rising to their
feet behind Steve's family. A standing ovation as

STEVE AND NINA meet on the courtroom floor and kiss.

THE CLERGY smile uncertainly. THE INSURANCE MEN frown
and...

GERRY sits shaking his head among the papers and broken
glass.

EXT. COURT HOUSE - DAY.

The brown cloud has lifted, the sun is peeking through as
People stream out of the courtroom. Reporters racing to
file their copy

GLAMOROUS ITALIAN REPORTER

Amore! Dio amore! Amore!

CNN REPORTER

....Amazing scenes in court and
outside.

ABC REPORTER

Something very special happened

here today... something profound.

FINANCE REPORTER

A shudder just ran up the spine of the financial, as it was leaked that the Churches are considering a multi-billion suit against the international insurance industry.

Steve emerges with his arm around Nina.

REPORTER

Mr Myers. A moral victory would you say? Where does it go from here.

Nina sees Jules and goes over to talk to her

REPORTER

(To Steve)

Who'll be representing your co-plaintiffs.

STEVE

Speak to my Brother.

Elsewhere on the courtroom steps, David is holding a press conference of his own

DAVID

We'll be extending the case to take in America and Great Britain, looking for combined damages of I don't know. Two hundred million.

PIGGOT AND HIS LAWYERS have emerged from the courtroom looking decidedly unhappy with things.

ON STEVE feeling strangely disassociated from the great hubbub around him. His arm is around nina and nothing else matters. The chattering reporters, the thrusting mikes.

He sees a conversation going on between Les, Jules and Rebecca, trying to make out what's going on between them. Rebecca is jumping up and down with glee.

She runs to Steve through the press of reporters.

REPORTER

Dad! We're staying! Mum says we're staying!

Steve embraces her, looking to Jules for clarification. She just smiles. A smile of forgiveness. Its like a ray of sunlight.

Fade in softly, the music of van Morrison

INT.COUNCIL OF CHURCHES. DAY

Gerry pours a whisky and drinks it, ignoring the Primate's outstretched hand.

MODERATOR

It was a victory of sorts wasn't it

GERRY

You got brained.

MODERATOR

Ah. I thought as much.

PRIMATE

I don't feel any sense of jubilation, I must say.

MULLAH

Trust in God but tie up your camel
- our lawyers made a big mistake.

RABBI

Yes we should have said at the beginning: God does not exist.
Case dismissed

PRIMATE

Pinch me. Tell me I'm dreaming.

We leave them debating - pulling back through a stained-glass window, through the clouds and into the heavens and a CELESTIAL POV.

HIGHER AND HIGHER - Van Morrison over:

VAN MORRISON

*In deep confusion, in great
despair. When I reach out to him,
He is there. When I am lonely as I
can be. I know that God shines his
light on me*

EXT. WHALEBOAT - DAY

Then down through FLUFFY clouds, onto

A LITTLE BOAT in Whaleboat Bay.

CLOSING - we see Steve rowing, Nina at the back, Arthur navigating.

NINA

Let's see Shanghai before they ruin it.

STEVE

How? I owe Les a hundred grand.

NINA

Its sorted. I've got an offer of 250 for your story.

(he stops rowing)

350 for ours.

Steve gazes at her, melting. Then turns to Arthur

STEVE

What do you think, Arthur? You want to go to Shanghai?

Arthur thinks, then wags his tail.

NINA

Don't they eat dogs in Shanghai?

Arthur stops wagging his tail.

STEVE

Come on Arthur. What's life without a little bit of risk?

VAN MORRISON

Reach out to him,

(reach out to him)

He'll be there.

(he'll be there)

With him your troubles you can share. If you live the life you love. You get the blessing from above.

RUN TITLES

VAN MORRISON

He heals the sick and he heals the lame. Says you can do it too in Jesus name. He'll lift you up and

*turn you around. Put your feet
back on higher ground.*