

FADE IN:

EXT. CITYSCAPE - DAY

A shot of the Manhattan skyline. The camera pans past the Empire State building and tilts down over Rockefeller Center.

EXT. STUDIO BUILDING - SAME

From the outside, we see the glass front of a street-level studio set. Catchy MUSIC plays as a title zooms up over a gathering crowd. It reads "A.M.eric-a - with Andrew Talbot."

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

This morning on A.M.eric-a, the MacGruder-Grundy family faces financial straits... Andrew Talbot interviews the family and talks live in our downtown studio with their father, Caleb.

The catchy music fades and we...

CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Andrew Talbot, a typical thirty-something talk show INTERVIEWER, sits near CALEB MACGRUDER-GRUNDY, a well-dressed man in his sixties.

INTERVIEWER

Good morning. Welcome to the show, everyone. This morning, we'll be talking to one of America's most interesting families. Here with me in the studio is Caleb MacGruder-Grundy--millionaire inventor and father of four very interesting children...

The interviewer turns to face his subject.

INTERVIEWER (CONT'D)

Mr. MacGruder-Grundy--

CALEB

Please, call me Caleb.

INTERVIEWER

Now, your fortune--a immense fortune that has attracted the attention and awe of the American public for years, and one that has brought your family to a sort of celebrity status--

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CALEB

Well, the fortune, yes... But also, I think, the special impressive talents of my children have brought that attention...

INTERVIEWER

Yes, indeed.... But the fortune. Your family initially made its millions through an invention. That envelope with the little plastic window in it...

CALEB

No, no... Those had already been invented, actually. My invention was the envelope with the window but without the plastic...

INTERVIEWER

(taken off guard)

So, wait... Before your invention, you say, there already was an envelope with a window in it?

CALEB

Yes, but with the plastic.

INTERVIEWER

So then, essentially, you... um... invented the idea of removing the plastic.

CALEB

Yes, that's right... I invented the kind without the plastic.

The interviewer looks around at the crew and the off-screen audience, as though wondering if anyone shares his confusion. He composes himself and continues.

INTERVIEWER

So, you mentioned your children. And really, that's a part of what we're here to ask you about today.... The MacGruder-Grundy fortune is nearly spent. You've lost a great deal by investing in your children's ventures--

CALEB

I'd've lost far more if I'd put money in the stock market.

The interviewer chuckle briefly along with Caleb.

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INTERVIEWER

But seriously. What's on the agenda for the MacGruder-Grundy's at this critical point?

CALEB

Well, it's been close to forty years since I've had to worry much about it. But now that I do, I have a plan with a great deal of potential. I think it will all work out for us in the end...

INTERVIEWER

I bet our audience is eager to hear what that plan is. But first, let's talk to the MacGruder-Grundy children.

MONTAGE - MACGRUDER-GRUNDY FAMILY

A series of family photos rolls across the screen. The four children--Michael, Mitch, Ursula, and Millicent--are seen at various ages.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

Some analysts have outright blamed them for emptying the family coffers with meaningless projects and wildly unsuccessful ventures... We wanted to give them the chance to tell us a little bit more about what they do, and why...

CUT TO:

EXT. KINGSTOWN MUNICIPAL BUILDING - DAY

A small town government building in Kingstown, Texas. A single pickup truck is parked outside.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

First, we visited Michael MacGruder-Grundy, conductor of the Kingstown Symphony Orchestra in Kingstown, Texas.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

A door with a glass pane that reads "Kingstown Symphony Orchestra" opens, and we move inside. Beyond the door is a tiny office dominated by a desk buried in stacks of sheet music. Over one of the stacks, we can barely make out the baldpate of MICHAEL MACGRUDER-GRUNDY.

Beneath the visible portion of Michael's head appears the caption: "Michael MacGruder-Grundy, Composer and Conductor."

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INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

Hello? Anyone--

Michael stands up and walks around the desk to greet the crew. He is a skinny, meticulous looking thirty-something man with a maestro mustache, wearing an a well-pressed suit.

MICHAEL

Please, come in, won't you? Welcome to the offices of the Kingston Symphony Orchestra...

The interviewer steps into the shot to shake Michael's hand.

INTERVIEWER

Well, that leads right to my first question, Mr. MacGrud--

MICHAEL

Please, call me Michael.

INTERVIEWER

From what I understand, there is no symphony orchestra here in Kingston...

MICHAEL

Well, in the technical sense, that's true, I suppose...

INTERVIEWER

The technical sense?

MICHAEL

I mean, sure. We don't have a full orchestra here... We're lacking a bit in--

INTERVIEWER

Technicalities aside, are their any musicians connected with a city orchestra here?

MICHAEL

No musicians, no... But we do have, well, me. I'm the conductor of the orchestra.

INTERVIEWER

The nonexistent orchestra...

MICHAEL

I'm the conductor.

They share an awkward pause.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

INTERVIEWER

How does that work exactly? I mean, what does a conductor do without musicians to actually, you know, play the music?

MICHAEL

Well, I see myself really as a sort of... cultural envoy. As I see it, it's my job to bring new musical experiences to the people of Kingstown. For example, this summer's program--which I put together--includes pieces by Elgar, Shashtakovich, and Rimsky-Korsakov. I want to introduce the public to artists they may not already know, and who they might not find in the local music stores. Which--not to sound like too much of an obscurantist--don't really carry a wide array of periods and styles...

INTERVIEWER

(clearing his throat)

Last week... You conducted a performance of Stravinsky's "Firebird Suite."

MICHAEL

Yes. The "Firebird," and also some Chopin pieces that Stravinsky arranged for the opening night of "The Rite of Spring" at the Elysee Theater in 1913...

INTERVIEWER

And how did the audience react?

MICHAEL

They seemed a little... Well, disappointed, frankly...

INTERVIEWER

Why do you think that is?

MICHAEL

Well, I think it may have had to do with not being able to hear the music...

INTERVIEWER

Because no one was playing it...

MICHAEL

I mean, I could hear it--in my head, as it were. And I tried to convey with my conducting the beauty of the music and--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

INTERVIEWER

Convey it through your conducting?

MICHAEL

Yes, exactly. As a composer myself, I see conducting as the actualization of a musical potentiality. You see, music--any music--is really a sort of potentiality. It's its purest when it's, in fact, not being played--when it's flawless, on the sheets or in the mind, untouched by the flaws of actual instruments or musicians. But I suspect the audience wasn't really with me on that...

INTERVIEWER

They just couldn't hear it...

MICHAEL

Yes, I suppose... So for the summer program, I guess I'll have to come up with some way of conveying it better... If that doesn't work, though, I suppose we could just take the shortcut and hire some musicians...

INTERVIEWER

Is the township of Kingstown--the town government, I mean... Are they paying you to conduct their orchestra?

Michael seems not to understand the question. He stares blankly at the interviewer.

CUT TO:

EXT. GOLDEN GATE PARK - DAY

We see the Golden Gate Bridge in the distance and people playing on the lawn in the park.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

Next we met up with Caleb's youngest daughter, Ursula, in San Francisco. For many years, she's been working as a translator, but her recent work has been a great expense to the family...

We approach a tree, beneath which sits URSULA MACGRUDER-GRUNDY, a pretty brunette in her late twenties, with a laptop and stack of English dictionaries. She looks up from her typing and greets the crew.

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TITLE: "Ursula MacGruder-Grundy, English Translator"

URSULA

(cheerily)

Hey there! Good to see you! Jeez, sorry to drag you out the park--to insist that we meet here. But, you know, sitting in some dark place all day, a dimly lit apartment or a restaurant, it just isn't for me... It's not my cup of tea.

The interviewer joins her beneath the tree and leans over to shake her hand.

INTERVIEWER

Nice to meet you. It's lovely out here, really...

URSULA

Oh, yeah. I come here almost every day. Almost daily.

INTERVIEWER

You've been in San Francisco for how long now?

URSULA

Just five years. Half a decade. I was in D.C. before--in our nation's capital--back when I was a translator for the White House.

INTERVIEWER

Now you're freelance, eh?

URSULA

So to speak... Basically, I just got fed up with the politics of translating in Washington. And I've always wanted to translate literature--the great works or any sort of fiction, depending on the bookstore you frequent--more than what some Senator has to say, you know?

INTERVIEWER

Now... But the interesting thing about your translating--

URSULA

Oh, here we go... Okay, I mean, there's certain things I don't want to talk about here... You know, because of the lawsuits--the court cases...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

INTERVIEWER

Two of them, right?

URSULA

Three... The big publishing houses, it seems--what with their their ridiculous clinging to outdated copyrights, their intellectual property laws and all that--they're just all over me. That is to say, I'm being inundated with litigation.

INTERVIEWER

The issue is your English-to-English translations. Some say that you've merely changed the wording, or in some cases transcribed, the works in question--D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*, Tom Clancy's *Hunt for the Red October*, among others. An eclectic mix...

URSULA

Yeah... I mean, this is my vocation--my livelihood. In D.C., I translated for the British Prime Minister when he visited, for God's sake! We've seen that there's often a need for intra-English translation--translation within our own language--just as much as there is a need for extra-anglophonic, or foreign, translations... English-to-English translators, in fact, have played a role in the amelioration, or betterment, of Anglo-American relations. But when I translate, say, Tom Clancy's work into Elizabethan dialect, I get sued!

INTERVIEWER

But why translate contemporary works into older dialects or--as with your recent translation of Bill Clinton's biography--into modern Standard American English. Is it worth the eight million dollars lawsuit?

URSULA

Absolutely, yes. Translating, it seems to me--foreign translating, that is--is always teaching the most obvious lesson. That we sometimes speak different languages.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

URSULA (CONT'D)

My work, on the other hand, shows that we just as often speak a similar or the same language... I, for one, find that enormously reassuring...

INTERVIEWER

But why *Hunt for the Red October* then?

URSULA

Haven't you always wanted to hear Jack Ryan speak in the language of the Bard?

CUT TO:

EXT. MACGRUDER-GRUNDY SPACECORP HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Nestled amid the buildings of midtown Manhattan we see the tall, sleek glass headquarters of Mitch MacGruder-Grundy's company, Spacecorp.

INTERVIEWER

Back in New York, I spoke with Caleb's son Mitch, the youngest of the family-- though sometimes I wondered if we spoke the same language. Three years ago, Mitch started Spacecorp, the most costly of the MacGruder-Grundy's ventures.

INT. OFFICE - SAME

Wearing a pair of torn jeans and a Dead Kennedy's T-shirt, MITCH MACGRUDER-GRUNDY sits behind an imposing obsidian desk.

TITLE: "Mitchell MacGruder-Grundy, CEO, Spacecorp"

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

What exactly does your company do, Mr. Mac--

MITCH

Call me Mitch.

INTERVIEWER

What's your product?

MITCH

We produce moon suits, moon rovers, moon colony shelter units, and other moon equipment...

INTERVIEWER

Moon equipment?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

For living... on the moon...

INTERVIEWER

I see... Mister--Mitch... Some say that this company is the biggest money pit ever dug by a MacGruder-Grundy. What have your sales been like so far?

MITCH

Pretty slim. But we're hopeful that once some colonies get started up there--on the moon--these products will be selling like hotcakes.

INTERVIEWER

(growing uncomfortable)

Usually companies make products to fill a current demand. Your company seems to make products to meet a demand that doesn't yet exist.

MITCH

True, true... We're always looking forward--at potentialities. We're ahead of the curve...

INTERVIEWER

But couldn't some of these products be sold based on a current need? The Spacecorp Moon Rover, for example. I mean, couldn't you sell it as a dune buggy, or as an upscale golf cart?

MITCH

(incredulously)

A golf cart? Don't you get it? It's supposed to be used on the moon!

EXT. TRUCKSTOP DINER - NIGHT

A full moon shines in the night sky.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

Always looking to the future... Trying to stay ahead of the curve.

The shot tilts down from the moon, and we see the front of an almost typical looking diner with a neon sign that reads "Cafe Bagatelle." The parking lot is half-filled with semis and tow trucks.

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INTERVIEWER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 So too with Caleb's eldest daughter,
 Millicent, owner and proprietress of the
 Cafe Bagatelle, off Exit 129 of
 Interstate 94 in Wisconsin.

INT. TRUCKSTOP DINER - SAME

A burly OLD TRUCKER wearing a Greenbay Packers cap chews on the stub end of a stogie as he talks to the camera. Behind him, the well-dressed kitchen staff hustle back and forth with plates of haute cuisine. The trucker seems bewildered by the parchment-like menu he's holding.

OLD TRUCKER
 (mumbling)
 I just... I tell you what, I don't know a
 damn thing what's written on there...

The camera racks focus to the kitchen door behind him. A thin, skittish woman in her thirties, MILLICENT, wearing a white chef's hat, barks orders to a waiter over the zinc counter between the kitchen and dining area.

TITLE: "Millicent Ravachol-MacGruder-Grundy, Cuisiniere"

INT. KITCHEN - FOLLOW

We move back into the kitchen. Millicent looks around the room critically. She glares at one of her assistants who is cutting onions.

MILLICENT
 If you mince them like that, how on earth
 do you expect to use them in the tomato
 coulis?... For Christ sake, give me that.

She grabs the knife from the shocked assistance and begins mincing angrily and at twice the speed.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)
Zut, alors... Go stir the bechamel before
 it burns!

She turns to another assistant, who rushes past with a platter of lamb shanks.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)
Josephine, attend. Let Raoul prepare the
 osso buco--I want you in charge of the
 eggs florentine special...

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She reaches for a glass of red wine, swirls it, sniffs the bouquet expertly, and takes a sip.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)
Miss MacGruder-Grundy... Can you tell us
what gave you the idea for Cafe
Bagatelle?

She holds the wine in her mouth a moment while considering her answer then swallows.

MILLICENT
Well, after teaching for six years at the
Culinary Institute, and following my
three years as head chef at "Lucas
Carton" in Paris, I felt it was time I
brought the beauty of French haute
cuisine to the hard working people of
rural Wisconsin. What better spot than a
truck stop?

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)
And how has your experiment turned out?
Do truckers enjoy the haute cuisine?

MILLICENT
(school-marmishly)
Oh, but they're like children! They all
want *cafes americains* and soggy apple
pie. They're utterly oblivious to the
charms of a chocolate marzipan brioche
coffeecake! They want "eggs over easy"--
not the *quiche lorraine*. They don't even
care that the spinach is organic!
(chuckling good-naturedly)
But I'll educate their palates yet. We
all deserve to know the finer things in
life, *n'est-ce pas*?

INT. DINING AREA - SAME

The old trucker, still gripping his menu, points emphatically to one of the items listed on it.

OLD TRUCKER
Now, look here. Right here. What'n the
hell is a "trout grain-o-bloyze"? A man
comes off a twelve-hour drive, he wants a
patty melt or--I don't know--maybe a good
steak with some ketchup. Not some goddamn
frenchified fish.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A YOUNGER TRUCKER, with a Marlboro behind his ear, comes up and grabs the older trucker's shoulder.

YOUNGER TRUCKER
C'mon, Destry... I know you like those
French fries...

OLDER TRUCKER
(shaking him off)
Shee-it....

YOUNGER TRUCKER
Now, c'mon, hoss. Let's go across the way
there, get a chicken fried steak or
sumpin'...

As the two men walk away, the camera racks focus to a MECHANIC behind them who is seated before a delicately prepared plate of trout grenobloise and fresh vegetables. Noticing the camera, the mechanic holds up a glass of white wine, toasting the camera.

MECHANIC
Well, y'ask me, I think it's all right!

He smiles a toothless grin.

CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Back in the studio, the interviewer leans in to his subject in a way that suggests it's wrap-up time.

INTERVIEWER
Now, Mr. MacGruder Grundy... You've
funded every one of these ventures. Is
that correct?

CALEB
Quite right, yes...

INTERVIEWER
And you've spent--some would say
squandered--the better part of your
fortune to pay for your children's, well,
failed attempts. Do you feel any
disappointment, or even anger, about any
of this?

CALEB
Anger? Disappointment? It never would
have occurred to me...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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CALEB (CONT'D)

They've tried their best, and they've done a fairly good job of it, I'd say.

INTERVIEWER

But even as your estate erodes, you're still willing to fund these wild ventures? Why?

CALEB

They're my children... It's who they are. Millicent is a *cuisiniere*--whether she does it in Paris or Wisconsin... Michael's a conductor, orchestra or no... The fact that no one else has sense enough to pack it up and move to the moon shouldn't stop Mitchell. And, like Ursula, I've always liked a good paraphrase--a rewording, don't you know. They are who they are, and I'm willing to support them no matter what.

INTERVIEWER

But aren't these projects all a bit... Well... Meaningless?

CALEB

Meaningless? What do you mean, meaningless?... What do you do? Is the world gonna end if your don't air your report on the MacGruder-Grundys?

INTERVIEWER

Well, no, but...

CALEB

Are you a fireman? Are you a doctor?
(airily)

Surely, there are a number of occupations we consider essential to the way of life we've gotten used to. But just as surely, a great many of those occupations can be shown, in the end effect, to be relatively unimportant to the way the world as a whole conducts itself... My small invention proves the point...

INTERVIEWER

What point is that, Mr. Mac--

CALEB

(excitedly)
The point that even the smallest little thing can change the world...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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CALEB (CONT'D)

Do you know how my meager invention affected the plastic market? Or what ungodly sums it saved innumerable companies?

(leaning back)

My children, it seems to me, have learned a lesson that more of us should take to heart. They've done the things they most want to do in the manner they most want to do them. That, in itself, might change a few things for the better.

INTERVIEWER

And you, Caleb? The money's gone--the house is on the market... What's your next move--and can it save the MacGruder-Grundy family financially?

CALEB

I've got two words for you: bigger windows.

THE END