

BENCHED

an original screenplay by

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BET Networks
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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT: DOWNTOWN LA STREET - MORNING DAY 1

It's early morning. Store fronts are just starting to come alive. A garbage truck rumbles by swooping up bins, as the #96 bus pulls up to the curb and comes to a complete stop. Passengers exit, the last one being a strikingly handsome and well put together brother WILL (30's) in a two-piece grey herringbone suit. Feet firmly planted on the ground, he stops for a second, taking in the splendor of this brand new day. The female bus-driver cranes her neck to get a final glimpse this beautiful specimen - her daily 8:30am fix.

EXT: DOWNTOWN LA STREET - CONTINUOUS.

Will glides through his perfectly choreographed morning routine. He grabs his morning paper from the nearby kiosk. Then bypasses the lengthy line at the Tactile coffee truck on the corner, where his daily coffee is ready and waiting just for him. He deposits a couple bucks in tip jar and continues on without skipping a beat. Just enough time to catch the day's headlines before... Will rounds corner and enters the LA courthouse complex of buildings. And with that, this smooth operator disappears into a throng of other public servants as they embark into the great halls of justice.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY 1

We're in a downtown LA Superior Courtroom. Will sits unfazed at the Prosecutor's table, as a priest sits on the witness stand dressed in his clerical frock, being cross examined by an overbearing DEFENSE ATTORNEY (40s).

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Father Reynolds, So you're saying that you indeed saw my client running down the north side of the parish between 8:30 - 8:40pm after you heard screams coming from the alley? Is that correct?

FATHER REYNOLDS (60s) adjusts his glasses and timidly leans into the mic.

FATHER REYNOLDS

Yes. That's correct.

DEFESE ATTORNEY

You can understand my confusion when I read the log from your cell phone data that shows that at that exact same time, you texting with a Ms. Candy Brown of the Elegance Escort Agency--

Just then Will, our prosecutor, our knight in shining three-piece suit, jumps to his feet, objecting.

WILL

Father Reynolds never testified that he wasn't doing anything else during this time period. Moreover the defense has not established proper foundation to identify the recipient of the text messages.

DEFESE ATTORNEY

Your Honor these documents have crucial bearing on--

WILL

The text message is irrelevant and has no bearing on what Father Reynolds saw!

DEFESE ATTORNEY

Your Honor, this evidence is very relevant. It demonstrates that the witness may have been distracted during this time. Calling into question the reliability of his identification of my client!

Just then the JUDGE (60's) doughy and quite obese interjects.

JUDGE

Gentlemen--

WILL

The defense is clearly trying to prejudice the witness with this improper and irrelevant evidence in the eyes of the jury--

JUDGE

That's enough!

WILL

He started it!

JUDGE

This isn't the playground! I don't care! I will not... I will not..

WILL

Your Honor...are you feeling alright?

Suddenly the judge, red-faced and sweaty, clutches his chest and gasps for air. Just then the judge's head falls and hits the desk. He's out cold.

INT. BAR - NIGHT 1

Will is at a bar having a drink with his friends: MITCHELL (30'S) pretty, smart, rich -- the whole package and he knows it, and JAY (30'S) cuter than he is handsome, one of those men who only starts to seem hot once you get to know him and realizes how kind, smart and interesting he is.

JAY

Wait... So you're a murderer.

WILL

I'm not a murderer.
(beat)
Short hair, big earrings.

They look. She's in the corner booth, she's cute. But Mitchell shakes his head.

MITCHELL

Oh, no. She is not for you. She's one of my people. She has her eye on the hottie in the short skirt over there.

WILL

The hottie in the short skirt is on the other team?

Damn.

MITCHELL

No. But Big Earrings likes a challenge.

JAY

I'm just saying...you went to court and got the judge so mad his heart exploded. So technically...you became a murderer today.

WILL

The man's neck was a ham.
(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

And he put butter on everything. I didn't kill him. Food killed him.

MITCHELL

That's why I tell you guys. Heart disease is the number one killer of black men.

JAY

Wrong, Counselor. Homicide's the number one killer.

MITCHELL

No it's not.

Both Jay and Mitchell look to Will to weigh in on the motion.

WILL

It all depends on what black man you're talking about. Take us, in our early thirties. We're straight gonna be taken out by homicide. But. Once we reach thirty-five in a couple years, we're looking at heart disease from there on out. However the overall systemic problem is that far too many black men are dying way too young.

Jay's deflated with that dire reality.

JAY

I really gotta start thinking about going back to running.

MITCHELL

Back to? You need an inhaler to walk down the hall.

JAY

I'll just sue all the fast food joints I eat at. Have them take care of me during my impending heart disease years.

NYE

You better do it before California enacts an obesity lawsuit ban. Twenty-six states already have the ban. You ought to spend your time targeting the companies that advertise their foods, making "healthy" and "natural" claims that these establishments can never live up to.

That was NYE (30s) the cute and outgoing woman sipping her cocktail, who's been standing near the guys all this time. The guys just stare at her. Which makes her embarrassed.

NYE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I wasn't trying to listen in but I'm here and you're there and I couldn't in good conscience let you go into a lawsuit uninformed...You know what? Ignore me. I am in your business. I apologize I'll move.

WILL

No. Thank you. You're pretty good. Listen all you want.

There's an instant spark. Everyone can feel it. Will just smiles at her. Like an idiot. No game. So Mitchell who's multitasking on his phone, steps in.

MITCHELL

Hi there. I'm Mitchell. This one here devouring pretzels, is Jay. And our friend is Will Wright. And my geolocation based mobile application is telling me "Abs87" is 2.3 steps away and closing in.

A very attractive man, ABS87(20s) approaches Mitchell.

ABS87

"LongArmofttheLaw"?

MITCHELL

(to Will)

You kids have a good time.

And with that Mitchell leaves with Abs87. Will and Jay are left with Nye.

WILL

Hi.

NYE

Nice to meet you guys. I'm Nye.

JAY

Nye...

He knows that name. He just doesn't know why.

NYE

Did you really kill that judge this afternoon?

WILL
I plead not guilty.

JAY
...Nye...?

NYE
But you saw the whole thing.

WILL
I may have witnessed the incident.
In fact, I-

JAY
Nye Brinson! You're Nye Brinson.
Right? With the Times? You write
The Court Report. Will, she writes
The Court Report.

NYE
That's me.

JAY
Bye.

And Jay is gone.

WILL
Hey. I want to be clear. Everything
that was said here is completely off
the record.

NYE
You're supposed to say that before
you speak. Not after.

Trying to impress her.

WILL
I like Journalists. Gayle King once
stepped on my foot at Baskin Robbins.

Nye laughs.

NYE
Oh she did, did she.

WILL
Yeah, cut all in front of me, getting
her Jamoca Almond Fudge.

Off of them enjoying their banter.

INT: WILL'S APARTMENT - MORNING DAY 2

We open on a slick downtown LA loft. We take in the rustic cinder block and tall windows that pair well with the Turkish rugs. We get a glimpse of the library wall full of books and art; the real kind of art you get from legit dealers. We move further down down the loft until we land on a sleeping Will in his bed. But when we pull out we see Nye asleep in his arms. They look good together there all cuddled up. That is until they're both woken up by Will's ringing cell phone. No sooner does he turn it off when Nye's alarm clock starts blaring. Nye maneuvers the sheet to cover up her innocence, as she hits it off. They're both all "about last night" awkward.

WILL

Hi. I mean... morning.

NYE

I, um.. typically don't--

WILL

Right! No! Me neither. I hope I didn't--

NYE

Not at all...

WILL

I mean, I did. We did. And it was really--

NYE

Very, very good.

She looks as hot as she did the night before. And Will feels it. He leans in for a kiss and round two ensues. But just as they get started, both of their phones sound off with message notifications. They ignore them. Then Will's phone rings again. He silences it and resumes with Nye. Seconds later another message notification; then Will's phone rings again. Giving in to the madness, Will answers his phone.

WILL

Hello!!

Nye takes her phone and starts scrolling. Whatever she's read has caught her attention. She's engrossed, and starts scrolling faster.

WILL (CONT'D)

Wait, wait-- What!? Who!?

The phone still firmly pressed to his ear, Will turns to Nye, who's already right in his face.

NYE

You know, don't you? They just named a new judge and you know who it is. C'mon, you and I both know they picked some one for political reasons. Is it someone you work for? Come on. Care to comment on the record?

WILL

I, I, I...

SMASH CUT:

INT. COURTROOM - DAY 2

Will stands dressed in a black robe taking the oath, as he's being sworn onto the bench of the Los Angeles Superior Court by judge Helen PIERCE (50's). Will's closest friends and colleagues sit watching him take the oath.

JUDGE PIERCE

...And that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties upon which I am about to enter.

WILL

And that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties upon which I am about to enter.

And then Judge Pierce holds out her hand and shakes Will's.

JUDGE PIERCE

Congratulations, Judge Wright.
Welcome to the bench.

TITLE CARD

EXT. COURTHOUSE COMPLEX - DAY 3

Will stands outside the courthouse as people swirl around him. Staring up at the building. Nervous. Jay and Mitchell approach Will without him noticing. They've come to give him a little moral support on his first day.

MITCHELL

You don't have to leap it in a single bound. You just have to walk inside.

Will's glad to see them.

WILL

Hey! What are you guys doing here?

JAY

We wouldn't have missed seeing you on your first day of court, for anything. This shit is history. The youngest Black Judge appointed to the LA Superior Court.

They all stare up at the courthouse like it's the Taj Mahal.

MITCHELL

I still don't quite get it.

WILL

You? When the Judicial Appointments Advisor called, he had to repeat himself like five times.

JAY

And a direct appointment by Governor Davies himself.

MITCHELL

That's what I don't get. You know him personally? How did we not know that?

Will becomes noticeably nervous.

WILL

Umm.. I met him once when I was a kid. Some school thing.

MITCHELL

Before he was Governor? You made that much of a lasting impression?

Will doesn't respond. Jay holds up his cell phone to take a group selfie.

JAY

Paparazzi, bitches!

MITCHELL

Don't post that.

WILL

Don't post that.

JAY

I didn't even know you applied.

WILL

Yeah... I used to talk about serving on the court all the time back in high school?

JAY

I guess I thought you were making tennis references.

WILL

It's staying the course and not just settling for comfortable. So I submitted an application and some writing samples. Wrangled references. I was vetted by the Commission on Judicial Nominees. And here we stand.

JAY

This is so surreal.

MITCHELL

So basically you're just filling a dead man's seat until they can vote in someone qualified, come elections?

Both Will and Jay turn to look at Mitchell.

JAY

Mitchell, Do you know that out of roughly 1,700 superior court judges in the state of California, Will is about to walk in there and be the youngest, blackest person to hold as much power and influence that we'll ever know. Who cares if he's only got what, four...five months to prove himself worthy of the seat. It's today that counts.

WILL

Thanks... I guess.

The guys bump fists, then go off in different directions in the complex of buildings. Will takes a deep breath and heads inside.

WILL (CONT'D)

(to himself)

You are qualified. You are qualified.

INT. COURTHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Will arrives at the front entrance. He stands in line waiting his turn at metal detectors. Just then Will hears his name being called. He looks up to see PAULETTE TOMPKINS (late 20's going on late 50's) his slightly homely, nerdy, knows-where-all-the-bodies-are administrative assistant, who's arrived to meet him.

PAULETTE

Judge Wright! Over here!

She waves him out of the line as she motions to the guard to let him bypass the line. Will is slightly confused, but does as instructed. And once on the other side, he makes contact with Paulette.

WILL

Hello.

PAULETTE

Hello. I'm Paulette Thompkins. We spoke on the phone. I was waiting for you on the other side of the building. There's a secured entrance for judges on that side. Moving forward, use that entrance.

WILL

Absolutely. I will--

Will feels as if he's just met the White Rabbit in Alice in Wonderland - "We're late, we're late, we're late," as she's two paces ahead of him as they embark of the 50 yard dash into his orientation.

Paulette continues talking as they walk down the hall.

PAULETTE

Criminal is on the eleventh floor. Three courtrooms, homicide and violent crime is our bread and butter, family court is on ten -- there's one judge taking care of 4 million LA families and 450,000 foster kids, you fill in when he's out sick. He's 78 years old so... get ready.

They head into an elevator.

INT. COURTHOUSE 11TH FLOOR HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

As they exit the elevator on the eleventh floor, Paulette continues her monologue. They head down the hall.

PAULETTE

You have a clerk, a court reporter, and a bailiff. Never piss off your bailiff. That's the person who is going to save your life if a defendant decides he's going to make a break for it in your courtroom.

(MORE)

PAULETTE (CONT'D)

That's happened seven times in the last two years. Twice in Judge Morello's court. Judge Morello? Treated his bailiff like crap. He has a glass eye now.

Just then senior judge DEAN RAMSEY (50's) one of the more liberal leaning judges with hippy tendencies, exits his courtroom with his clerk. Paulette introduces them.

PAULETTE (CONT'D)

And this is Judge Ramsey. Judge Ramsey this is Judge Wright. He's starting today.

WILL

Pleasure meeting you. I prosecuted a case you presided over, about a year ago.

DEAN

Nice. Well I'm here, stop by if you need anything. Nothing worse than being the new kid on the block.

That lands on Will, as he tries to catch up with Paulette who's already continuing down the hall.

PAULETTE

I ordered you three sets of robes. There will always be one pressed and waiting for you at the beginning of each day. And yes it's true what they say, there is no dress code otherwise. What you chose to wear or not wear under your robe is between you and your God.

As they round the corner Will sees Judge Pierce, she's engrossed in a docket as she heads to her courtroom. Will stops her.

WILL

Judge Pierce. Hi. I just wanted to thank you again for taking the time to swear me in.

JUDGE PIERCE

Welcome aboard. We're expecting good things.

PAULETTE

Oh, Judge Pierce I was able to get a copy of that deposition that--

Judge Pierce becomes hurried, having no time for administrative matters.

JUDGE PIERCE

Yeah. Just give it to Kenneth.

And she then continues on her way. Will is slightly taken aback with the exchange, but quickly gets back in step with Paulette who has continued on with the matter at hand.

PAULETTE

Staff bathrooms are there to the left. You have your own in chambers -- but in the event that you need an extra... On the right is the break-room. We typically rotate for people to bring in coffee. Also none of the staff double as maids, so any dishes you dirty, you wash. And...

Just before they hit the end of the hall Paulette opens the large door on the left marked courtroom 11C. Will follows close behind.

INT. WILL'S COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

Paulette turns on the lights. Will stops, takes a breath. A bit awe-struck.

PAULETTE

This. Is. Your. Courtroom. Unless you are very lucky or very unlucky, you will spend the rest of your career serving the county of Los Angeles on that bench. It's a good room. A lot of lives have been changed in this room.

Off Will as he just stands there looking up at the great seal of Los Angeles County that adorns the wall above the place where his is supposed to sit.

INT. LATHAM BRICKMAN & STRAUSS MITCHELL'S FIRM - DAY 3

Mitchell's in the conference room going over his strategy for The State v. Armstrong case. A few of Mitchell's colleagues are also in the meeting, including KAREN WEBBER (30's), Mitchell's direct competition in the succession for partner.

MITCHELL

This is about self-defense, and proving that she believed that she would be killed or seriously injured
(MORE)

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

by the victim. And that deadly force was necessary to repel the threat. We need to show that he was a brute, a thug and a coddled athlete who turns violet if he doesn't get what he wants. That he was an animal.

KAREN

You really want to go down that road and play into those types of stereotypes--

MITCHELL

Thank you, Karen. I'm good. This is about our client and her reasonable fear of him killing her. We stress his imposing size, his strength and images of him looking threatening. And we need to show how small, frail and helpless she was in comparison and I think we've got it.

Mitchell finishes and looks up just in time to see his boss ANDREW DUMONT (50's) one of the brash senior partners at the firm, standing in the doorway. He's heard the conversation.

ANDREW

Sounds like you're right on the money. Good lead on this, Mitchell. By the way just found out Judge Phillips recused himself. I guess his prior firm did some tax litigation work that Ms. Armstrong's father was involved in years ago. But stay on it. They're briefing another judge now. Will let you know, when I know.

And just before Andrew leaves he turns back to the room.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Mitchell, Good work.

MITCHELL

Thank you.

Off Mitchell, a complete Rock Star.

INT. JAY & CAMILLE'S HOUSE - EVENING 3

Will meets up with Jay and his wife CAMILLE (30s) at their house for dinner. Camille is the epitome of brains and comic relief. She multitasks as she cooks and looks over some crime scene photos from work. A little celebratory cake sits in the center. Will comes in from the back porch.

He's brought wine.

WILL

Hey, hey..

CAMILLE

Hey sweetie.

WILL

They were all out of that Pinot you--

He groans in disgust from seeing the gory photos, just as Jay enters the kitchen.

JAY

Baby, have you seen my new shirt that I--

He recoils at seeing the photos.

JAY (CONT'D)

Can we leave the death and the dying at your office?

CAMILLE

Yeah fellas. Exactly. This is the stark reality of the countless, nameless victims of homicide that fill the city morgues. Think of that the next "murder" you're assigned to.

JAY

Noted. Can we at least move them away from the cake?

Camille collects the photos.

CAMILLE

Will, tell us everything! Jay get the glasses.

WILL

I mean it's, nice. Stable. Sedate. Dead judge's wife is letting me keep all the law journals.

CAMILLE

That is so sweet. Saves you the hassle of doing all that.

WILL

So today I prepped for this Landlord/Tenant dispute that--

Will notices that Camille and Jay keep giving each other the eye and making faces.

WILL (CONT'D)

What's wrong with the two of you?
You guys already started drinking
without-- Wait! Are you guys pregnant?

CAMILLE

No. But not for lack of trying.
(to Jay)
Tell him.

JAY

I got a case, with no chance of a
plea.

He practically starts screaming.

JAY (CONT'D)

I got a case!

The thought of it almost makes him nauseous.

WILL

Oh shit, man! That's fantastic!
What kind of the case is it?

JAY

Murder. Guy ran down and killed a
kid as he was fleeing a crime scene.
You know any other prosecutor would
give this brotha life. There are
some extenuating circumstances. So
I'm trying to figure if the victim's
family will go with felony murder.

CAMILLE

This! Right here. This is exactly
why you had to give up tenure teaching
at that junior college, and go into
prosecution.

JAY

Well, on the bright side, if he does
get life, at least I'll know that
he'll be clothed, fed and with a
roof over his head for an eternity.

Will bristles at Jay's Joke.

WILL

Jay, prison is not Club Med.

JAY

I know, I know... Listen if you don't have court in the morning can you be there - a little moral support?

WILL

Absolutely.

CAMILLE

And you know I'll be there.

Will high-five's Jay.

WILL

It's happening. Mitchell's on one of biggest cases in town. I just got appointed, and now you. I've got all night if you want to go over strategy for the case.

JAY

Thanks, man.

Jay realizes his good fortune.

JAY (CONT'D)

I got a murder. I'm on a case!

WILL

We three Kings! We are on our shit!

INT. CHAMBERS CORRIDOR DAY 4 - MORNING

Will strides down the corridor leading to his chambers. He's come early, with a full carrier of coffees. Just before he gets to his chambers, he "coincidentally" runs into his older and somewhat serious bailiff GONZALEZ (50s) coming out of the courtroom with documents to deliver. Will becomes awkwardly animated when he sees him.

WILL

Hey just the man I wanted to see! Gonzalez, right?

GONZALEZ

Yes. Good morning, your Honor. What can I do for you?

WILL

Nope. The only thing you can do is tell me how you take your coffee?

GONZALEZ

Excuse me, your Honor?

WILL

Are you a with milk kind of guy? Strictly black? Half & half with--

GONZALEZ
Black is fine.

Will hands Gonzales the black coffee.

WILL
Here you go. Once you go black you--
Nevermind.

GONZALEZ
Thank you, your Honor.

WILL
No. Thank you. Just keep up the
good work.

Before Will turns into his chambers, he flashes imaginary guns and makes this weird clicking/shooting noise-- Then realizes.

WILL (CONT'D)
Not that I want to shoot you. I--

GONZALEZ
Have a good day, sir.

WILL
Right.

With that Will heads into his chambers.

INT. WILL'S CHAMBERS CONTINUOUS - MORNING DAY 4

Will hangs up his jacket and decides to try on his robe for the first time. He admires his image in the mirror, that is until he's "caught" when Paulette marches in, carrying a thick docket. By her look, she looks stressed beyond belief.

PAULETTE
Where have you been all morning?

WILL
It's only 8:30am. I just walked--

PAULETTE
Nevermind that. There's been a change with the docket. The landlord/tenant dispute has been dismissed. And the next case you've pulled is The State Vs. Armstrong Murder trial.

HOLY SHIT!! Off Will in complete shock at the news.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. COURTROOM - DAY 4

Will and Camille are in the back row of the courtroom to support Jay. People are slowly filling the courtroom.

CAMILLE

Wait-- you haven't spoken to Mitchell?

WILL

That's what I'm trying to tell you.
I just found out.

CAMILLE

What are you going to do?

WILL

I haven't even had time to process
it all yet.

Just then Mitchell slips in at the last minute just as Jay is about to start his opening statement.

MITCHELL

What'd I miss? Did he throw up yet?

CAMILLE

He did that on the way over.

MITCHELL

Hey, so the head of the firm basically gave me a gold star for how I'm handling the Armstrong case. You heard we're on recess for a day or two, right? Judge recused himself. They're briefing a new one now - but we're good. I don't mean to toot my own horn, but I'm rockin' it out.

Camille catches Will's eye. He's sick.

CAMILLE

That's great, babe. Oh they're starting.

Just then Jay's judge enters the courtroom as the BAILIFF (30's) calls the courtroom to stand.

BAILIFF

All rise.

Everyone stands while the judge takes the bench.

MITCHELL

I see partner by the end of the year.

Camille shushes Mitchell so she can hear Jay's opening statement. Jay drinks his entire glass of water before he stands to begin.

JAY

Ladies and gentleman of the jury, We the people of these United States were ordered to form a new and perfect union... Umm... Establish justice, insure transgen-- Wait.

Jay has barely begun before he loses his place. Will and Camille panic.

WILL

Is he trying to recite the US Constitution? That's not what we practiced!

CAMILLE

Oh God! He's gone rogue!

JAY

Aside from the ramble of the preamble...

Jay retrieves a hanky and dabs his sweaty brow.

JAY (CONT'D)

The accused Mr. Randall Jackson on May 6th never dreamed he'd be enjoying his right to a... umm...speedy and public trial by all of you... people. It's hot in here!

He completely wipes is glistening forehead.

JAY (CONT'D)

Where was I?

He starts repeating himself to find his place. Camille, Will and Mitchell sink down a little in their seats. They feel awful.

JAY (CONT'D)

We the people... establish justice...general welfare. It was right here. I just had it--

Jay loses himself in his notes for much too long. The entire courtroom is mortified for him. Nye's in the courtroom. She and Will lock eyes for a beat.

By now Jay's a train wreck you can't look away from. The JUDGE (60s) looks at him bewildered.

JUDGE
Counselor. Are you okay? Do you need a moment?

JAY
I am good your honor. I have it right--

JUDGE
Son, you're turning green. Sit down!

The Judge strikes the gavel.

JUDGE (CONT'D)
Let's take a recess. Bailiff get this man some water.

Court is adjourned, people start filing out. Camille gets up to go to Jay. Before she leaves she turns back to Will and Mitchell who are still in their seats.

CAMILLE
Is there a world where he comes back from this?

WILL
Poor guy. He had this.

MITCHELL
That sucks... Between you and I my strategy is a little unorthodox. But I know they respect the fact that I can go balls-out for the team. I'm not a group-think man. I can go outside the box. It's about the win.

WILL
Mitchell, you probably shouldn't be telling me this.

MITCHELL
Dude. The prosecution has no case. They're trying to establish--

WILL
No. Seriously. You really shouldn't be telling me any of this.

MITCHELL

When haven't I ever told you about a case I'm-- You know something. You know the judge who pulled this case, don't you?

Will says NOTHING. There's a beat... then.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

You're kidding me. You? You pulled my trial?

Off on these two friends as the air completely seeps out of the courtroom.

INT. WILL'S DTLA LOFT - NIGHT 4

Will sits at his dinning table drinking a beer and going over the Amanda Armstrong case file and photos, when his loft gates suddenly lift open. It's Mitchell. His mood still visibly sour.

MITCHELL

I still can't believe it doesn't weird you out that just any body can come up in here?

WILL

I keep telling you, it's a secured building. You wanna beer?

MITCHELL

I'm good. All I need is a DUI. My luck I'd end up in your court.

WILL

Mitchell--

MITCHELL

Man, you know how long I've been waiting for this moment.

WILL

What, like I haven't thought about anything else all day?

MITCHELL

Things just don't fall in my lap like they do for you. I feel like I have to fight for every little god-damned thing.

Will takes a step back from Mitchell.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)
I've fought for stuff.

WILL
You have never had to fight for anything a day in your life.

MITCHELL
You know what I mean.

WILL
No. I don't. You've been acting like your life depends on this one case.

MITCHELL
It does.

Will takes a beat, realizing just how much Mitchell needs this.

WILL
Well... This is your moment, man. And I want you to fucking knock this shit all the way out the park. I'm recusing myself.

A smile like no other appears on Mitchell's face. Off Will feeling a sense of pride and overall relief.

INT: COURTHOUSE COFFEE SHOP - DAY 5

Will gives his coffee order to the young BARISTA(18).

WILL
Just a medium Cappuccino. Skim.

BARISTA
Name?

WILL
Will.

Just then Nye steps forward as the barista is writing his name on the cup, and corrects him.

NYE
The Honorable Judge William Wright.

The barista still holding the pen, just looks at Will confused.

WILL
Will is fine.

The barista's relieved. Will and Nye hug. Will's happy to see her.

NYE

It's good to see you.

WILL

You too. I've totally been meaning--

NYE

No-no... You're presiding now. I get it. Congratulations by way.

WILL

Thanks.

NYE

I guess I can literally say, I knew you when. You must have done something right. Your first case out of the gate and you're about to be on the national scene. That's a definite career maker.

WILL

I don't know if it's really--

NYE

No, you don't get it. This case could be a major defining moment for you to prove yourself as more than just a small criminal court judge. This is big. Lean in.

That lands with Will. He takes a beat, then...

WILL

It's good to know that someone has as much faith in me as you do.

NYE

The headline actually writes itself, "*Boy-Wonder Ascends to Power In Record Speed!*"

Will laughs.

NYE (CONT'D)

No really. How's it feel to be one of the chosen ones?

WILL

If only I'd heard that on the regular, while I was in the DA's office.

NYE

How long were you there?

WILL

Seven years this May.

NYE

And then three years at a small firm, before that, handling primarily civil matters. Went to USC, where you double-majored in History/Law. Which lead you to Stanford.

WILL

Okay that's not creepy. Somebody's been doing their homework on me.

NYE

Sorry to break it to you, but you're hot news. It's my job.

WILL

Listen, why don't we grab a drink or dinner this week, so I can do a bit of the stalking.

Will is devilish as hell.

NYE

Is it stalking if it's consensual?

WILL

Depends on what you're into.

And with that Nye is out. Off Will pondering the conversation he's just had.

INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY 5

Mitchell talks with his boss Andrew as they head into court. Mitchell is the epitome of confidence and class, qualities every future partner must possess.

MITCHELL

...We both had a good laugh. I mean, what are the odds of us both being on the same case - and the same week he gets appointed to the bench?

ANDREW

And you two know each other from... was it undergrad or Law School?

MITCHELL

Law School. Judge Wright was in my class at Stanford. Really good guy. So when we discovered we were both on this case, he was like, "Mitch don't give it another thought, I'm gonna recuse myself." So he wants to make a formal motion of recusal today before our team, as well as the prosecution, so it won't hold up another judge being assigned.

ANDREW

Smart guy. As they say, it is good to have friends in high places.

Mitchell chuckles at Andrew's white collar humor as they head into to Will's chambers.

INT. PAULETTE'S DESK EXTERIOR CHAMBERS - DAY 5

Paulette greets Mitchell and Andrew at her desk. She motions for them to head into Will's interior chambers for their meeting.

PAULETTE

Afternoon. Please, head on in. He's expecting you. The prosecution has already arrived.

INT. WILL'S CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Will stands with the Prosecutors admiring the Blue Marlin mounted and hung on wall. The lead PROSECUTOR (40s) with dark horn rims stands close looking up at the fish.

PROSECUTOR

That's some big fish.

Mitchell and Andrew enter Will's Chamber's interrupting the conversation. Mitchell remembers introduces his boss to Will.

MITCHELL

Judge Wright I'd like for you to meet our firm's senior partner, Andrew Dumont.

Andrew immediately looks at the bespectacled prosecutor and not at Will who has his hand extended. The moment is further marred in awkwardness when Andrew looks at Will and is unable to contain his obvious shock. He was not expecting Will to be black.

WILL

Nice to meet you counselor.

Will and Mitchell share a quick look, but keep the proceedings moving. The lawyers follow Will to the conference table in the corner, and take a seat. Andrew is still noticeably in a state of surprise. Will addresses the group.

WILL (CONT'D)

Thank you for coming down here today. As I'm sure you all have been made aware by now, the lead on the defense team and I are very good friends, going back to our time at law school. So before we move any further on this case, I feel that the best way to proceed is for me to make a formal motion to recuse myself.

Everyone seems to be in agreement. Andrew continues to look at Will.

MITCHELL

Thank you, your honor. I appreciate that. In the interim while we wait for a new Justice, I think --

Mitchell is cut short when Andrew interrupts.

ANDREW

Excuse me Mitchell, if I can interject. I don't think it's necessary for Judge Wright to recuse himself.

Both Mitchell and Will are confused by Andrew's request.

MITCHELL

I'm sorry...

WILL

Come again?

ANDREW

I think it would be best for us to remove Mitchell from this case, and let Judge Wright remain.

Mitchell is completely stunned. And Will freezes. Andrew takes a beat. Then...

ANDREW (CONT'D)

It's settled. Judge Wright will remain and we will replace Mitchell.

Off Will, surprised.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. LATHAM BRICKMAN & STRAUSS MITCHELL'S FIRM - DAY 5

Mitchell stands in his firm's conference room with Andrew.

MITCHELL

Andrew, you know I can bring this home for us--

ANDREW

It's the optics, Mitchell. People will look at race and begin to question if a black judge and a black defense attorney will--

MITCHELL

Seriously? He was ready to recuse himself.

Just then Mitchell's colleague Karen comes into the conference room.

ANDREW

Mitchell I've decided to have Karen lead on this. A woman will play better on this, in way a man can't. And we're putting Bruce on as second.

MITCHELL

I don't even get second chair?

ANDREW

Not on this one, Mitchell. And make sure Karen gets all your files.

Karen tries to interject.

KAREN

Mitchell I--

MITCHELL

Will do.

Andrew nods yes. Off Mitchell as he leaves the room clearly unhappy.

INT. JAY & CAMILLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT 5

Camille and Jay host a celebratory dinner from hell. Tons of food containers sit in the middle of the table. But no one's eating or saying anything, as they push their food around their plates. Camille looks around at everyone sulking. She can't take it anymore.

CAMILLE

I trekked all the way down to the
BBQ place that you guys love.

The tension between Will and Mitchell is thick and terse.
While Jay is grappling with the mortification of his courtroom
performance.

JAY

I ruined the brand new Brooks Brothers
shirt I'd just bought. I'll never
be able to show my face in that
courthouse again.

MITCHELL

Good God! Is your HPV flaring up
again?

JAY

Don't displace your anger onto me!
Tell it to the judge!

WILL

Mitchell! How many times do I have
to tell you? The whole thing just
caught me off guard. I don't know
why, but I just froze.

MITCHELL

You've had ample time to dethaw and
correct the situation! But you
haven't! You're just out for
yourself. Be honest, man.

WILL

I'm going to talk to Andrew and recuse
myself.

MITCHELL

You've gotta be kidding me.

Mitchell thinks for a beat.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

What was the name of that program
you used to talk about? The one
that got you into boarding school?
Gives a leg up to lower performing
students?

Will knows how his friend operates.

WILL

A Better Chance. And it's not
necessarily for lower performing--

MITCHELL

A Better Chance! That's right. I think we had a couple of those kids at Choate.

WILL

What made you think of that?

MITCHELL

You know, just looking for a good cause to get behind.

Will just looks at Mitchell.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

I know those Latham Brickman boys. Let's just say ruthlessness is prized, down at the shop. And I think they see an advantage to your being a rookie. And ummm, as a good friend, I thought you should know.

WILL

I appreciate that friendship guided you to look out for my best interest. I got this, my friend. I don't need your help. I'm the judge.

MITCHELL

But I'm still the Obama though. You can be Holder, but I'm still Obama.

WILL

The Holder that was appointed to the DC Superior Court by Reagan, while Obama was still over in Gannet House editing the law review. I'm cool with that.

CAMILLE

Stop! Everybody just stop!

Jay gets mad.

JAY

Why am I lumped in with the "everybody"?

CAMILLE

Stop! This was supposed to be a celebratory dinner. My God you people would eat your young.

MITCHELL

Camille, my apologies. I'm good.
I'm fine. It's just a case.

Mitchell takes a beat then raises and tips his glass to Will.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

We've all worked hard. I'm proud of
you.

WILL

We have; I appreciate that. You
know that I'd never intentionally
cause you any undue hardship.

Will acknowledges, as they both work to establish a semblance
of a truce.

INT. JAY & CAMILLE'S HOUSE - LATER

Camille and Jay have the house back to themselves. They
wash dishes together.

CAMILLE

If those two don't get it together
fast, they're gonna do some
irrevocable damage to themselves.

JAY

Will did tell Mitchell that he was
going to take himself off the case.
How do you all of a sudden go back--

CAMILLE

It's the guys very first case! Cut
him some slack. And it's not like
it's the last case ever.

JAY

How did this week go from phenomenal
to down in flames so fast?
(off the dishwasher)
Baby, knives down.

Camille flips the knives. Last glass in, they're done.
Camille closes the dishwasher.

JAY (CONT'D)

Wait! Why are we still discussing
this? I can think of more interesting
things to do.

He grabs Camille and pulls her close to him. They kiss.
Mid lip-lock she looks at her watch.

CAMILLE

Perfect timing, mister. I'm ovulating.

He gives her a "this is supposed to be fun, not work," look.

JAY

Remind me again why we're doing this?

CAMILLE

Because we're sadistic overachieving narcissists who have no regard for the exploding population and the health of our planet.

JAY

That's right, I forgot.

Off them both kissing passionately as the dishwasher hums in the background.

INT. WILL'S COURTROOM - NIGHT 5

It's after hours and Will is alone in his courtroom getting a mental feel for the space before his case in the morning. He's deep into his air guitar riff, when he looks up to see Judge Ramsey who he was introduced to earlier, standing there.

DEAN

I saw the light on. Am I interrupting?

WILL

Judge Ramsey. Not at all. Please...

DEAN

We're colleagues now. Dean.

WILL

Got it.

DEAN

(pointing to Will's
headphones)

Who's taking you into the arena?

WILL

Lenny.

DEAN

Mine's always Jagger.

Then Dean hands him a canvas bag full of vegetables.

DEAN (CONT'D)

My wife and I have a pretty good little garden going on.

WILL

Thank you!

DEAN

I dare you not to like the Okinawa sweet potatoes.

WILL

I can't wait to try 'em.

Dean takes a seat at one of the counsel tables.

DEAN

So, everybody's talking about the Armstrong case.

Will sits down in the jury box.

WILL

Yeah, no pressure, right?

DEAN

The joy of random assignments.

WILL

Both legal teams are really sharp. I feel like I need to be ahead of them on--

DEAN

Will. Don't overanalyze or try to be two steps ahead of either attorney. You're not a litigator anymore.

WILL

I know...

DEAN

Listen. Your sole responsibility is to listen to all the information presented. You're there to be fair and impartial. Go as slow as you need to. And if you miss something, don't be intimidated to have them repeat or rephrase. Remember this is your court.

Off Will, as he ruminates on Dean's advice.

INT. WILL'S COURTROOM - DAY 6

Will and Paulette enter the courtroom. Will's dressed in his robe for the first time. Paulette whispers some last minute advice to him.

PAULETTE

Remember to seat the room, speak up,
and don't let them see you sweat.

GONZALES

ALL RISE! The Superior Court of Los
Angeles County is now in session,
the Honorable Judge William Wright
presiding.

Will steps up to his bench and takes a seat.

WILL

Please be seated.

Will looks out at the room before him. He takes in a breath. He notices that his gavel is exactly where he positioned it. He looks out at the audience. Someone clears their throat. He focuses in on his bailiff off to the left side. He looks over at both the defense and prosecution. Everything is pretty much as expected. He exhales, and begins the trial.

WILL (CONT'D)

Good morning ladies and gentlemen
calling case #1135 The State Vs.
Amanda Armstrong. Are both sides
ready?

Off Will trying to believe in his confidence.

INT. WILL'S COURTROOM - DAY 6

Montage of testimony: Jeff Stevenson's football COACH (40's)
speaks about his prized athlete.

COACH

Between practices and game days, I
was with Jeff four to five days a
week. So when he didn't show up for
practice I knew something had to be
wrong. He was a good kid. I don't
want to make him out to be holier
than though...but I mean he was your
average teenage boy, he would rough
house with the other guys on the
team from time to time. But nothing
that ever gave me cause for concern.

Jeff Stevenson's mother MRS. STEVENSON (40's) sits on the
stand. For all her grief, she is staying pretty composed.

MRS. STEVENSON

I just kept saying that the University
of Michigan was so far away and wasn't
(MORE)

MRS. STEVENSON (CONT'D)
 there any other school closer? But I was so proud of him in that moment. He was to be the first in our family to go to college. I think he somehow knew that football would be his ticket to... doing more with his life. He said he wanted to be a teacher. He just had so much compassion. And so he just looked down at me with those beautiful brown eyes of his and said, "Aw mom don't worry. I'll be just fine."

Tears well up in her eyes. Off the courtroom completely gripped to this extremely intense moment.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

A) INT. WILL'S COURTROOM - DAY

Will is smooth and doing an excellent job on the bench, as he speaks to both attorneys.

WILL
 The clerk will provide you each shortly, with an exhibit list. Make sure you have any exhibits not already in evidence admitted before the end of the day.

It's like he's been doing this for years. He's a peacock.

B) INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Jay stands before his judge who's sitting at the bench.

JAY
 ...And I guess it triggered my Hyperhidrosis. Normally I take my Black Cohosh capsules, but I ran out. And I didn't want to take any of the Propantheline I had, cause that just flares up my back acne...

The judge just sits there, head in hand listening as Jay very animatedly explains the nuanced medical litany of his condition.

C) EXT. COURTHOUSE COMPLEX - DAY

News cameras are set up on the courthouse steps. A group of reporters fire questions at Karen and her second, Bruce who stand there in front of the cameras. Nye is there and gets a question in.

NYE

There is talk that your client is considering taking a plea..?

Mitchell is there too. You see half of his face in the frame as he stands next to the other attorneys. Each time he tries to move into frame, the camera adjusts, never quite getting him in full view.

KAREN

Absolutely not. My client is innocent and we are confident that she will be exonerated of all charges.

INT: CAFETERIA - DAY

Will and Nye sit together in the courthouse cafeteria during the lunchtime rush.

WILL

I can't believe you opted not to get the chef's special.

Nye laughs.

NYE

Cafeteria Meatloaf? I'm good.

WILL

I know it's not the ideal setting, but I'm glad this worked out. I knew that if we didn't get this in today, who knows when... I'm slammed.

Just then Paulette walks by and gives Will a look like he's broken curfew. She can be scary.

NYE

You look like you're handling it all well. Especially to be coming in halfway through. See, you were made for this. So tell me, do you really think the prosecution has a strong enough case?

Will just smiles and looks at her, saying nothing.

NYE (CONT'D)

Got it.

WILL

So tell me Nye, why aren't you a lawyer?

NEY

Lawyers angle and lie. I like real investigation... fact-finding. And informing the masses.

WILL

How'd you get into Journalism?

NYE

You know, the usual. Nosey kid. Gets into everybody's business. Then reports on it. Then when I was about nine I discovered that there was an actual profession where you got paid for getting into people's business. And that was my defense when Granny would break out the switch when I'd gotten into something I shouldn't have been into. And let's just say that Granny's switch was not partial to the idea of early on the job training.

WILL

There was no beating the Barbara Walters out of you?

Nye shakes her head, laughing.

NYE

Granny was tough. But I get it. She raised my little brother and I right here in Compton. And when I got a scholarship to Vassar, I left. And then from there I ended up on the research desk at The Inquisitor and worked my way through journalism school at Columbia. Came back to LA about a year and a half ago when I got the job at the times.

WILL

"Alien baby born to woman in rural West Virginia," Inquisitor?

NYE

That's the one. It was either that or a mountain of student loans. I felt like I chose the lesser of two evils.

WILL

I get it.

NYE

You seem like the type of kid who
got away with Murder.

Will is slightly taken aback.

WILL

Why do you say that?

NYE

You just seem like you were the dream
child.

Will grunts. Getting fidgety when the subject's on him.

NYE (CONT'D)

Really, what were you like as a kid?
Did you make your bed... eat your
vegetables? Were you on Little League?
Were you the product of divorce or
did you have two model parents who
talked out their feelings?

WILL

I was a regular kid like everybody
else, I guess.

NYE

Oh you gotta have a story. What was
the little Will Wright like?

WILL

Nye I don't know. I--

NYE

Come on give me something. I read
you went to Cate boarding school up
near Santa Barbara, for junior high
and high school? Where are you from?

WILL

I hate talking about--

NYE

Modesty. Or troubled youth that--

WILL

Nye. Stop.

Nye's stops talking, taken aback by Will's abruptness.

WILL (CONT'D)

I feel like you're angling for the
backstory.

NYE

I just wanted to get--

WILL

I just wanted a date. No story here.

This isn't the way lunch was supposed to go. Off Will noticeably annoyed.

INT. WILL'S CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Will crosses through the outer office to get to his chambers. Paulette is on his heels with some documents for him to sign. Just before she's about to leave she closes the door and turns to Will

PAULETTE

I'm about to tell you about yourself.

WILL

Excuse me?

PAULETTE

Look. You can fire me for not holding my tongue. But you're about two minutes in on your timecard on this job, your Honor.

WILL

Okay..?

PAULETTE

You're a very smart man, and I see your character and passion for the position.

WILL

Thank you?

PAULETTE

These people are watching you and they're waiting for you to trip up. Firstly, Ms. CNN out there, no.

WILL

I believe she's with the Times--

PAULETTE

Wherever she's from; It's not in your best interest to be intertwined with the media at this point. Secondly, I know as a lawyer you worked a lot in this building and have a lot of friends who still work
(MORE)

PAULETTE (CONT'D)

here. Be mindful that it doesn't look like you're currying favor to anyone. Again I ain't trying to meddle. I tell you this because I was the first Black Senior Admin in this building and I had to be five steps ahead at all times. You're a judge now, let them see you be that.

And with that she's gone. Off Will not quite sure how to take that.

EXT. RUNYON CANYON - DAY 7

Will, Jay and Mitchell have met up to hike. Tensions between Will and Mitchell are still palpable. The hike is a bit strenuous. Jay seems to be feeling it the most.

JAY

I say date her. Ignore Paulette. You don't let a woman dictate who you see. Don't ever let a woman run you, man.

(off Mitchell's look)

What?

MITCHELL

Camille has you on a leash. A PINK GLITTER LEASH.

JAY

You know what? Will, maybe you could get Nye to do a feature on Mitchell. Give him something to do, and give him his Johnny Cochran moment after all.

MITCHELL

You know, there are times when I do get a little down, thinking about missing out on that case. But then I just think about you wetting your pants in the courtroom... and it just instantly takes me to my happy place.

JAY

I didn't wet my pants.

WILL

How about less talking and more decompressing?

JAY

(to Will)

Hey. Can you still do Animal Friday night? I need some of that Chicken Liver Toast, like nobody's business.

WILL

I'm not sure. My schedule's all over the place. But call Paulette, she can tell you what my Friday looks like.

Jay and Mitchell look at each other and roll their eyes.

JAY

I'll be sure to do that.

MITCHELL

(to Will)

You know, I'm surprised you don't want to date Nye. I'd have thought with this whole case and all, that the two of you would have been deep into your expose by now. I mean, it's pretty beneficial to be in bed with the media, come reelection time.

WILL

You just wont give it up, will you?

MITCHELL

What the hell is that supposed--

Jay has had it.

JAY

Enough! I'm tired of you two being at each other's throats! We're supposed to be becoming one with nature and not falling dead in our courtrooms. So shut up and become one. I have enough to think about with this murder case of my own.

WILL

(to Jay)

Are you in court tomorrow?

JAY

Yeah.

WILL

You're gonna be great.

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

Since this is the guy's first offense, you really oughta argue extreme recklessness, as opposed to felony murder.

MITCHELL

And here we go...

WILL

What?

MITCHELL

Jay. I'm just saying you might want to do your own prepping or you may find yourself out of your own case.

Now Will has really had it.

WILL

Fuck you!

MITCHELL

Fuck you! You're not the boss of everybody!

Will gets right in Mitchell's face. Jay tries to put a hand between them.

WILL

I won Mitchell! Without the pedigree, the family name, the ivy league. I got it. You didn't! So deal with it and shut the fuck up!

Mitchell shoves Will as hard as he can causing Will to fall down in the dirt.

MITCHELL

MAKE ME!

Will gets up and like a bull dives head first into Mitchell, both guys fall to the ground slapping, hitting, punching each other, as they roll around in the dirt. They're both really going in on each other good, getting in some powerful blows. While Jay is trying to get them to stop.

JAY

Stop!! You guys get up! There's poop down there! Get up!

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. WILL'S DTLA LOFT - NIGHT 7

Will's in the Kitchen. He's having a drink while he cooks a steak. He has a Band-Aid on his left upper cheek. Someone buzzes up to his apartment. He answers the intercom.

WILL

Yeah?

JAY (O.S.)

Hey, it's me.

WILL

Come on up.

Will goes back to his steak. Moments later Jay opens the loft gates. He struggles to close the last one.

JAY

Don't you get tired of opening and closing these gates all the time?

WILL

Why does everyone still have so much commentary about my place? You wanna a drink?

JAY

Whatever you're drinking.

WILL

You eat? If I'd known you were coming I'd have saved you the other steak. Unfortunately I had to use that one for my eye. Can you believe Mitchell? Typical world revolving around him, then when you don't want to go along, suddenly it's fisticuffs.

Will puts some ice in a glass and pours Jay a drink.

JAY

I think you both know how to push each others buttons.

WILL

Are you really defending him?

JAY

How is that defending him?

WILL
All because I changed my mind about
a case?

Will takes the steak off the heat and grabs a plate.

WILL (CONT'D)
(re: the steak)
Half?

Jay shakes his head no.

JAY
Camille is being called to testify
tomorrow.

WILL
I know.

JAY
And. Just. Make sure she's okay.

WILL
Jay this is court of law. And I'm
going to do the job I've been
appointed to do.

Off Will slightly annoyed with Jays request.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY 8

The State v. Armstrong trial is in session. The Prosecution is finishing up with Camille who has been called to testify as the Medical Examiner who conducted Jeff Stevenson's autopsy.

PROSECUTOR
Dr. Braodus, in your expert opinion
would you say that the wounds found
on the victim were consistent with
the defendant's account of what
happened?

CAMILLE
For the most part, yes.

PROSECUTOR
"For the most part..?" Can you be
more specific?

CAMILLE
In my professional opinion, based on
the victim's size, weight and the
height from which he fell back... I
(MORE)

CAMILLE (CONT'D)

don't believe that the wound to the back of the head, that penetrated the cerebellum, would have been that deep.

The prosecution heads back to his table.

PROSECUTOR

No more questions your Honor.

Karen gets up for the cross examination.

KAREN

Dr. Broadus. If I'm understanding you correctly, you're saying that more force would have been needed to cause such an impact. Is that correct?

CAMILLE

Yes. That is correct.

KAREN

As you are aware Ms. Armstrong stands roughly 5'6" and weighs 128lbs. And you would have the jury believe that she was overcome by some hysterical strength to throw a 6'2" 210lbs man onto a bedpost? Is that what you're saying?

PROSECUTOR

Objection! That was not her testimony.

WILL

Sustained. Get to your point Counselor.

KAREN

Yes, your Honor. Doctor you've been with the medical examiners office for five and a half years, is that correct?

CAMILLE

Yes.

KAREN

Has there been any time in those five and a half years when you've... missed something or on later examination it was shown that not a
(MORE)

KAREN (CONT'D)
proper evaluation of the victim was
performed - on your part?

We see Mitchell sitting out in the audience. He's in complete shock as he slowly shakes his back and forth mouthing a steady stream of no's. He knows something. Camille tries her best not to get agitated.

PROSECUTOR
Objection, your Honor. This has
nothing--

KAREN
Your Honor I'm trying to get to the
fact that we all have off days.

Will hesitates for a beat, then...

WILL
Overruled. Please answer.

Camille looks at Will. She can't believe this.

CAMILLE
Yes. I guess there are times that
even the best of us may miss--

KAREN
So it is true that two years ago in
The State v. Withers case they had
to call in an additional examiner,
because of details you had missed
during the autopsy?

Camille is hurt. She answers in a voice that's barely audible to the court.

KAREN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry Dr. Broadus. We didn't
hear you.

CAMILLE
Yes.

The Prosecution is pissed.

PROSECUTOR
Your Honor! I don't see where this
line of questioning is going!

WILL
Counselor what bearing does this
have on this matter?

KAREN

I'm getting there your Honor. So Dr. you're saying that there is absolutely without a shadow of a doubt no way for a 6'2" 210lbs quarterback to fall onto a bedpost in just the right way, causing just the right impact to the brain that could result in death?

CAMILLE

I'm saying that--

KAREN

That's a yes or no question Dr. Broadus.

CAMILLE

It's not that straight--

KAREN

Dr. Broadus all I need is a yes or no answer - that there is a possibility Jeff Stevenson, could have indeed fallen onto the post in such a way, that it resulted in death.

Both attorneys begin shouting.

PROSECUTOR

Your Honor, the defense is--

KAREN

These facts are detrimental, your Honor. I'm simply trying to--

WILL

Answer the question.

CAMILLE

Yes. I guess there could exist that remote chance.

Reasonable doubt has been planted.

KAREN

Thank you. I have no further questions your Honor.

Off Camille deflated.

INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Out on recess, Mitchell is engrossed in his phone sending a message.

He looks up to find Camille is right there in his face. She just looks at him all puffy and teary-eyed as she speaks quietly yet firmly.

CAMILLE

If there's one piece of advice that I'd offer, and hope you'd take to heart, it's that your team "grow some" and focus on the fuckin' crime in this case. Because if you don't, and you allow some extraneous shit to play out, the facts are going to get muddied, and it's going to lead to the wrong outcome in this case.

MITCHELL

Camille, I--

CAMILLE

Was this really worth putting us in jeopardy over? I don't need for you to treat me with respect. But this is about getting to the truth. And that dead black boy deserves better. You betray him, you betray you.

Camille turns and walks away. Off Mitchell chastened.

INT. WILL'S COURTROOM - DAY 8

As people leave the courtroom, Mitchell walks up to Karen who is still sitting at the counsel table.

MITCHELL

(to Karen)

Can I talk to you for a minute?

She gets up and they step away to talk in private.

KAREN

What's going on? I really need to--

MITCHELL

That information on Camille was confidential. Not to be used against her. You crossed the line, Karen.

KAREN

Are you working for the Prosecution now? Because it sounds like you do.

MITCHELL

You don't play hardball with the people I--

KAREN

It was material information and I chose to use it. And if you didn't want it used, you should have probably not been so sloppy to keep it in your file notes.

MITCHELL

Karen--

KAREN

And had the roles been reversed, you would have lead with it.

With that Karen walks away. Off Mitchell feeling both remorse and put in his place.

INT. WILL'S CHAMBERS - DAY 8

Will sits at his desk, head in hands watching a Newton's Cradle swing back and forth. He looks completely deflated. Paulette comes into his chambers.

PAULETTE

Judge, I wanted let you know that...

Her expression becomes one of concern when she sees Will just sitting there.

WILL

Have you ever wondered how these things work?

PAULETTE

It's actually just about momentum and energy. And the transmittance of force through those stationary balls in the middle.

Will just looks up at her. Of course she would know.

PAULETTE (CONT'D)

I don't know your moods yet but I don't like this one.

She pulls up a chair, feeling comfortable.

WILL

Paulette, when I took the oath. And swore to take this obligation freely without mental reservation or purpose of evasion... Did I miss something? Did they omit a part about living up to and fulfilling the expectations of every damn person in my life?

PAULETTE

No they did not.

WILL

I feel like I'm doing everything wrong have and let everyone down since the moment I got appointed.

PAULETTE

"You can please some of the people all the time, you can please all of the people some of the time, but you a fool if you think you're gonna make every-damn-body happy all of the time."

WILL

True.

He ponders for a beat as he picks up one of the Armstrong crime photos.

PAULETTE

Your job is to remain impartial. You interpret the law. You assess the evidence presented. That is what you do.

It's a real moment between the two of them. Will looks at her and nods. Off Will breathing into this moment.

INT. WILL'S COURTROOM - DAY 8

Will's courtroom is in session. Just then two men enter the courtroom and make their way down to the prosecution's table. One of the men is younger who we'll soon discover is DETECTIVE AARON FERGUSON (40's). He guides the older man, who seems out of his element, to an open seat behind the prosecution's table. The detective whispers something to the prosecutor, and hands him some sort of book.

WILL

Will the defense be calling any other witnesses?

KAREN

No, your Honor. The defense rests.

WILL

And the state?

The prosecutor doesn't hear Will, because he still has the detective in his ear. Will gets his attention.

WILL (CONT'D)
(to the prosecutor)
Do you need a recess?

The prosecution jumps back into action.

PROSECUTOR
Sorry your, Honor. The state would like to recall Detective Aaron Ferguson.

KAREN
I object. This witness has already testified on day 1.

PROSECUTOR
I'm recalling Detective Ferguson as a rebuttal witness, to the testimony on the first day of this trial by Ms. Dorothy Holloway, the Guidance Counselor at Valley Crest High School.

Will thinks for a beat then..

WILL
Overruled. Call your witness.

The Detective takes the stand.

WILL (CONT'D)
Detective, I'll remind you that you're still under oath.

PROSECUTOR
Mrs. Holloway testified that in her time spent with Amanda Armstrong, she did not display any sort of jealousy. Is there anything that you learned during the course of your investigation that would conclude that the defendant was jealous?

DETECTIVE FERGUSON
Yes.

PROSECUTOR
And what was that?

DETECTIVE FERGUSON
We've found a journal that the defendant kept.

KAREN
Objection!
(MORE)

KAREN (CONT'D)

This wasn't a part of discovery!
Why is this the first we're hearing
of this journal!?

WILL

Would Council approach the bench.

Both Karen and the Prosecutor go and stand before Will.

KAREN

Your Honor, this is clearly some
wannabe DA cowboy stunt.

PROSECUTOR

This evidence--

KAREN

Your Honor I move to strike from the
record any testimony of an alleged
journal.

PROSECUTOR

Judge, if you would allow me to
continue. I can clear this up
quickly.

KAREN

Everything that you say from here on
out will be prejudicial to the jury.

PROSECUTOR

This evidence was just found this
morning, your Honor.

WILL

At this point I will allow you to
continue your line of questioning.
And I'll see whether or not the
journal comes into evidence.

They both return to their tables.

WILL (CONT'D)

Overruled. The prosecution can
proceed.

PROSECUTOR

When did you discover this journal?

DETECTIVE FERGUSON

The school custodian found it this
morning when he was cleaning out
some senior floor lockers.

The prosecutor takes the journal and places it on an overhead projector that's already there.

PROSECUTOR

On the right-hand side we have the English Lit notes that were submitted earlier. And on the right we have the journal that was just discovered. The handwriting is identical.

The audience gasps at what has clearly been written in the journal.

PROSECUTOR (CONT'D)

Detective Ferguson, can you please read the top page of the journal?

DETECTIVE FERGUSON

Steve's punk ass. I should tell Dale I cut that fat lip. LOL! Love him.

PROSECUTOR

And this next page.

DETECTIVE FERGUSON

New meaning to black and blue. Told him if he even looks at that ho again I'd fuck him up worse next time.

Karen clearly becomes uncomfortable as she confers with her partner. Amanda's genteel demeanor grows more tense.

PROSECUTOR

And this one here.

Then the gasp of all gasps is heard.

DETECTIVE FERGUSON

He knows I don't care about that tramp. I will straight up kill him if I see him with her again--

Karen jumps to her feet, furious.

KAREN

I object! This evidence--

Just then Amanda can't take it any more and screams out.

AMANDA

He was going to leave me! He couldn't do that! I earned him! I earned him!

Everyone erupts in complete shock as Amanda breaks down. The jurors look at each other in disbelief. Nye is in the audience writing feverishly in her note-pad.

WILL
Order! Quiet down in the court!

Off Will as he brings his court back to order.

INT. WILL'S CHAMBERS - DAY 8

Will enters his chambers and makes a beeline to his desk drawer where he keeps the antacid. He feels sick to his stomach. He sits at his desk and rubs his temples. Paulette comes in she can feel the weight of this moment and what's bound to be going through Will's mind.

PAULETTE
I've got to say I didn't see that one coming.

WILL
Neither did I.

PAULETTE
I just don't get it. What would possess a child to kill? That burden she'll have to carry for the rest of her life. To me that'd be sentence enough. I never envy this part of the job.

Off Will taking Paulette's words to heart.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. WILL'S LOFT - EVENING 8

Will arrives home exhausted. He drops his bag, loosens his tie and goes to the fridge and cracks open a beer. He stands there as he takes a long glorious swig of the dark ale. Then he thinks...

INT. WILL'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Will's clothes from the day are strewn all over his room. We follow of path of discarded clothes to end at a pair of running shoes being laced up.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES ARTS DISTRICT - MOMENTS LATER

It's dusk as the sun majestically sets from behind the sixth street bridge in DTLA. At a distance we see a figure running. When we get a better look we see that it's Will. He's shirtless, just dressed in running shorts with a bandanna on his head. He's letting off some much needed steam. But as we scope his beautifully chiseled and defined body, it's hard to not get a little steamed up yourself. He runs to the song "Somebody Else" by Emeli Sande.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES FINANCIAL DISTRICT - MOMENTS LATER

Will makes it up the steep incline on 5th street. We see him getting images of Amanda Armstrong killing Jeff Stevenson. He comes in and out of these images. In one of the images he sees himself in the room with the both of them. When Will makes it to the top he's out of breath. Just then he gets a text on his watch from Camille that reads: **Can you swing by tonight?** Will takes a beat, then heads back down the hill in the direction he came.

INT. JAY & CAMILLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT 8

Will arrives at Camille & Jay's. He's still dressed in his running attire, except he's added a tank top. Mitchell is there too. Will walks in to find all three of them awkwardly standing together on one side of the island in the kitchen. Will looks at them like they're crazy. They just look at him.

WILL

What is wrong with you people? Why are you are standing there like that-- And staring at me? Who died?

CAMILLE

No one died. We--

WILL

Wait. You're pregnant! But why is Mitchell standing there? Did you have to use his sperm? Jay's little paratroopers petered out and Mitchell's going to be the father the of your baby? Okay...Yes it's weird. But in time I'll get my head around it.

CAMILLE
No!

MITCHELL
Gross!

JAY

My paratroopers are just fine, thank you!

WILL

So you don't need my sperm?

CAMILLE

Can you just shut up for a minute?

Will does as he's told. But just then he turns and heads for the door.

WILL

This is some intervention shit! And I can't today!

JAY
Will! Stop!

CAMILLE
It's not an intervention!
Come back!

Will turns back and eyes them suspiciously. Then Camille holds up a toothpick with a little white paper flag taped to it. Then Jay holds up one of his own. Camille and Jay look over at Mitchell, and he reluctantly holds up his flag. They all surrender. Camille takes another flag she's made, and holds it out for Will.

CAMILLE (CONT'D)

And this one is yours. We surrender.

Will waves his flag. The mood is instantly lightened.

WILL

You guys... I do owe you an apology. All of you. I don't know-- I just kind of lost my head.

CAMILLE

We could have all acted better.

Jay and Mitchell don't say anything and Camille, from her middle position elbows them both.

JAY

Sorry.

MITCHELL

I'm sorry too. I could have handled the entire situation differently.

CAMILLE

You guys this is us here. The Tribe. We don't do the crabs in the barrel thing. We got to where we are by being supportive, not to mention rock stars, not by killing each other. We are the best and the brightest. We're crusaders.

She throws a superhero fist up in the air.

WILL

Please tell me you didn't make capes, too.

MITCHELL

So... We all good?

They all sheepishly nod as they look at each other.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

Great! Cause I'm hungry as hell. Is there any of that chicken left from the other night?

Mitchell and Camille head to the fridge.

JAY

(to Will)

Man? Amanda Armstrong? What the hell?

WILL

I know. Crazy, right?

CAMILLE

That little girl is about to be in for a rude awakening.

MITCHELL

Jail is exactly where that girl needs to be. Pulling some shit like that on the stand. Just glad it was Karen and not me.

WILL

Don't say that. Prison's a hard place to be. Even for the guilty.

JAY

Maybe I should use that in my statement tomorrow, when I'm back in court.

They all start digging into the leftovers.

CAMILLE

Jay, you've been studying those on-line closing statement videos like crazy. You got it.

She leans over and kisses Jay.

CAMILLE (CONT'D)

You, my prince, are going to be brilliant.

Will admires the love these two have for each other.

MITCHELL

I told you, just imagine everyone in their underwear.

WILL

No. Just speak to every juror like they're Camille.

MITCHELL

(to Will)

So, you ready for tomorrow, man?

WILL

I'm still working on it.

JAY

I just realized that this is going to be your very first sentencing ever. What a moment! I mean as an attorney you're once removed, but now the fate of someone's life, their mere existence is entirely in your hands. I can't even imagine the enormous first-time pressure you must be feeling.

WILL

Thanks, Jay.

CAMILLE

You'll do just fine, Will. Despite the tragedy of this whole thing.

Just then Mitchell holds up an empty alcohol bottle.

MITCHELL

The tragedy is that there's no more gin.

While Camille, Jay and Mitchell search the cupboards for more alcohol, Will's left thinking. The wheels begin to spin.

WILL

(to himself)

Tragedy...

Off Will, contemplative.

INT. WILL'S COURTROOM - DAY 9

Will sits at the bench. He takes a long pause as he looks at Amanda and the victim's family. The weight of the world is on his shoulders. He begins to read his statement to Amanda before he sentences her.

WILL

Othello is one of Shakespeare's best plays. Tragedy of epic proportion. I'm taken with its themes of Love, Power, Race, and at its core, jealousy. Jealousy is an overwhelmingly powerful vice - and when coupled with vengeance and delusion, we know that jealousy has the strength to kill. What is so disturbing... so shocking... and so painful, is that when life begins to imitate art, bringing with it all of its misguided and vengeful energy, you see these same tragic themes become a reality in the here and now; as they did for Jeffrey Stevenson and Amanda Armstrong. While other teenagers engage and grapple with this fictional body of work, you Ms. Armstrong, plagiarized its content, spilling the blood of Jeffrey Stevenson in your final ACT. Romance ended where your tale began. You beat and stole the life of Jeffrey Stevenson.

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

And as Shakespeare also wrote,
*"Cowards die many times before their
 deaths; the valiant never taste of
 death but once."* Amanda, this will
 inevitably be the burden that you
 will carry for the rest of your life.
 And that's a sentence much heavier
 than the one that I can hand down to
 you today. Murder is a heavy burden
 to carry, but it will be yours to
 bear. This was someone's son,
 someone's brother, and a cherished
 friend to others. His life was not
 expendable. His life mattered. I
 will ask you to stand Ms. Armstrong
 for sentence, please.

Amanda stands, holding on to Karen for support.

WILL (CONT'D)

Amanda Armstrong, you have pled guilty
 to murder in the 2nd degree. So it
 is the sentence of the court that
 your custody be committed to the
 department of corrections for
 confinement of the California state
 prison with possibility for probation
 after twenty years.

And just before Will closes...

WILL (CONT'D)

The court wishes that you do find
 peace along the rest of your journey.

Off Will as he strikes his gavel, adjourns his court and
 leaves.

INT. WILL'S COURTROOM - DAY 9 LATER THAT DAY

Will sits in his empty courtroom. The silence is broken
 when Dean enters Will's court from the back. Deans walks up
 to the bench and sits on the edge of one of the counsel
 tables. He can read Will's internal struggle.

DEAN

It's that dichotomy of justice served
 but the reality that you've just
 altered the course of someone's life
 forever.

WILL

And something tells me that there isn't an antacid strong enough to soothe that kind of heartburn.

DEAN

Nope.

WILL

Whatever I do, I am going to have to live with the fact that I'm going to always feel like shit.

DEAN

Yup.

WILL

How do you reconcile that it's... either too much and still yet not enough? Destroying one family, disappointing another?

DEAN

It'll come with the job. It's how you'll know you're a judge.

Off Will realizing that he is definitely a judge.

INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY 9

Will is running at full speed down the hall. Just as he rounds the corner, there's Nye. She takes him by surprise.

WILL

Hey!

NYE

You look like you're in a hurry.

WILL

I kind of am. Did you need something?

NYE

I wanted to say congratulations on your first trial. And what you said in there... Will I, I'd love to go on a date, if the offer still stands.

WILL

Nye... You seem like a great girl.

NYE

Oh that's never good.

WILL

I love the law. And you and I...
This. We would always be an ethical
breach waiting to happen. I can't...
We can't date.

They look at each other for a beat.

NYE

I get it.

They both kind of look around for an awkward beat. Now what
do we do? He awkwardly motions that he's really late.

WILL

So I...

NYE

Oh yeah... Totally! Go! Go!

With that, Will dashes down the hall to where he's going.
Off Nye forlorn as she turns and heads in the other direction.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY 9

Will slips in and sits down next to Camille and Mitchell
just as Jay stands at the counsel table. He still looks a
little pale and clammy as he begins his closing statement.

JAY

More often than not, last resorts
have heavy consequences. This
unfortunately was the case for Randall
Johnson, at the heart, a good man.
Who made a disastrous choice one
night that ended in the death of a
16 year old girl. Extreme and utter
recklessness - Yes. Premeditated
murder - No. I don't believe in one
not taking responsibility or paying
for the crimes they've committed.
But the punishment should not exceed
the boundaries of that crime
committed. Before you in this
courtroom is a man of moral character,
remorseful for his crime and willing
to accept his punishment for a chance
at life after a meaningful and just
period of rehabilitation.

It's an amazing heartfelt close. Jay succeeds - it's a
triumph. Just then Camille, Will and Mitchell jump to their
feet and loudly start cheering and applauding Jay's
performance. Dean begins banging his gavel.

JUDGE

That will be enough! Quiet in the courtroom! I will not tolerate this outburst!

They continue, prompting others to cheer.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

You three... Leave my courtroom immediately or I will have you held in contempt!

The three of them make their way out the of the courtroom. Just before Camille leaves, she turns and mouths "I love you" to Jay. Off Jay riding high off of his moment.

INT. BAR - EVENING 9

Will and the gang are all at the bar we first met them. They stand around a pub table celebrating Jay's success in court today.

JAY

Ten years with option for parole after five, and good behavior.

CAMILLE

You were so damn hot up there.

MITCHELL

I was like look who got their pull-ups.

Jay gives Mitchell the stink eye.

WILL

You did us proud today man. Knew you had it in you.

Will makes eye contact with a sexy woman across the room. They smile at one another. Mitchell clocks it.

MITCHELL

Not bad. She definitely makes the reserve.

WILL

Nah... I've got plenty on my plate at the moment.

He looks at his watch.

WILL (CONT'D)

Listen you guys, it's getting late
and I still have an errand to run.
Jay. Buddy, again good job.

JAY
We just got here.

CAMILLE
Don't go yet.

MITCHELL
Errands? Man, stay for one more.

WILL
I wish I could, but I gotta go.
We'll connect this week.

Will puts on his jacket. They all try to stifle laughs.

JAY
Tell Nye we said hi.

They laugh. Will smiles and just shakes his head. And he
leaves his crew to their celebration. Off Will as he exits
the bar.

MONTAGE OF WILL'S MOVEMENTS AFTER HE LEAVES THE BAR - VARIOUS

A) INT. WILL'S CAR - EVENING

Will sits behind the wheel of his car driving. He's deep in
thought.

B) EXT. HIGHWAY - EVENING

We pull out to see that Will is on the highway exiting to
Lancaster, CA.

C) INT. WILL'S CAR - EVENING

Will powers down his phone and throws it the glove
compartment. And just before he forgets he removes his watch
and throws it in the glove compartment before he gets out of
the car.

D) INT. SECURITY CHECKPOINT - EVENING

By the signage and uniformed security we see that Will is at
the Los Angeles County Prison going through security. He
exchanges his ID for a visitors badge and clips to his jacket
pocket.

E) INT. PRISON VISTOR'S LOUNGE - EVENING

Will along with some other visitors are lead into the
visitor's section of the prison. Will takes a seat at one
of the phone stations.

Just then GARRETT EVANS (50's) an older man, tall and thin with graying two-day-old stubble, sits on the other side of the plexiglas from Will. They both pick up the phone. Will smiles at the man.

WILL

Hi dad.

Will's dad holds up a newspaper clipping that has a photo of Will on it. The caption reads: "*The Wright Man for The Job.*"

FADE OUT:

END OF SHOW