

BLUFF CITY LAW

'Pilot'

Story

By

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Teleplay

By

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At that table we find EDGAR, along with two of his attorneys: ANTHONY LITTLE, 31, African-American. And ELIJAH STRAIT, 61, a modern-day Atticus Finch.

SYDNEY (V.O.)  
Everyone thinks fighting for what  
is right is a noble calling.

6 **INT. WOMENS' ROOM - COURTHOUSE - DAY**

6

Finally, we find the speaker, SYDNEY KELLER, 30, splashing her face with cold water. Her breath heaving.

SYDNEY (V.O.)  
But what they don't tell you is -  
if you lose - it destroys you.

Staring into the mirror, she lets out -- A PRIMAL SCREAM!

**AND WE CUT TO BLACK:**

"Six Weeks Earlier"

7 **EXT. ONE COMMERCE SQUARE, DOWNTOWN MEMPHIS - DAY**

7

A skyscraper looms over older buildings with more character.

8 **INT. JENNER, HARVEL & HAYES - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY**

8

A deposition is taking place. On one side of an expansive glass table is the Deponent, EARL JOHNSON, 50, nervous-looking. He is flanked by his WIFE and their ATTORNEY.

On the other side is a murderer's row of SIX Jenner, Harvel & Hayes killers, led by a very different Sydney. Icy calm. \$3,000 pantsuit, \$500 eyeglasses, hair pulled back tight.

SYDNEY  
Mr. Johnson, before we begin would  
you like some water? Anything at  
all to make you more comfortable?

Mr. Johnson mumbles a *no*. Sydney nods to the STENOGRAPHER. Let's go on the record.

SYDNEY  
Mr. Johnson in your complaint you  
stated you've chewed Red Chief  
tobacco since you were 14. So  
that's 36 years, correct?

MR. JOHNSON  
Yes.

SYDNEY

During that time, did you ever use  
a competitor's product?

Mr. Johnson is hesitant to answer. Sydney smiles patiently.

SYDNEY

You're suing them, Mr. Johnson.  
They're not going to be angrier if  
they find out you weren't always a  
loyal customer.

Everyone in the room laughs a little.

MR. JOHNSON

Sometimes.

SYDNEY

But you believe Red Chief is the  
reason you have Throat Dysphagia?

MR. JOHNSON

I do.

She nods. Makes a note. So far, so good.

SYDNEY

Mr. Johnson, have you been tested  
for sexually transmitted diseases?

Mr. Johnson is taken aback. *What did she just say?* His  
Attorney starts to object but Sydney cuts him off casually.

SYDNEY

Untreated STDs are an established  
cause of his illness. I just want  
to know if he's been tested.

MR. JOHNSON

I don't need to be tested. I'm  
happily married.

SYDNEY

So that's a no?

MR. JOHNSON

Yes, that's a no.

SYDNEY

Thank you. Mr. Johnson, are you  
aware your wife has had three  
affairs in the last ten years?

The question lands like a BOMB. Mr. Johnson turns to Mrs. Johnson. She turns pale.

JOHNSON'S ATTORNEY

(scrambling)

Counsel, if you're planning to attack this woman, I will stop this deposition right now--

SYDNEY

--Fine. Mr. Johnson, is it possible any of the prostitutes you visited in the past ten years could have given you a sexually transmitted disease?

Now it's Mr. Johnson's turn to pale.

9

**INT. JENNER, HARVEL & HAYES HALLWAY - DAY**

9

Sydney and her colleagues exit the conference room, leaving behind an escalating shouting match between spouses.

AMAZED ASSOCIATE

Sydney -- you realize you just won a case for Big Tobacco by taking the moral high ground?

Sydney flashes a smile and then disappears into her...

10

**INT. CORNER OFFICE - DAY**

10

...where the victory smile vanishes. Replaced by a more somber look. And a heavy exhale. She looks out her window at the city, her face reflected in the glass.

ELIJAH (O.S.)

You really do look down on us. I thought that was just a figure of speech.

Sydney turns - shocked to see Elijah standing in her doorway.

SYDNEY

(calling to her assistant)

Carla, what part of '*under no circumstance do I want to see my father*' didn't you understand?

ELIJAH

(sadly)

The part where your mother dies.

And just like that, Sydney's world changes forever.



14

**EXT. STRAIT FAMILY MANOR, BACKYARD - DAY**

14

Seated on rows of white chairs in a grove of Dogwoods along the Wolf River, 150 GUESTS listen to Elijah speak. He has an unassuming country charm that belies his great intellect.

ELIJAH

All of you here know how important the spirit of service was to Catherine. Many of you worked on civic projects with her. Some of you even opposed her at times. It didn't matter. So long as you believed you were making Memphis a better place, she considered you a friend.

He smiles - as does the audience who recognize the Catherine they know in his words. This next part is harder for him. He LOOKS at Sydney - almost as if he's telling this to her - as well as the rest of the crowd.

ELIJAH

My wife was my light. And it terrifies me to think she is gone. But she's not. She lives on all across our city. We can see her when we pass the community center in Longview Heights. Or take our children to play in Overtown Park - which they wanted to turn into a shopping mall. We can see her in the women's shelters, or on the riverfront. She is, in fact, all around us.

(smiles, thinking)

I remember it was our second date. I'd just finished telling her how impressive I was going to be. A big money lawyer. She gave me that stare - that Catherine stare our daughter Sydney inherited...

Sydney feels the eyes pass over her.

ELIJAH

She said - *'Why measure yourself by money, when you have a chance to change the world?'*

15

**EXT. STRAIT FAMILY MANOR, BACKYARD - LATER**

15

The chairs have been replaced by TABLES OVERFLOWING WITH FOOD where the guests now mingle. We recognize Anthony from the courtroom opening. Next to him is JAKE REILLY. Early 30s,

Jake is handsome and has a touch of charismatic rogue to him. He is also NOT from Tennessee.

JAKE

Three things you Southerners are good at. Putting people in their place with a smile. Saying things are 'just fine' when they're not. And bringing food to a funeral.

ANTHONY

Well as my wife says, 'you can't eat flowers.'

A PASSING WOMAN lets her gaze LINGER on Jake; clearly smitten. Anthony, seeing that, shakes his head.

ANTHONY

Even here you get looks.

JAKE

We all have our crosses to bear.

Jake's voice trails off as his eyes find Sydney on the far side of the crowd. He studies her a beat.

JAKE

So that's the daughter. I thought she'd look angrier.  
(off Anthony)  
Based on your stories.

ANTHONY

It's not like I said she was a monster. She and her dad just clashed is all.

JAKE

When was the last time you saw her?

ANTHONY

The day she walked out. Three years ago.

JAKE

What was the straw that broke the camel's back?

ANTHONY

A civil rights complaint taking on the three-strikes law. Client was a 28 year-old mother facing a mandatory 25 years for shoplifting a child's coat. Sydney became

(MORE)

ANTHONY (CONT'D)  
obsessed with the case - even  
though on paper there was no way  
to win. It got to the point her  
marriage suffered, she was living  
at the office, harassing the DA.  
So Elijah took her off the case.  
And she quit the next day.

Jake lets that sink in. Then--

JAKE  
What happened to the mother?

ANTHONY  
Funny that. We ended up winning.  
Thanks to Sydney - she's free.

Off Jake, considering Sydney...

16

**EXT. STRAIT FAMILY MANOR - BACK PORCH - NIGHT**

16

Quiet now. The air thick with cicadas and fireflies. Sydney  
and her father sit looking out towards the moonlit river.  
They are two people who didn't expect to be here. Who were  
once so close. And now aren't even sure what to say.

ELIJAH  
Your mother gave me updates. Every  
week she saw you.

SYDNEY  
Me too.

Silence.

ELIJAH  
She'd get a kick out of this,  
wouldn't she? The two of us  
sitting here on the porch.

SYDNEY  
Especially this quietly.

He laughs a little sadly at that. She does too.

ELIJAH  
Can I show you something?

17

**INT. ELIJAH'S HOME STUDY - NIGHT**

17

Elijah and Sydney are standing in front of a wall covered  
with photos and information about Edgar Soriano's case.

ELIJAH

What do you think?

SYDNEY

I think there's a reason  
Morningstar is 66 and 0 in lawsuits  
against 'Knock Out'.

ELIJAH

68 and 0. They won two last week.  
(Looks at her)  
Seriously, you work with these  
companies, you know how they think.  
Tell me how you'd beat me.

Her eyes scan back and forth across the information.

SYDNEY

You're part of a class-action?

ELIJAH

86 clients from 38 states.

SYDNEY

First thing I'd do is avoid your  
client. I'd scour the 86, find  
someone who plays like he's in it  
for the money, make *him* the face  
the jury remembers. Then I'd drag  
you into a war of experts. Mine  
will be EPA certified, yours will  
be '*guns for hire*'. Last but not  
least, I'd nail you on causation.  
'*Prove Knock Out made him sick.*'  
You won't be able to - and  
Morningstar will be 69 and 0.

(beat)

To be honest, they wouldn't waste  
me on this. A good associate would  
handle it. I'm sorry, Dad, you  
can't win.

ELIJAH

Could you?

She blinks. Excuse me?

ELIJAH

Win. If you were representing the  
Sorianos - could you win this case?

And now the real reason Elijah brought her in here dawns on  
Sydney. It wasn't for an opinion on a case. It's because--

ELIJAH

I want you to come back to the firm.

Sydney blinks. Laughs.

SYDNEY

Dad...

ELIJAH

I want you by my side, fighting for what's right. It's where you belong. We both know it. Your mom did too...

At the mention of her mother, Sydney pauses a beat. Then--

SYDNEY

I appreciate the offer but there's a reason it was a disaster the first time. We're both Alphas and two Alphas don't mix.

(before he can protest)

We're also totally opposite when it comes to how we do the job. We're oil and water. You're conservative, I wage war...

ELIJAH

Strengths. Our differences could be strengths this time...

SYDNEY

You're serious...

ELIJAH

For 35 years I've had the best legal minds pass through my office, but the brightest of all? I drove away. By badgering her, and second-guessing her--

SYDNEY

(sharp)

I don't like you, Dad. Have you forgotten that? I can't just ignore how you treated me when we worked together. Or forgive you for all the years you cheated on Mom. I don't see a hero, I see a hypocrite.

She gets up and starts to walk away.

ELIJAH

That's no reason to waste your talents working for soulless vampires who sell justice to the highest bidder. Hate me. Fine. Never forgive me. Okay. But get back in the fight. If not with me, then somewhere else. Because in case you haven't noticed, the world is running out of heroes.

She stops at the end of the porch. His words lingering in her ears. She stares out into the vast night.

SYDNEY

Why would it be different?

She turns and looks at him.

SYDNEY

If I came back, why would it be different? You're Elijah Strait. Beloved and famous in your field. People like you don't change, Dad. Why would you even try?

The \$64,000 question. And his answer - so simple.

ELIJAH

Because - when you lose the love of your life, you realize you don't want to miss even one moment with your incredible daughter.

**END ACT ONE**



He opens the door for her. She meets his smile with hers.

SYDNEY

Jake. Lose the Handicap placard or  
I'll have them tow your car.

She walks in. He lingers. Blinks. Smiles. Impressed.

JAKE

Ouch.

20

**INT. ENTRY VESTIBULE - CONTINUOUS**

20

No sooner is Sydney inside than does she see Della and Anthony up ahead in the open KITCHEN/Common Area.

ANTHONY

I called Vandy Law. Told them their  
two best students were back on the  
same team.

Anthony and Sydney embrace. Then Della hugs Sydney tight. Everything about this place is the opposite of Sydney's last firm. It's warm, inviting. There aren't dozens of people running around. Just one LEGAL SECRETARY and a PARALEGAL.

SYDNEY

Guess hell froze over, huh?

DELLA

I prefer to think of it as the  
Spring thaw.

Sydney's eyes fall on the ONE PERSON she doesn't know. He's 21, mixed-race, and is wearing BEATS headphones with the music blaring. He has just turned around from the fridge, holding three Mountain Dew's in his hands.

ANTHONY

Sydney, meet Emerson. Paralegal,  
assistant, all around wonder boy.

EMERSON shifts all his sodas to one hand so he can use the other to shake hers. He forgets to remove his headphones.

EMERSON

Hi. Nice to finally meet you.

Before Sydney can respond, Emerson turns around and walks off. Clearly unaware that his doing so is considered weird/rude by most people on this planet.

ANTHONY

He's an acquired taste.

21

**INT. JAKE'S OFFICE - DAY**

21

Jake hangs his coat on a rack in front of a wall covered with BOSTON SPORTS MEMORABILIA. Elijah knocks on the open door.

ELIJAH

So. Have the calls started?

JAKE

(beat)

I may have received a few.

ELIJAH

(laughs)

I bet an hour after news got out your phone was ringing off the hook. 'Old man Strait's bringing back his daughter, what does that mean for a rainmaker like you, Jake?'

JAKE

In fairness, I don't think they were as eloquent as that.

ELIJAH

Give me 30 days. If, after 30 days, you think Sydney being here compromises you in any way, I'll make sure you get a job at any firm you want.

JAKE

Can I use the 30 days to start places bidding against each other - drive my price up?

ELIJAH

I'd be disappointed if you didn't.

(stands)

But in the meantime, I've got something for you.

Elijah places a FILE on Jake's coffee table. Attached, a sticky note in beautiful cursive handwriting says: 'For Jake'.

ELIJAH

I found that in Catherine's study. You know how she was. Memphis Saint of Lost Causes. People would write her letters, come up to her in the supermarket...

Jakes flips through the file. It's filled with information about an old murder case. He wrinkles his brow.

JAKE

Why me? I haven't gone near a criminal case since before I worked for you.

ELIJAH

I don't know. But if there was one thing my wife was a genius at - it was matching people to purposes.

(looks Jake in the eye)

It would mean a lot if you could take a look.

Off Jake, taking the file, quite moved by the request.

22

**INT. KITCHEN COMMONS - DAY**

22

Sydney, Anthony, and Della are still standing around the large island in the firm's expansive kitchen and common area.

SYDNEY

I heard you had another daughter.

ANTHONY

(nods, laughs)

Yep. That's four to one now I'm outnumbered in my own house.

DELLA

Your girls are delightful.

ANTHONY

You only say that because you get to leave after you babysit. Which reminds me, there's a rumor going around says Aunt Della has been bringing ice cream.

DELLA

Anthony, I'm a sixth generation woman of the South. Spoiling other people's children is in my DNA.

Sydney watches Jake walk out of the office - exchanging pleasantries with a FAMILY just coming in. One we recognize.

DELLA

The Sorianos are here.

23

**INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY**

23

Anthony is standing next to a giant WHITE BOARD on which he has meticulously written out a road map for their trial. He's FINISHING the update for Edgar, Maria, and Eva. Sydney has noticed the 12 year-old girl is dutifully taking notes.

ANTHONY

Finally, we'll present evidence as to loss of quality of life. We'll call your friends. Maria. And Eva - if you're still up for it.

Eva nods. *Hell yeah I am.* That makes Sydney smile.

ANTHONY

Okay then. We're on track for a Spring 2020 start. The trial itself will take about ten weeks.

Sydney sees Eva abruptly stop taking notes. Edgar and Maria shift in their seats. Everyone in the room feels the change.

ELIJAH

Edgar, what's wrong?

EDGAR

It seems my tumors have spread much faster than the doctors anticipated. They've revised their timeline. I won't live to see the New Year.

It hangs there. The words hitting everyone like a body blow. Especially Sydney, who is not used to this kind of thing.

MARIA SORIANO

Do you think... Is there any way we can move the trial up to this year?

Anthony and Elijah exchange a look.

ANTHONY

Unfortunately, trials like this can only move so fast. I'm afraid our hands are tied as far as when--

SYDNEY

--Unless we switch to the alternate strategy.

Anthony and Elijah have NO IDEA what she's talking about.

ANTHONY

The alternate strategy.

Sydney goes to the WHITE BOARD. Begins to ERASE large chunks of the meticulous trial plan. She writes 'EXPEDITE'...

SYDNEY

We start by breaking from the class action and filing individually for an expedited trial due to your new prognosis. There is precedent for this in California. Other State Courts seem to be following suit.

She writes 'SIMPLIFY'...

SYDNEY

Assuming we get our trial, we then pare down the case we'll present to the jury. Instead of three months, we tell our story in three weeks, focusing on three keys.

She writes the name 'EDGAR'...

SYDNEY

Key one is you. I think a jury will love you. I want them to hear your story - in your words.

She writes 'COVER UP'...

SYDNEY

In politics they say - it's not the crime that gets you - it's the cover-up. So we show Morningstar engaged in a deliberate and malicious cover-up. Of reports. Debates. Anything that suggests they knew Knock Out was dangerous.  
(she turns to Eva)  
Am I going too fast?

EVA

(jotting it all down)  
No.

Sydney writes one last word: 'SCIENCE'...

SYDNEY

Once the jury is *convinced* there's been a cover-up, then we call our expert witnesses and we keep their message *simple*. Knock Out *can* cause cancer. Morningstar *hid* that. Let the jury connect the dots.

Sydney stops and looks at the board. A hundred phrases and dates have been reduced to a handful of words.

EDGAR

And... I would get to testify?

SYDNEY

If we win the appeal, trial could start in a matter of weeks.

The Sorianos are obviously excited. Edgar turns to Elijah.

EDGAR

Elijah, I must admit, I like this plan. Most of all, I like that Eva would get to see me testify. Confront the people who did this.  
(tempers himself)  
But you are the expert. You are the one I trust. I will do whatever you say.

Off Elijah's look...

24

**INT. KITCHEN COMMONS - DAY**

24

Della watches them all file out of the conference room. The Sorianos, buoyant, exit the firm smiling.

ELIJAH

(on edge)  
Sydney, a word in my office...

SYDNEY

(on edge)  
Sure...

Anthony comes over and pours himself a long cup of coffee.

ANTHONY

Two hours. She's been here two hours. And already she's undone two years worth of work.

25

**INT. ELIJAH'S OFFICE - DAY**

25

Elijah doesn't hide his displeasure.

ELIJAH

You want to explain what just happened?

SYDNEY

I was afraid you'd shoot down the idea before the Sorianos heard it.

ELIJAH

So you ambushed me in front of a client in order to avoid having a conversation--

SYDNEY

You're not a gambler, Dad. And the only way to win this case is to gamble--

ELIJAH

You don't know that. And what's more. You don't have the right to make that determination without the rest of us. You realize if we lose this appeal, Edgar's wait for trial will be five years minimum, and he'll have walked away from any chance at a settlement.

SYDNEY

Then we better not lose.

26

**INT. VISITORS ROOM, FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTE - DAY**

26

Jake sits, waiting, flipping through the contents of Catherine's file. We glimpse old newspaper articles. "TEACHER ACCUSED OF STUDENT'S MURDER." We see the teacher: George Bell, 27. We see photos of his WIFE and BABY BOY. Then we see the MURDER VICTIM, a 16 YEAR-OLD GIRL.

A BUZZ - and Jake looks up to see GEORGE BELL, now 51, enter the visitors room. George is *not* what Jake expects of someone who has done a lot of hard time. His eyes are still bright, his face still capable of an easy smile. It's as if George is determined not to let his circumstances get him down.

JAKE

Mr. Bell, my name is Jake Tracey. I'm an attorney with Keller/Strait.

GEORGE

As in Elijah Strait?

JAKE

Yes, sir. I was actually given your name by his wife Catherine. Did you know her...?

George shakes his head. Nope.

GEORGE

Just him. From seeing him in the papers. But this is great. Elijah Strait has handled some of the biggest Civil Rights cases in the last 20 years.

JAKE

That's true.

GEORGE

And that's what this is - a violation of my Civil Rights...

JAKE

Mr. Bell...

GEORGE

Not some petty complaint. Not a nuisance lawsuit...

JAKE

Mr. Bell...

GEORGE

It's about more than applesauce!

Jake blinks.

JAKE

Applesauce?

GEORGE

That's my lawsuit. See, for the last 10 years FCI has served world-class applesauce. I'm talking little plastic tubs of heaven. Six months ago? They stop. Budget cuts, they said. But I know better.

Jake notices two FCI GUARDS watching and trying not to laugh.

JAKE

Mr. Bell, I'm not here about the applesauce. I'm here about you. I'm here because even a cursory look at your trial shows you have several grounds for appeal. Catherine Strait believed something was wrong here and if she did--

George cuts Jake off. Suddenly *very sober* and *very sane*.

GEORGE

Let me save you the shoe leather,  
pretty boy. There's no pot of gold  
at the end of this rainbow.

(off Jake's look)

I'm guilty.

George smiles sadly at Jake. Then gets up and walks back to the gate to await being buzzed back into the hell that is his home. As Jake watches George go, one of the FCI GUARDS appears over Jake's shoulder. Oozing disdain.

FCI GUARD

Guy is a total nutbag.

On Jake -- Who feels like something here doesn't add up. He glances down at the note on the file folder: 'For Jake'.

27

**EXT. FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT, JACKSON, TENNESSEE - DAY**

27

Seat of the 6th district Western Tennessee Court of Appeals.

CHIEF JUSTICE STAFFORD (PRE-LAP)

*Soriano v. Morningstar. Motion for  
Expedited Trial. Do we have both  
counsel present?*

28

**INT. FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT OF APPEALS - DAY**

28

On Sydney, standing at one dais, trying to control her breathing, as she looks up at the THREE JUSTICES who loom over her on the raised stage. She speaks into the mic.

SYDNEY

Sydney Keller for the Plaintiff.

The counsel for Morningstar, an OLDER MAN cut from a similar cloth as her dad, speaks into his mic.

SANDERFORD

Thomas Sanderford for the Defense.

In the front row, two of only a few spectators, Anthony and Elijah. As nervous, or maybe more nervous, than Sydney.

CHIEF JUSTICE STAFFORD

Ms. Keller... We've reviewed your  
petition for an expedited trial.

Sydney braces herself for the questioning to begin.

CHIEF JUSTICE STAFFORD  
Mr. Sanderford... Do we have this  
right that your client does not  
wish to contest this?

Sydney looks up. *What?*

SANDERFORD  
That's correct, your honor.  
Morningstar sympathizes with Mr.  
Soriano and is equally eager to  
adjudicate this matter.

CHIEF JUSTICE STAFFORD  
Well, we know better than to look a  
gift horse in the mouth.

Polite laughter echoes through the mostly empty room as  
Sydney looks back at Elijah, who reads his daughter's mind.

ELIJAH  
We missed something...

CHIEF JUSTICE STAFFORD  
Ms. Keller, you have your trial.  
Voir dire to begin a week from  
Monday.

The gavel comes down. And Sydney is on the move...

29

**EXT. COURT STEPS - MOMENTS LATER**

29

Sydney dials her phone. The call goes straight to Briana's  
voicemail. She hangs up to try again - *when Briana calls her.*

SYDNEY (PHONE)  
Bri, Morningstar has something. I  
don't know what--

BRIANA (PHONE)  
--Your expert witnesses.

30

**INTERCUT. INT. KELLER/STRAIT - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY**

30

Briana is flanked by a concerned Della and Emerson.

BRIANA (PHONE)  
Emerson was trying to reach them  
and getting the run-around. I  
finally got one of them on the  
phone. Seems in last 24 hours  
they've become unavailable or  
changed their mind about helping.





After a beat her smiling ends. And she stares at a photo of her mother.

SYDNEY

It's starting to sink in.

ELIJAH

Yeah. I walk around the house and I don't recognize the place. It's like someone blew out all the candles.

He smiles sadly. Then, unable or unwilling to indulge in any more of this with him, Sydney goes back into work mode.

SYDNEY

Weaker experts means we'll have to come out of the gate stronger.

ELIJAH

Move Edgar to last. Open with the conspiracy.

She nods. On this at least, father and daughter are in sync.

BEGIN TRIAL SEQUENCE ONE

34

**INT. CROWDED COURT ROOM - TRIAL - WEEK ONE**

34

On the stand is EDWIN JAMES, a Morningstar Vice-President.

SYDNEY

Mr. James, as VP of Research for Morningstar you oversaw 143 safety studies of Knock Out. But presented only 80 of those to the FDA when you applied for approval. Why not present all of them?

MR. JAMES

Some were inconclusive. The data in others contained errors--

SYDNEY

How'd you know it was an error?

MR. JAMES

Excuse me?

SYDNEY

When you say error - what you mean to say is - a result that didn't fit your mandate to show Knock Out was safe - is it not?

SANDERFORD

Objection...

SYDNEY

The results of nearly 40% of the safety tests you performed on Knock Out were withheld from the FDA---

MR. JAMES

You're twisting my words.

SYDNEY

No, sir. Your words are twisted.

35

**INT. CROWDED COURTROOM - TRIAL - WEEK ONE**

35

Up on BIG SCREENS, two identical documents are projected side-by-side. DR. STAN RIFKIN is on the stand. Anthony is more subtle than Sydney. The tone of his voice is his weapon.

ANTHONY

On the left is the paper presented by you, a world-respected biopharmacological researcher, in which you declare the active ingredient in Knock Out to be harmless to human beings.

(beat)

On the right is the same paper, written eight weeks earlier not by you, but by Ms. Sally Jenkins, a Vice-President of Marketing for Morningstar. Is it fair to say she wrote this report for you?

DR. RIFKIN

She gave input--

ANTHONY

In fact the only change you made was to add your signature, wasn't it?

DR. RIFKIN

Yes.

ANTHONY

How much did you get paid to put your name and its considerable reputation on a research paper that was actually written by a Morningstar Marketing VP?

DR. RIFKIN

\$150,000.

ANTHONY

With sales of Knock Out in the billions, I'd say you should have held out for more--

SANDERFORD

--Objection!

36

**INT. CROWDED COURT ROOM - TRIAL - WEEK ONE**

36

An EMAIL is projected. A highlighted portion reads: *If I can get this one thrown out, they'll have to save me a corner office.* The witness is EPA director SCOTT KARLBERG. And Elijah is at his country gentleman best.

ELIJAH

"If I can get this one thrown out, they'll have to save me a corner office." - Then you added a little smiley face at the end.

IRA GELLER

That was written in jest--

ELIJAH

I'm sure it was. My question is - who did you mean by *they*? Did you mean your higher-ups at the EPA? You are, after all, a public servant working to ensure that the products people use are safe. Perhaps you were thinking they would reward you for killing an independent study showing a possible link between Knock Out and Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma, the disease killing Mr. Soriano?

IRA GELLER

I don't recall what I meant.

ELIJAH

Let me help you. Who was this written to? Oh. It says so right here. "VFranks@Morningstar.com"

IRA GELLER

Victor is a friend.

ELIJAH

Who works at Morningstar. How about your last boss? Where does she work now?

IRA GELLER  
At Morningstar.

ELIJAH  
And her boss before that?

IRA GELLER  
Morningstar.

Favoring the jury, Elijah smiles.

ELIJAH  
You might think about leaving the  
EPA soon yourself, because it  
sounds like Morningstar is running  
out of corner offices.

SANDERFORD  
Objection.

ELIJAH  
Withdrawn. Nothing further.

Elijah looks at JUDGE COLLINS who seems begrudgingly  
impressed with how things have gone.

JUDGE COLLINS  
Court will adjourn for the weekend.  
Trial to resume Monday morning.

And the gavel comes down.

37

**EXT. SHELBY COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY**

37

Descending the steps, Edgar appears next to Sydney.

EDGAR  
Thank you, Ms. Keller.

SYDNEY  
We had a good week, but it's way  
too early for thank you's.

Edgar gestures a few paces ahead of them - to where his wife  
and daughter are *smiling and laughing* as they talk.

EDGAR  
The thanks - is for that.

CUT TO:

TRICIA YEARWOOD

Hosting her show - Tricia's Southern Kitchen.

TRICIA YEARWOOD (TV)  
Today is about feeding a crowd. And  
there's no better way than ribs...

38

**INT. JAKE'S OFFICE - DAY**

38

Sydney pops her head in and is more than a little surprised to see Jake so absorbed in this kind of program.

TRICIA YEARWOOD (O.S.)  
*I hear folks nowadays say ribs are  
their go-to comfort food. So how's  
about we all wallow a little today?*

SYDNEY  
(beat)  
You're an interesting guy Jake.

Jake stays riveted as he reaches for a remote.

JAKE  
Two years I've been down here.  
Figure it's time I go native.  
Besides, cooking shows help me  
think.

SYDNEY  
O-kay. Well, Emerson said you  
wanted to see me?

Jake turns Tricia off for now. Indicates his wall...

JAKE  
Any idea why your mom wanted me to  
look at the George Bell case?

...What used to be his Boston Sports stuff has been REPLACED  
by notecards and ideas about the GEORGE BELL CASE that sprawl  
across the entire wall.

SYDNEY  
She never mentioned the case to me.  
(confused)  
Wait, I don't understand. Della  
told me the guy said he was guilty.

JAKE  
You think your mom would have a  
file on it if it were that simple?

Sydney is - she hates to admit it - impressed.

JAKE

Rumor around the office is your ex-husband is now Chief of Detectives.

Sydney almost blanches.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I was hoping you could introduce me. There are parts of this investigation that don't make sense and public records aren't enough to fill in the gaps. A look at the actual investigatory files... Stuff guys like me don't normally get to see... Would go a long way...

(senses her hesitation)

What? You guys not on good terms?

SYDNEY

No. We're fine. I mean, we're nothing. It's just we had a strict "no work lines crossed" policy.

JAKE

I assume that died with the marriage.

SYDNEY

See, now I *know* you could have said that with more tact.

JAKE

But where's the fun in that? What do you say, will you call him?

SYDNEY

I can't just call him.

39

**INT. CHIEF OF DETECTIVES OFFICE - DAY**

39

Sydney shares a WARM EMBRACE with DETECTIVE ROBERT "ROBBIE" ELLIS. 35, fit, handsome, the kind of MAN who wears cowboy boots with his jeans and sports coat. As steady as Jake is wily, as straightforward as Jake is opaque.

ROBBIE

I'm so sorry about your mom. Dianne and I had just gotten to Montana when we heard. Did you get the flowers? I know Tulips were her favorite.

SYDNEY

Yes, thank you.

Robbie extends a welcoming 'man's handshake' to Jake.

ROBBIE  
You must be Jake. Robbie Ellis.

They all sit down. Robbie favors Sydney.

ROBBIE  
So, back to work with your dad...

SYDNEY  
(to Jake)  
...Robbie had a front row seat to  
what happened the first time...

ROBBIE  
Things are always complicated when  
family is involved. But I think  
it's great, Syd. I always believed  
that work was your calling.

Robbie smiles. Seems to soak in seeing her.

JAKE  
So. George Bell...

ROBBIE  
Right. I don't have a problem  
showing you the files. But they  
don't leave my office--

SYDNEY  
--They won't.

Robbie looks at Jake. Jake gestures agreement.

ROBBIE  
Okay. I'll be right back.

As soon as Robert is gone, Jake smiles.

JAKE  
Now it makes sense...  
(off her 'what' look)  
Cowboy still loves you.

SYDNEY  
He has a fiancé.

JAKE  
Did you break his heart? You broke  
his heart.

Sydney's PHONE vibrates. She turns away to answer it.



ELIJAH

(snaps)

Sydney, either let the man talk or wait outside.

Sydney - not happy - shakes her head and walks out.

ELIJAH

I apologize for my daughter. She can't always tell when someone is trying to do her a kindness.

SANDERFORD

200K is all I can give without Morningstar shutting me down. I know you'll probably say no...

ELIJAH

But...

SANDERFORD

Elijah, you and I have been doing this a long time. We both know a man tells another man when the sky is about to fall.

Off Elijah's worried look...

42

**EXT. BEALE STREET - NIGHT**

42

Elijah and Sydney are walking back to the office. The CROWDS are out. LIVE MUSIC fills the air. Sydney is pissed.

SYDNEY

Next time you ask me to walk out of a meeting, I'm going to keep walking.

Elijah shakes his head.

ELIJAH

You have to do something about your anger. Because it blinds you from seeing shades in behavior...

SYDNEY

"People are complicated, they make mistakes" -- That speech was a lot more compelling before I realized you were talking about yourself.

ELIJAH

It's your clients who'll pay, Sydney. They're the ones who'll pay when you lose control.

SYDNEY

What do you suggest, Dad? I blow off some steam by checking into a hotel, getting drunk, and screwing one of mom's friends--

Elijah stops abruptly.

ELIJAH

Stop making this about me! If you could drop the attack dog act for one minute -- wait instead of lashing out for just one minute -- you'd be able to see that Sanderford wasn't trying to screw us. He was trying to warn us.

Sydney scoffs and walks off. Done with this talk.

BEGIN TRIAL SEQUENCE TWO

43

**INT. CROWDED COURTROOM - TRIAL - WEEK TWO**

43

Anthony and Sydney watch as one of their EXPERT WITNESSES is sworn in. Elijah looks over at Defense Counsel. Sanderford sits with SEVERAL CO-COUNSEL. He doesn't meet Elijah's gaze.

SYDNEY

Dr. Reeger, you've spent--

Sanderford stands, interrupting her.

SANDERFORD

Your honor, at this time we are lodging a formal objection to the relevance of Dr. Reeger's testimony.

SYDNEY

She studies *cancer*--

SANDERFORD

But has never studied Knock Out or any product similar. It's like asking a blood expert to talk about fingerprints.

SYDNEY

If defense counsel wanted to disqualify a witness, the time for doing that was before the trial.

SANDERFORD

Normally, I'd agree. But as this trial was expedited, we were left with no  
(MORE)



SANDERFORD

Objection.

48 **INT. CROWDED COURTROOM - LATER**

48

She is foiled at every turn.

JUDGE COLLINS

Sustained.

49 **INT. CROWDED COURTROOM - DAY**

49

So that she's just barely keeping the rage in now.

SYDNEY

Mr. Lynch, in the past, how much did Morningstar pay you to study--

SANDERFORD

Objection, beyond the scope.

JUDGE COLLINS

Sustained.

SYDNEY

Mr. Lynch, what was your salary for the year 2017?

SANDERFORD

Objection, scope.

JUDGE COLLINS

Sustained. Ms. Keller, do you have any relevant questions for the jury?

Sydney swallows an angry laugh. Turns and looks at the Judge.

SYDNEY

Just one. How much is Morningstar paying you?

After a moment of shocked silence, the court ERUPTS in noise.

50 **INT. COUNTY JAIL - LATER - DAY**

50

Sydney, sitting in a holding cell, with a handful of not-so-savory types. Furious with herself, she turns around and suddenly sees the man who has come to 'rescue' her.

ROBBIE

Hey, Syd.

**END ACT THREE**



ANTHONY

You said it would work because  
you've changed. But *she* hasn't.  
She's reckless. She thinks she's  
smarter than everyone. And she  
doesn't listen.

(shakes his head)

Blowing up in front of the jury  
tells them we think we're losing  
and that's a terrible message...

His voice trails off because they've all become aware that  
Sydney is here and walking by on the way to her office.

SYDNEY

He's right.

With that she's gone, down the hall.

ELIJAH

(to Anthony, calm)

Forget about today. Focus on  
prepping Edgar for tomorrow. And  
yes, I'll be questioning him.

(to Briana and Emerson)

We need to find an expert witness  
Judge Collins can't disqualify.  
And we need to do it fast.

54 INT. HALLWAY/EMERSON'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

54

Briana and Emerson walk down the hall and into the windowless  
cube that is Emerson's office. It's like a scene out of  
Hoarders. Files piled on files. 'Mountain Dew Can' pyramids.

EMERSON

Where do we start?

BRIANA

By ordering coffee.

55 INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

55

Sydney's door is closed. Elijah considers knocking, but  
turns around to walk off. He runs into a wall of Della.

DELLA

You're not going to talk to her?

ELIJAH

I've tried talking to her. I never  
seem to say the right thing. My  
whole career is about connecting to  
people but with her...

Della looks at her friend of nearly 40 years.

DELLA

That girl grew up with a hero for a father. A hero she found out was all too human. Every time someone told her how lucky she was, think how that pulled her apart. Keeping your secrets behind her smile.

(beat)

Elijah, you're my friend and I love you, but don't be an ass. You helped build that wall around her. So you *will* keep knocking it down.

56

**INT. SYDNEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

56

Sydney is looking out the window, when she hears a soft knock, and Elijah enters. He thinks about what to say...

...but she beats him to it.

SYDNEY

All this time I've told myself that I quit because I resented you for not being the man I thought you were. And because you resented me for how I saw you. And maybe that's all true.

She turns and looks at her father.

SYDNEY

But what's also true is - I don't think I can handle losing on this side of the law. At my last job, I slept like a baby. I wanted to win, sure. But I didn't care if I lost. Now I look at Edgar Soriano. At his wife, his daughter...

(exhales)

How do you do it? How do you deal with the pressure that comes when *winning or losing means everything?*

ELIJAH

(gallows humor)

Poorly for years. That's why I nearly lost your mother.

(exhales)

Sydney. I don't know what kind of relationship we're going to have. I don't know if we'll work as colleagues or as a family...

(MORE)

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

(beat)

But I do know that I can teach you how to hold onto your sanity and do this job. And if you learn to channel all of that passion you have? You will change the world.

On Sydney - hearing her dad - and for once believing him.

57

**INT. DELLA OFFICE - NIGHT**

57

Of all the offices in the firm, Della's is the homiest. Among her things, we see PICTURES of her wife. Turns out Della was one of the first prominent members of Memphis society to be openly lesbian. A road that hasn't always been a smooth one.

Della is on her computer when Jake knocks.

JAKE

Everyone done having heart-to-heart chats?

DELLA

(smiles)

What's up?

Jake crosses and sits on her couch.

JAKE

Why would you say you were guilty when you were innocent?

She knows who he means.

DELLA

You're sure?

JAKE

Witnesses' stories don't add up - timeline is wrong. Della, if I didn't know better, I'd say they actually *framed* this guy.

DELLA

Thank God, Catherine found him--

JAKE

Too bad he doesn't want anyone's help.

(off her look)

He insists he's guilty, won't even talk about the case. So now I've got to figure out how to change his

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

mind or else an innocent man is going to keep rotting in jail.

DELLA

How can I help?

JAKE

(venting frustration)

You can start by telling me why the hell Catherine gave me this in the first place? I keep thinking it must be related to some old criminal cases I tried back in Boston, but she wouldn't have heard of them anyway...

His voice trails off. She puts her hand on top of his in a maternal gesture of reassurance and friendship.

DELLA

(repeats)

How can I help?

JAKE

(exhales, looks at her)

I was thinking. You do trust and estate law. People come to you to talk about their hopes for the future, and what happens with their family after they die. The way I see it, life in prison is about as close to dying as you're going to get. So I'm asking you - why would George Bell lie?

Della gestures to the couch he's sitting on.

DELLA

When new clients first sit down on that couch, we talk about assets. Money and property. But, after an hour or so, the conversation always turns to the same thing. Legacy. When they're gone, how will their life have shaped the future? For me, it's my sons. For Elijah, it's Sydney. It's why Edgar can still find the strength to fight with tumors in every organ of his body.

(looks at Jake)

If you want to know why George Bell tells people he's guilty, find out why he's chosen guilty to be his legacy.



ELIJAH

When you noticed your skin lesions weren't getting any better, you called Morningstar's 1-800 number?

EDGAR

Yes. I couldn't help but think perhaps there was a connection.

ELIJAH

What did the product rep tell you?

EDGAR

That they'd never heard of anything like what I was reporting.

ELIJAH

So you didn't know it was actually the 451<sup>st</sup> call of its kind?

63      **INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - TEACHER'S LOUNGE - DAY**      63

Jake is charming a PRETTY YOUNG TEACHER.

PRETTY YOUNG TEACHER

You missed her by ten minutes.

64      **INT. CROWDED COURTROOM - DAY**      64

Sydney watching, appreciating her dad at work.

ELIJAH

I want to go back to the events of November 6th, 2014. That's the day the nozzle on your sprayer had it's cataclysmic failure and basically fell apart.

EDGAR

Yes.

ELIJAH

The result - you said - was Knock Out pouring out prodigiously. As if someone tore the head off a fire hose while it was in use.

EDGAR

Yes.

ELIJAH

Mr. Soriano. You've testified that when that happened, you grabbed the  
(MORE)

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

hose and jumped into the cab of your vehicle, thereby practically drowning yourself in their product.

EDGAR

Yes.

ELIJAH

That's what I don't understand...

65 **INT. QUIET STREET - NORTH MEMPHIS - DAY**

65

Jake double-checks the address in his hands with the address of the house ACROSS the street. They match.

He's about to cross to it when a WOMAN comes out. She's 45, very average, carrying a bag to her SUV. Her name is ELAINE CAREY GROSSMAN. Once Elaine Carey Bell. George's Ex-Wife.

66 **INT. CROWDED COURTROOM - DAY**

66

Elijah smiles, almost patiently.

ELIJAH

I mean, at the risk of sounding cynical, why would you expose yourself like that if you really thought Knock Out was killing you?

EDGAR

Because otherwise it would have reached the children.

The courtroom is dead silent. Hanging on every word.

EDGAR

The creek that feeds the school's well was only a few yards away. If I had done nothing, the chemical would have reached it. I couldn't let that happen. I couldn't let it reach the children.

Off Maria and Eva Soriano, teary with pride...

67 **INT. QUIET STREET - NORTH MEMPHIS - DAY**

67

Elaine Grossman is no longer alone. She's with her HUSBAND, their TWO TEENAGE KIDS, and GOLDEN RETRIEVER.

JAKE

(to himself)

She had her whole life ahead of her.

Jake turns, braces against a gust of wind, and walks off as...

68

**INT. CROWDED COURTROOM - DAY**

68

...Elijah lets Edgar's moment hang. The Jury moved.

ELIJAH

No further questions.

Dead silence. Then the sound of Elijah's shoes as he walks back to where Anthony is smiling and Sydney is beaming with pride. The two of them share a look. He holds out a hand for a 'low-five'. She takes it. Back on good terms.

She then puts her hand on her dad's arm as he sits next to her. Any doubts she may have had about this being what she's meant to do seem cast from her face until she hears...

A WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

...Mr. Soriano, before we begin  
would you like some water?

Sydney looks up. Her name is JANE GORDON. She is Sanderford's Second Chair. She's wearing a \$3,000 suit, has her hair pulled back. And has the same icy corporate timbre in her voice that Sydney had for almost five years.

MS. GORDON

Anything at all to make you more  
comfortable?

Edgar shakes his head no. She nods.

MS. GORDON

Mr. Soriano, you used Knock Out for  
15 years.

EDGAR

Yes.

MS. GORDON

And you believe it is the reason  
you have cancer?

EDGAR

Yes.

Ms. Gordon nods. Makes a note.

MS. GORDON

Mr. Soriano, do you drink Diet  
Soda?

EDGAR

Yes.

MS. GORDON

Spend time in the sun?

EDGAR

Yes.

Anthony's face falls. Sydney swallows hard. Even though this is the kind of cross-examination both feared was coming, every question still hits Sydney like a body blow.

MS. GORDON

Have you ever had an X-Ray?

EDGAR

Yes.

MS. GORDON

Been around secondhand smoke?

Powerless to stop the questioning, Sydney can feel the rage building in her. But then she HEARS a noise. Eva has gotten up and is leaving the courtroom, starting to cry.

EDGAR (O.S.)

Yes.

MS. GORDON (O.S.)

Do you enjoy red meat?

Sydney joins Maria in going after the girl.

69

**EXT. COURT STEPS - DAY**

69

Sydney and Maria catch up to Eva on the steps, and the girl turns and sobs in her mother's embrace. Sydney is about to leave when Eva speaks to her.

EVA

We're not going to win, are we?

No, we're not - thinks Sydney. But instead she says.

SYDNEY

Eva. They believed your father.  
And this trial is not over.

Eva nods. Sydney nods back. And the eye contact is only broken by the sound of SCREECHING BRAKES and HONKING HORNS.

Sydney looks up to see... *Emerson?*... Abandoning his crappy car where he's double-parked it and now RUNNING towards her.

SYDNEY

Emerson, what are you doing here?

He's sweaty and breathing like he just ran a 5-minute mile.

EMERSON

All your phones are off in the  
courtroom. So I couldn't call.

(off her look)

I found a doctor who worked on  
Knock Out. And I'm pretty sure she  
proved it causes cancer.

**END ACT FOUR**



SYDNEY (CONT'D)

from a subsidiary in Berlin. Guess Morningstar wasn't counting on us having someone who could read German. Neither, frankly, was I.

Deemer seems to consider that. Then she nods.

DR. NANCY DEEMER

Come on up. I just made coffee.

73

**EXT. PORCH - MAIN HOUSE - HORSE FARM - DAY**

73

The three women sit as Deemer finishes her story.

DR. NANCY DEEMER

I was so excited about my new test that I wasn't paying attention to the results. Before I knew it, lawyers were in my lab. Shutting me down and telling me if I said anything they'd bankrupt me.

SYDNEY

Dr. Deemer, what exactly were the results of your test?

She seems almost reluctant to answer.

DR. NANCY DEEMER

That past a certain level of exposure, Knock Out is approximately 500 times more carcinogenic than cigarettes.

Sydney and Briana react visibly. Seeing that reaction causes a flicker of regret to cross Deemer's face. Sydney catches that look, knows it, and knows to speak to it.

SYDNEY

I spent five years as counsel for companies like these so I know what happened next. They promised to fix the problem, helped you land somewhere good, and you moved on because you felt powerless to do anything else.

(off Deemer's look)

You know what? You were powerless. They would have buried you. Then. But now, with this trial, you have a chance to hold them accountable for lying to you. And for forcing you to live with guilt and regret.

74           **INT. VISITORS ROOM, FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTE - DAY**           74

George Bell enters the room and sees Jake waiting for him. He's about to turn around when he sees Jake has a tray in front of him with some FCI applesauce.

JAKE (PRE-LAP)

I made a few calls to some friends  
in high places.

75           **INT. VISITORS ROOM, FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTE - LATER**           75

George is eating and Jake is watching him. Pleased.

JAKE

From now on, you will have access  
to applesauce at every meal. And  
if you don't, just let me know and  
I'll sort it out.

GEORGE

You're a good man, Jake.

Jake thinks about that as George continues to eat.

JAKE

My dad ran off when I was eight.  
Took his money with him. My mom...  
lived in denial. She wanted to  
hold onto that life so bad. She  
kept thinking one day he'd come  
home. Until then if she needed to  
depend on the kindness of  
strangers... of strange men... Well  
there's no harm, right?

(wrong)

To this day, she clings to the idea  
he'll come back. Prick's been dead  
for nine years.

A bittersweet laugh - then Jake levels his gaze at George.

JAKE

You didn't start telling people you  
were guilty until *after* you were  
convicted, George. And I know why you  
started saying it. You did it so your  
wife and son could move on. So they  
wouldn't end up living a shell of a  
life waiting like my mom.

George is frozen. His defenses begin to crack. Revealing  
profound emotion underneath. *He shakes his head - doesn't  
want to hear this.* But Jake isn't stopping now.

JAKE

It worked. She has a great life. She's a teacher. Twice she's been named Educator of the Year. She found a good man who takes care of her. They have a family. They're happy...

With every new piece of information, George comes back to life a little more. Thawing. The ice turning to tears.

JAKE

And your boy? He's a Sophomore at Georgetown. On the debate team. Which means in a few years he just might try to take my job...

George actually laughs...

JAKE

They all have lives, George. Rich, beautiful, messy lives.  
(beat)  
Now it's time you have one too.

George looks at a Jake, and through his tears, says simply:

GEORGE

Okay, Jake.

76

**INT. CROWDED COURT ROOM - DAY**

76

Elijah gets to his feet and speaks calmly.

ELIJAH

Plaintiff calls Dr. Nancy Deemer.

A look of shock shoots between Sanderford, Gordon, and the rest of the Defense. Clearly, they know the name. Which is probably why both Gordon and Sanderford are on their feet.

SANDERFORD AND GORDON

Objection!

77

**INT. JUDGE COLLINS CHAMBERS - DAY**

77

Elijah, Sydney, Anthony, Sanderford, Gordon and the Judge.

SANDERFORD

They want her to testify about the results of a test there is no record of - there will be no way to impeach the testimony - it will be prejudicial to the point of farce.

ELIJAH

Your honor, there's no record because they destroyed the record. Too often trials are decided without us knowing the truth. Well we have the truth. She's sitting out there. And all we ask is that she be allowed to tell her story.

JUDGE COLLINS

Mr. Strait makes a compelling argument. And it's not the plaintiff's fault if Morningstar destroyed their own records.

(beat)

However...

Sydney leaps forward out of her chair as if to attack somebody but Elijah stops her. Not like this.

JUDGE COLLINS (CONT'D)

With no way to corroborate what Dr. Deemer will say, I must side with the defense. Dr. Deemer may not testify to any testing she may or may not have done.

ELIJAH

Your honor, in light of your ruling, I'd ask for a ten minute recess to confer with co-counsel.

78

**INT. EMPTY OFFICE - COURT HOUSE - DAY**

78

Elijah, Anthony and Sydney trying to come up with *something*.

ANTHONY

What if we stay broad--

ELIJAH

They'll shoot us down.

ANTHONY

Maybe if we ask about her lab--

ELIJAH

Same problem. The judge won't let her say anything about her work. And her work is all that matters.

On Sydney... As she hears that...

SYDNEY

No. It's not all that matters.

79

**INT. CROWDED COURT ROOM - DAY**

79

Deemer is on the stand. Elijah and Anthony waiting to see if Sydney can pull this off. The entire place is silent.

SYDNEY

(Keeps it casual)

Dr. Deemer, during your time at Morningstar, did you ever hear about our client, Mr. Soriano?

DR. NANCY DEEMER

No.

Sydney is so relaxed that Sanderford is confused.

SYDNEY

You've never met him? You only know him because of this case today?

DR. NANCY DEEMER

That's right.

SYDNEY

Is there anything you'd like to say to him?

That was so casual Sanderford is a beat slow.

SANDERFORD

Objection, relevance.

Sydney ignores him. Stays focused on Dr. Deemer.

SYDNEY

Say to Edgar or his family...

SANDERFORD

Your honor, relevance...

Deemer suddenly speaks loudly and clearly.

DR. NANCY DEEMER

I'm sorry.

Her words STUN everyone for a beat.

DR. NANCY DEEMER

I'd like to say I'm sorry.

Sanderford and Gordon leap to their feet.

SANDERFORD AND GORDON  
OBJECTION!! PREJUDICIAL!!



ACT SIX

81 INT. A CROWDED COURT ROOM - MORNING

81

Everyone has come for closing arguments. The Sorianos sit with Della and Briana. We find Emerson another row back...

Anthony and Elijah are at the Plaintiff's desk...

Robbie sits near the back of the gallery...

And, standing in the way back, Jake has just arrived so he can watch Sydney deliver her close.

SYDNEY

My mother died not too long ago. It was sudden and I miss her, but the truth is she had a wonderful life, because she got to live it on her terms. That's all any of us wants. A chance to take on life on our terms. Edgar Soriano didn't get that chance, because known risks about the safety of Knock Out were willfully withheld from him.

She lets that hang there.

SYDNEY

Our society is a living thing. It grows, it evolves. Often for the better, but sometimes things go off course. I think all of us are feeling that lately. A vague sense that we're losing our way. More and more, money confers too much power. More and more, human values are vanishing before our eyes.

She looks at them.

SYDNEY

That's where the law comes in. Out there the fight may be fixed, but in here we are equal and we get to say 'justice matters.' We get to say what kind of world we want this to be.

She scans them all - one by one.

SYDNEY

Ladies and gentlemen, right now we live in a world where companies like  
(MORE)

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Morningstar thinks it's okay to hide truths from us. Right now, we live in a world where those same companies control the men and women who are supposed to regulate them. And in our world - what we've sacrificed - is the chance to live life on our terms. Like Edgar Soriano, we are making choices without all the information. Because companies like Morningstar are willfully lying to us in order make more money.

She shakes her head.

SYDNEY

That is not right. Someone has to speak up. Right now that's the twelve of you. Your verdict is both your message and voice. So use it here, today, to make this a better world for all of us.

82

**EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVERFRONT - SUNSET**

82

Sydney sits, watching the sun sink below the iconic Hernando De Soto Bridge. A familiar voice approaches.

JAKE (O.S.)

That was some inspiring shit.

Sydney actually laughs as Jake joins her on the bench.

JAKE

You know who teared up? Robbie. I saw him.

SYDNEY

Jake.

JAKE

Chief of Detectives sitting in on the close of a civil case, I'm sure that means nothing.

Then, kidding aside.

JAKE

Seriously. You were great.

She nods, thanks.

SYDNEY

What happened with George Bell?

JAKE

Good news is he's on board. Bad news is - it's going to be an uphill battle to get him out. Then a bigger fight to get him any kind of restitution--

SYDNEY

Might take more than 30 days.

JAKE

You heard about that? Well, technically they were up last week anyway.

SYDNEY

Careful, you're starting to sound like a human being.

She smiles at him. He returns the smiles, but then looks a little chagrined.

JAKE

Well while you're still feeling warm and fuzzy about me I should tell you. Those files Robbie showed me are going to be crucial to George's case.

A flicker of *oh shit* passes across Sydney's face.

JAKE

I'll do my best to keep him out of it, but the reality is, doing right by George is going to make life really complicated for Robbie.

*And by extension - for her.* She lets out a long exhale.

SYDNEY

As we say down here. 'The past isn't over. It isn't even past.'

At that moment - THE COURT PAGER APP on her iPhone goes off. She looks at the message. Jakes quizzes her with his eyes.

SYDNEY

(nods)  
Verdict.

Sydney finds Elijah and Anthony among all the people filing in. Edgar, nervous.

EDGAR  
Is fast good or bad?

ELIJAH  
Impossible to say.

84 **INT. A CROWDED COURT ROOM - 5:15PM**

84

The JURY FOREWOMAN and JUDGE COLLINS go through the formal process of rendering a verdict.

JUDGE COLLINS  
As to question one. Did Knock Out cause harm to Mr. Soriano? How do you answer?

JURY FOREWOMAN  
Yes.

Sydney blinks. They've got a shot.

JUDGE COLLINS  
Since you answered in the affirmative, we proceed to question two. Was Morningstar aware of the potential dangers of their product? How do you answer?

JURY FOREWOMAN  
Yes.

It all rides on this next question.

JUDGE COLLINS  
Since you answered in the affirmative, we proceed to question three. Did Morningstar withhold knowledge of these dangers in an attempt to avoid responsibility?

Sydney closes her eyes. Can't take it. But Elijah smiles, because he knows what he's going to hear.

JURY FOREWOMAN  
Yes.

Muffled cries that are quickly silenced. Elijah and Anthony are totally professional. Sydney keeps her eyes closed.

JUDGE COLLINS  
Since you've answered all three questions in the affirmative, you must assess and assign damages.

JURY FOREWOMAN

In the matter of Soriano V.  
Morningstar, we the jury award 1.4  
Million dollars in Compensatory  
Damages...

Now there are audible gasps. Rob smiles. Della and Briana  
squeeze each other...

JURY FOREWOMAN

And 45 Million dollars in Punitive  
Damages.

Sydney opens her eyes. What did they just say? 45 million?!  
She turns around as Judge Collins goes on with the formality  
of thanking the Jury for their service...

...and she sees Edgar Soriano crying as he holds his wife and  
Eva. Speaking with profound relief.

EDGAR

You're going to be okay. You're  
going to be okay...

For one moment, Eva favors Sydney with a smile and then  
Sydney is bear hugged by Anthony, who is so damn happy.

ANTHONY

You realize it's not just us that  
won today. There are 85 other  
people in that class-action who  
have a chance now.

Elijah smiles at her.

ELIJAH

See? You changed the world.

85

**INT. WOMENS' ROOM - COURTHOUSE - A FEW MINUTES LATER**

85

*And now we're back where we started at the top of Act One...*

Sydney washes her face with cold water. Staring into the  
mirror, breath heaving. She lets out--

--A PRIMAL SCREAM!

Of relief. And when it's over, one of the stalls opens and  
Jane Gordon, Morningstar Co-Counsel, comes out. Sydney  
watches her leave - then looks at herself in the mirror.

She's not that woman any more.

86

## INT. 'MR. HANDY'S BLUES HALL' - NIGHT

86

CHARLIE LOGAN, African-American, 55, but looks older, is on-stage before a packed crowd. Working his guitar like a master, he has the entire audience swept up in the music.

JAKE

Man. Brianna your dad can play.

They're all together at A BACK TABLE. Jake, Anthony, Della, Brianna, Emerson, and Elijah. Sydney is off-screen.

DELLA

Her brother's no slouch either.

She's referring to JUNIOR LOGAN, a baby-faced 27, who is on the drums. Jake looks at Brianna.

JAKE

Did you ever think about going into music?

BRIANA

Growing up, I just didn't love it like they did.

(wry)

My talent has always been playing people.

That gets laughs of approval from the table.

ANTHONY

Here she is...

He means Sydney, who returns carrying a fresh round of drinks.

ANTHONY

She wins cases. She buys drinks. Sydney, yours is a welcome return.

That gets some *here-heres*. Anthony and Jake take beers. Della takes a fresh Whiskey Sour.

JAKE

You want to pace yourself there?

DELLA

Honey, I will drink you under the table.

Emerson looks up as Sydney hands him a MOUNTAIN DEW. He nods. Then she gives him a SECOND MOUNTAIN DEW. He smiles.



SYDNEY

What?

ELIJAH

It's 2:30 on a Sunday afternoon and I have no idea what to do with myself. That must sound silly...

SYDNEY

That doesn't sound silly, Dad. It sounds about right. I think it's just going to take time, you know? For all of us.

He looks at her.

ELIJAH

I'm glad you're back, Sydney.

She gets a smile on her face.

SYDNEY

Speaking of that, now that I am, we should talk changes to the firm. Starting with my car allowance.

ELIJAH

Car allowance? Sydney, we're a boutique operation...

SYDNEY

Then there is vacation time...

ELIJAH

I never take vacations.

SYDNEY

Well, maybe you should.

Elijah laughs. And it makes her smile. And it's such a nice moment that neither of them hears Emerson approaching.

EMERSON (ENTERING)

Hey, Dad, how much longer are you staying today?

Emerson stops short when he realizes Elijah is not alone.

SYDNEY

(beat)

What did he just call you?

**END PILOT**