

in contempt

Episode #102

"Combat by Agreement"

Written by

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ACT ONE

INT. NULA'S BAR - NIGHT

We're only minutes after the end of Episode 1. Across the bar, the gang sits in a booth. Bennett can't take his eyes off of Gwen. Their repartee is light and playful.

BENNETT

Thank God Nula's is still here. I've been trying to catch up with you for the last few days. But apparently you're too important to answer your phone anymore.

GWEN

Listen, in my world, "No Caller ID" is either a bill collector or a client's mother wanting to know why I couldn't get her baby off on that robbery charge.

BENNETT

Ah. My fault. My publicist suggested I have a secure number. Oh man, that sounded --

GWEN

Bougie?

He smiles. Loves her teasing.

GWEN (CONT'D)

How long are you in town?

BENNETT

I'm home for good. Bought a place even.

GWEN

Lemme guess, within walking distance of Abner's.

BENNETT

It's a townhouse in Society Hill.

GWEN

Double bougie. You've come a long way from teaching me the difference between battery and assault, professor.

Bennett's phone vibrates.

BENNETT

Sorry. People waiting...

As Bennett texts a quick reply, Gwen takes a good measure of him. The years have been kind.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Listen, I wanted to reach you before you found out by a Tweet or a "like..."

GWEN

Found out what? A new novel? A movie deal? Ooh. Please say I can play the lead opposite Idris.

BENNETT

In that order, yes, yes, and treat me really nice and we'll see. Look, I'm running late. How about I tell you everything over dinner? Or are you still forgetting to eat meals?

GWEN

I'd love to do dinner, but I'm swamped. I've got a 14-year-old kid being tried as an adult on a murder charge tomorrow.

BENNETT

I really love that you're still fighting the power.

GWEN

That's me. Eternal vigilance. But that's nothing compared to winning a National Book Award --

BENNETT

Nah, don't do that. You're a badass. Own it.

Gwen grins despite herself.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Come on. Dinner. A piece of chicken. A nice glass of red.

GWEN

Have I ever said no to a nice glass of red?

BENNETT

I'll call you with the details.
Pick up this time.

That moment. Buddy hug, lover hug, a cheek kiss? They dance for a beat, then hug just long enough. With a McDreamy smile, he's off. Gwen watches him go, then turns to see Tracy watching. She gives Gwen a thumbs up.

INT. DEFENDER ASSOCIATION - CLOTHES CLOSET - DAY

Gwen rummages through men's suits and ties as Charlie enters.

CHARLIE

Going for an androgynous look today?

GWEN

(appraising him)
You have broad shoulders.

CHARLIE

I know. Wide grip lat pulldowns, mostly. Five sets of --

GWEN

Take off your jacket.

Charlie complies.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Nice. Now your shirt.

CHARLIE

I like it when you take control.

Charlie takes off his shirt to reveal his CrossFit body.

GWEN

Perfect. Now the pants.

CHARLIE

(with a shit-eating grin)
We have time for this?

Gwen motions: Gimme. He takes off his pants. Charlie is a boxer briefs guy. Gwen scoops up his clothes, grabs a pair of hand-me-down sneakers.

GWEN

I'll dry clean these. Thanks.

CHARLIE
(as she jets)
Wait... Son of a bitch.

He turns to the rack of clothes to find something to wear.

TOM (O.S.)
Charlie, have you seen...
(opens door)
...Gwen?

It's Tom, with Vanessa in his wake. Vanessa does a double-take upon seeing Charlie dressed only in his underwear and socks. Tom doesn't react at all.

CHARLIE
You just missed her.

TOM
Vanessa will shadow you then. Guide her through the wonderful world of arraignments.

Tom leaves. Vanessa's eyes twitch as she drinks him in.

VANESSA
Do you... maybe I should... I left my... OK.

Beyond embarrassed, she scurries off.

INT. COURTROOM 50 - DAY

No jury. At the rail, Gwen meets with her client WILLIE, a tall for his age 14-year-old who tries to play like he's gangsta'. He wears a suit that's a bit too small.

Willie's world-weary and overwhelmed grandmother EARLIENE IVERSON (50s) stands next to him. She speaks haltingly, as if years of hard work and heartache have settled in her throat.

EARLIENE
Willie doesn't belong in adult court. He's only fourteen.

GWEN
I know. But he shot a veteran. A.D.A. DaShay doesn't want to look soft on crime. So we're gonna try and convince the Judge to move the case to juvenile court himself.

Earliene considers the ramifications. Gwen motions her over for a private moment.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Mrs. Iverson, you know Willie was carrying a loaded gun on a city bus.

EARLIENE

It was an accident. The gang kept steady threatening him. They was trying to kill him.

GWEN

Yes, but we're going to have to admit that he had the gun. So even if we win on the murder charge...

Resigned, Earliene nods.

EARLIENE

How long will they put him away?

GWEN

That depends on this hearing and which court the case ends up in.

Gwen holds up Charlie's suit and the sneakers.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Willie, I need you to put these on.

EARLIENE

I just bought him the suit he's wearing. And yours is too big.

GWEN

Exactly.

Willie is fascinated by the Hugo Boss suit.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Willie. Pay attention. Gimme your watch.

EARLIENE

That's my father's watch. I think it looks good on him.

GWEN

I don't want him to look good, Mrs. Iverson. I want him to look like a child. If his case stays in adult court, he's facing life.

WILLIE

(naive)

I can get parole though, right?
When I'm 21?

GWEN

There is no parole, Willie. Life is
life in adult court. Take this.

From her bag, Gwen pulls out a Star Wars spiral-bound notebook and hands it to Willie.

WILLIE

What for?

GWEN

For when you get bored.

OFF Gwen, staring at her client, very much a child --

MAIN TITLES:

INT. COURTROOM 50 - MINUTES LATER

Judge ANDREW PINKNER, White, 50s, willing to consider unorthodox legal tactics but not afraid to rule with a firm hand. A.D.A. E.J. DASHAY, a dapper Black man wearing a seersucker suit, sits at the prosecution table.

At the defense table: Willie. Dressed in Charlie's oversized suit and the secondhand sneakers, he looks even more like a child. On the stand: Earliene. Gwen questions her. As the hearing progresses, Willie doodles in the Star Wars notebook.

GWEN

How did you come to raise your
grandson?

EARLIENE

Willie's father passed when he was
only five. He didn't much know him,
which is a blessing. He was a
violent man. Beat Willie. Burned
him with cigarette butts.

GWEN

What about Willie's mother?

EARLIENE

My daughter Anita. She's not right.
Left Willie home once for four days
when he was six. I couldn't save
her on account of drugs, but I

(MORE)

EARLIENE (CONT'D)
could take Willie in, take care of
him.

GWEN
What kind of child is he?

EARLIENE
My little junebug... He's so smart.
And artistic. And polite. He could
charm the birds out of the trees.

In the back of the courtroom, the doors open and a group of
freshmen boys parade in, accompanied by their teacher TERESA.
They dutifully fill the first two rows.

JUDGE PINKNER
Can I help you?

TERESA
Thompson Boy's School Law and
Justice class. We're doing a report
about crime and punishment.

A grimace from the Judge. Gwen gives Teresa a wink.

A.D.A. DASHAY
(sotto, to Gwen)
Just a happy coincidence?

Gwen barely suppresses a smile.

JUDGE PINKNER
Carry on.

GWEN
What was Willie's life like with
you, Mrs. Iverson?

EARLIENE
I did the best I could. But I have
two part-time jobs as a nurse's
aide, work 7 AM to 10 PM.

GWEN
So Willie essentially raised
himself?

EARLIENE
(tearing up)
I tried. But I was never home.

GWEN
Is it true that Willie needed a
police escort to get to school?

There are twitters from the gallery, where a few of the boys act up. The Judge raises his eyebrows, glowers at them.

EARLIENE

They made, what-you-call-it, a safe corridor, what with all the gangs harassing the little ones, trying to recruit them.

GWEN

Yet he did join a gang. Arch Street Posse.

EARLIENE

What choice did he have? The gangs, they make themselves look like family. It's my fault, Miss Harrison. I wasn't there. He's a good boy and they snatched him out of my hands.

Anxiety overcomes Earliene. She goes off script.

EARLIENE (CONT'D)

Willie's still more child than teenager. He won't survive a month, a week, inside an adult jail. Please, Your Honor...

JUDGE PINKNER

I'll need you to confine yourself to the questions, Ms. Iverson.

GWEN

Nothing further.

A.D.A. DaShay stands to cross. Affable yet unflappable, DaShay begins gently.

A.D.A. DASHAY

You love your grandson?

EARLIENE

He's my world.

A.D.A. DASHAY

And boys being boys, you kept a close eye on Willie.

EARLIENE

I tried.

A.D.A. DASHAY

Did everything you could to raise him right?

EARLIENE

Yes sir. Church on Sundays, homework, respect...

A.D.A. DASHAY

And did you know he carried a gun?

From the gallery, a few "wows" and "Yo, he had a burner?"

GWEN

Objection.

JUDGE PINKNER

We're not trying the case here.

A.D.A. DASHAY

No, but we are trying to determine how this young man engaged with his environment.

Earliene chokes back tears.

EARLIENE

Willie is a good boy! He's done some wrong but life gave him a bad hand.

A.D.A. DASHAY

Life gave him a pretty great grandmother.

EARLIENE

It's not his fault, sir.

A.D.A. DASHAY

You worked hard, you tried to raise him right, and your grandson became a gun toting gangbanger who shot someone in cold blood.

DaShay takes out a CRIME SCENE PHOTOGRAPH showing the bloody carnage on the bus. In the gallery, the kids REACT.

GWEN

Seriously? In front of the children?

A.D.A. DASHAY

Oh come on --

JUDGE PINKNER

All right. Given the disturbing nature of the upcoming testimony, I'm clearing the courtroom of observers under the age of sixteen.

GWEN

That's a good idea, Your Honor. Clearly 14-year-old children do not have the capacity that adults do to process this kind of brutality, and we should not be treating them as if they did...

A.D.A. DASHAY

Oh please...

TERESA

Okay kids, time to go.

The kids begin to file out. Gwen smiles. DaShay catches Gwen's eye with a look that says, "It's on." As Gwen returns to the defense table, she sees Willie doodling in the notepad she gave him. Except it's not just doodling. He's sketched a tiger coming up out of water in pencil. It's beautiful.

GWEN

God. Willie...

He looks up at her: What?

INT. COURTHOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Charlie, wearing a very hand-me-down suit, struts down the hallway. Vanessa follows a quarter-step behind.

CHARLIE

Okay, here's what you gotta know.
Assistant D.A.s: Learn who you can work and who's out for blood.
Judges: Learn what pisses them off.
You want something, make sure you get to Judge Gosh before her three o'clock martini lunch and Judge Meyers after his.

A FEMALE COURT OFFICER passes by.

FEMALE COURT OFFICER

Hi Charlie. What's going on? That's some... suit.

CHARLIE

(flashes a megawatt smile)
I'm happy to take it off for you,
Suzanne.

(as she moves on)

Court Officers: Butter them up.
They can move your cases to the top
of the sign-in sheet. And manage
your client's expectations. If you
say 3 days of community service and
they get 4, they'll be pissed. Say
they'll be in jail for a month and
get 'em those same 4 days, they'll
think you're a champ.

VANESSA

Lie about what they're gonna get?

CHARLIE

Not lie. Manage.

INT. COURTROOM 50 - LATER - DAY

On the stand, mid-testimony, is defense witness DR. RENEE VAN
HORN -- White, 40s, a bit persnickety.

VAN HORN

The area right behind your
forehead, called the frontal lobe
or the prefrontal cortex, doesn't
fully develop until around age 25.

GWEN

It's developed enough to drive a
car or play video games, correct?

VAN HORN

Yes, but it isn't fully developed
enough to discern higher order
right from wrong.

GWEN

Would that include lack of impulse
control?

VAN HORN

Absolutely. Adolescents lack mature
judgment and are highly influenced
by their peers.

GWEN

So it's actually possible that kids
can do things, even violent things,
(MORE)

GWEN (CONT'D)

with no adult appreciation of what they are doing?

VAN HORN

Without question. That's settled science.

GWEN

And given the lack of brain development, is it possible that kids, even kids who have done violent things, may develop into mature, conscientious adults?

VAN HORN

It is not merely possible but commonplace. Kids change. Childhood is about developing and growing.

GWEN

They can, in short, be rehabilitated?

VAN HORN

Yes. In fact, Willie has been getting A's and B's while in custody, where there are no gangs trying to kill him.

GWEN

Thank you, Doctor.

Gwen sits. DaShay stands to cross.

A.D.A. DASHAY

If I told you that my five-year-old niece knows that lying is "wrong," would you dispute that?

VAN HORN

No.

A.D.A. DASHAY

So even very young children can discern right from wrong?

VAN HORN

Some can, yes. But...

A.D.A. DASHAY

And most children know that if they do something bad, they will get in trouble. They can appreciate the notion of consequences.

VAN HORN

Appreciating basic concepts and
engaging in genuine moral reasoning
is not the same thing.

A.D.A. DASHAY

So even if a child knows right from
wrong and can appreciate
consequences, you don't think they
should be held accountable?

GWEN

Objection.

A.D.A. DASHAY

I fear for your children.

GWEN

Oh c'mon.

A.D.A. DASHAY

Withdrawn.

INT. COURTROOM 50 - LATER

All rise as Judge Pinkner returns to the bench. His face is
inscrutable.

JUDGE PINKNER

There are times when a moral choice
is so stark, an activity so brutal,
that the moral failure within it
can only be compassed by adult
sanction. This is such a case.
Child or no, there is no place for
guns and murder on our city buses.
I am denying the motion for
decertification to juvenile court.
Trial to begin forthwith.

Gwen lowers her head. She glances at DaShay. He pities her.
The worst thing. In the gallery, Earliene cries.

WILLIE

What just happened? What did all
that mean?

GWEN

It means we're all up in it now.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Gwen navigates through a scrum of jockeying reporters lobbing questions as she enters the courthouse.

INT. HOLDING CELL - COURTROOM 50 - DAY

Gwen enters the cell. The dozen or so inmates part like the Red Sea upon her approach, revealing Willie, tucked in a corner, shoeless, furiously sketching in the notebook. It takes all of Gwen's will to remain stoically professional.

INT. HOLDING CELL - COURTROOM 50 - LATER

Gwen has created a pocket of privacy for her and Willie.

GWEN
What happened last night?

WILLIE
Nothing.

GWEN
You got no shoes.

Willie just looks at her, his youth outshining his toughness.

GWEN (CONT'D)
Look, we lost the decert hearing.
That means we have to convince a
jury in adult court that you acted
in self-defense when you fired that
gun on the bus.

WILLIE
How do we do that?

GWEN
Well, you said you were carrying
the gun that day because of all the
"cyber-banging" on social media.
The rival gang was threatening you.
What pages did you see it on?

WILLIE
I didn't see it. My boys were
telling me about it.

GWEN
That's not enough. I need to find
those pages. Without them, we can't
prove a prior threat. Okay, on the
(MORE)

GWEN (CONT'D)
day of the shooting, tell me again,
what happened?

WILLIE
I got shot at on the street. I ran
onto the bus, they came after me.

GWEN
Why did you have a gun?

WILLIE
(shrugs)
'Cause you can't be lackin'.

GWEN
No. Only to protect yourself.
Repeat that to yourself until you
say it in your sleep. "Only to
protect myself." What happened
next?

WILLIE
I got on the 37 bus, in the back.
Those same three mother--
(stops himself)
Those same fools stopped the bus
and held the door open. One of 'em
got on and came at me, but I got
off the first shot -- "pop!" "pop!"
Glass flyin', people runnin'...

GWEN
Willie. You talk that way on the
stand, the jury won't like you and
you'll be in prison until you die.
Hear me?

WILLIE
Yes Ma'am.

GWEN
We've got a bunch of problems. The
police found the rival gang members
but none of them had weapons. With
no weapons, we have no claim of
self-defense.

Gwen pulls an 8x10 photo of Willie posing with a gun out of
her file and shows it to him.

GWEN (CONT'D)
The Prosecution has this photo of
you holding a gun like you're an
O.G.. Even worse, you shot an
(MORE)

GWEN (CONT'D)

innocent bystander -- a 22-year-old Iraq War veteran. And today's problem is you. You act like it was a first person shooter game. Sounds like you've already done hard time. That shit is not gonna work for you.

The coarse language gets Willie's attention, taking the bravado out of him. He stares into space.

WILLIE

He smiled at me.

GWEN

Who?

WILLIE

The soldier. The guy who died. When I got on the bus, he smiled at me. People don't never do that.

(beat)

I should have smiled back.

Gwen lets the moment hang there.

GWEN

(gently)

What happened to your shoes? Truth.

As if it's the darkest confession:

WILLIE

The big guys took them from me.

GWEN

That right there -- I need this version of you every day in court. This Willie might keep you out of prison.

INT. HOLDING CELL - ARRAIGNMENT COURT - DAY

Charlie walks Vanessa back toward the cells.

CHARLIE

Everyone is lying, so don't expect the truth until they trust you. Always remember you're the lawyer. Be confident and authoritative. You help them by telling them what's best.

VANESSA
(not feeling it)
Confident and authoritative.

CHARLIE
Under promise, over deliver. You'll
be great.

Vanessa opens a file...

MONTAGE OF VANESSA INTERVIEWING CLIENTS

GREGG HARPER, early 20s, White, sporting a black eye.

VANESSA
Mr. Harper, my name is Vanessa
Winters and I'm going to be your
lawyer today --

GREGG
Listen, I'm the victim here.

VANESSA
Well, it says here that you tried
to steal a woman's purse.

GREGG
And look at my face! That woman
totally overreacted.
(then)
You getting me out?

CUT TO: LUPITA LOPERA, 20s, Hispanic, eyeing Vanessa
suspiciously.

VANESSA
Ms. Lopera, I'm Vanessa Winters,
your court-appointed attorney.
Would you like to tell me what
happened?

LUPITA
(crosses her arms)
What's your little file there say
happened?

CUT TO: JACKSON PETERS, mid-30s, Black, all defensive
attitude.

VANESSA
Mr. Peters, my name is Vanessa
Winters and I'm going to be your
lawyer today. Now, it says here
that you were in possession of
(MORE)

VANESSA (CONT'D)
burglar tools. A ... lock pick. Is that what happened?

JACKSON
Nah, I didn't have no lock pick. Cops put that on me.

VANESSA
Oh. Okay...

Vanessa writes this down as...

TRACY (O.S.)
You really wanna go with that? The cops planted the lock pick on him?

It's Tracy, leaning against the wall. She's overheard.

TRACY (CONT'D)
(to Jackson)
Look, I get it. You don't trust her. And you think 'cause she's a P.D., she sucks. But here's the thing. We're not doing this job out of the goodness of our hearts. We want to be private attorneys, make some money. Which means we put our time in, build up good reputations. And we do that by winning cases. So if we think your case is a loser, we'll tell you to plead. But if we think you can win, or we can beat them on some technicality, we'll fight. But you gotta be up front with us. You good with that?

JACKSON
Hell yeah, I'm good with that.

TRACY
So?

JACKSON
So I had the lock pick but the cops were sweeping the block. They searched me before they even asked me my name.

Tracy turns to Vanessa. Sotto:

TRACY
All that stuff about wanting to be a private attorney? Total bullshit. You gotta find a way to get your
(MORE)

TRACY (CONT'D)
clients to trust you. Especially
you. You look and act just like a
prosecutor.

Tracy leaves. Vanessa looks down at herself. What?

INT. COURTROOM 50 - DAY

CLOSE ON a PHOTO of Willie, a candid of him posing with a
gun. PULL BACK TO REVEAL Gwen and DaShay standing before
Judge Pinkner. Willie is at the defense table. No jury.

GWEN
The defense moves to preclude the
Facebook photograph of Mr. Iverson
holding a gun. It's irrelevant and
far more prejudicial than
probative.

A.D.A. DASHAY
It proves the defendant's gang
membership and goes to show state
of mind.

GWEN
We're stipulating he was in a gang.

A.D.A. DASHAY
It's the metaphorical smoking gun.

GWEN
It's a pose. Let's be honest, the
only reason the Prosecution wants
the photo in is to paint my client
as a scary black child.

Gwen produces two PHOTOS OF TRAYVON MARTIN -- in one, he
looks like a "thug," and in the other, like a choirboy.

GWEN (CONT'D)
Each of these photos paints a
different portrait of Trayvon
Martin, but neither is really
probative of anything. It's just a
tool for the agenda of the person
who picked it. A.D.A. DaShay wants
to show the jury a photo of a scary
black boy. But my client was scared
too.

Gwen produces a subpoena.

GWEN (CONT'D)

I have a subpoena for the social media pages of the three rival gang members who were threatening him. If Mr. DaShay gets to put his photo in, I should be able to put theirs in too, because I assure you, their photos are just as scary. If you want to have a trial about scary black boys, Judge, let's go.

Judge Pinkner looks at the two Trayvon photos and sees a future of warring photographs.

JUDGE PINKNER

The subpoena is denied. And the gun photo is out. Moving on.

DaShay turns to Gwen.

A.D.A. DASHAY

You should have led with the subpoena. He might have had sympathy and given it to you. I don't have the photo but I don't see how you prove the prior threat.

GWEN

You don't need to see it, E.J..
'Cause I do.

INT. DEFENDER ASSOCIATION - GWEN/TRACY'S OFFICE - DAY

Gwen studies a document with a furrowed brow, eats a hot dog. Tracy finishes her dog, does a half shoulder stretch. Gwen notices.

GWEN

Whoa. "Sex stretch."

TRACY

Pardon?

GWEN

Your I-got-me-some stretch.

TRACY

I didn't realize I was so transparent.

(caught, smirks)

Yes, I "got some." Gave some, actually.

GWEN

I deserve a name. Give me seven questions.

TRACY

We're due in court. You get three.

GWEN

He works downtown.

TRACY

That's a statement, not a yes/no --

GWEN

Fine. Is he blue collar?

TRACY

No.

GWEN

Have I ever met him?

TRACY

(after a beat)

Yes.

GWEN

Really? Okay... Got it! Mitchell Berkowitz from Courtroom 50.

TRACY

Ugh, no. It's not "B.O. Berkowitz." Now, what's the deal with you and Bennett?

GWEN

We're going to dinner tonight.

TRACY

Oh really? Where?

GWEN

Kapparu. But it's not a date. He's my mentor, my friend. It's just dinner.

TRACY

No friend of mine is taking me to Kappuru.

Tracy smirks. Vanessa enters.

VANESSA

I heard the judge denied your subpoena for the rival gang members' social media pages.

GWEN

Yeah.

VANESSA

I'm sorry. How are you going to prove the prior threat to Willie?

GWEN

I knew Pinkner was never going to give me that subpoena. I gave up something I was never going to get in order to keep Willie's picture out of evidence. Besides, I always have a plan B.

VANESSA

What's plan B?

GWEN

I need you to take off your bra.

TRACY

Oh this should be good.

GWEN

We're going to create a fake page using you as bait.

VANESSA

We?

GWEN

If any of the rival gang members friend you, we have access to their posts and messages.

Vanessa thinks about it, smiles.

VANESSA

Sounds like fun.

In a flash, Vanessa is unbuttoning her top.

TRACY

(re: the bra)

My stars, is that La Perla?

INT. KAPPURU RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Top Chef-level Asian fusion. The lighting makes everyone look runway ready. Gwen and Bennett share a prime table, their plates nearly empty. Bennett pours Gwen a glass of Cabernet, clearly not her first. They both laugh hysterically. Gwen lets out a snort.

BENNETT

Oh my God, the snort! I forgot about the snort!

GWEN

I did too. I haven't laughed this hard in so long.

BENNETT

You know, our late night impersonations are the only thing that got me through the draft of my first book. That and all your stellar research, of course.

GWEN

Tell me about your new book.

BENNETT

It's another crime novel. Set in Philly this time. A crime panorama of one city during one summer.

GWEN

Let me guess. An unarmed, young black man is the lead character?

BENNETT

Actually, I'm in search of a larger story. Readers have short attention spans. Black lives may matter, but their names don't matter that long.

GWEN

How can you say that?

BENNETT

The summer of 1964. Harlem. James Powell, a typical smart-ass, unarmed Black boy, was gunned down in front of his friends and a dozen witnesses by a White police officer. Why? For the crime of scaring off a White man after he took a hose to his Black friends,

(MORE)

BENNETT (CONT'D)
saying, "Dirty Niggers. I'll wash
you clean."

GWEN
Jesus.

BENNETT
The city caught fire. Six nights of
rioting -- vandalism, looting. What
changed afterward? Nothing much.
Window dressing. We've forgotten
James Powell. And Odessa Bradford
and Eugene Williams. Today's names
are only a thread in a tapestry of
social change, but they're not the
change itself.

Gwen takes in his words, then --

GWEN
That's a load of shit. Emmett Till.
Rosa Parks. Bobby Seale. The
individual is the change. I don't
represent tapestries. I go to the
mat for the disenfranchised,
unrepresented "one."

Bennett studies her, smiles.

BENNETT
That's why you were my star pupil.

GWEN
Don't... condescend.

BENNETT
I'm not condescending. I'm
appreciating.
(beat, then)
How are you, Gwen? For real.

GWEN
Let me see. I'm overworked and
underpaid. I handle an
unconstitutionally high case load.
Not a day goes by that I'm not
asked, "How can you represent
criminals?" My clients are presumed
guilty until proven innocent. And,
more than anything, I crave eight
hours of uninterrupted sleep.

BENNETT
Sounds like you hate your job.

GWEN

No, I love it. I'm doing God's work.

Bennett laughs, leans back in his chair.

BENNETT

Assuming I get the okay, I plan on imbedding myself with the Defender Association to research my book. You're going to have to deal with me for a while. I want to keep on making you laugh until you snort.

GWEN

(beaming)

That sounds great.

Bennett lifts a glass.

BENNETT

To old friends... Reconnecting.

GWEN

I'll drink to that.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. GWEN'S & TRACY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A pre-war two bedroom. The shabby chic decor leans toward the shabby.

Gwen, dressed for work, wolfs down a breakfast of Cap'n Crunch, an Entenmann's donut and coffee. Tracy, nearly dressed, enters from her bedroom.

TRACY

The electric bill is due tomorrow.

GWEN

I'm on it.

TRACY

They're serious about shutting us off this time.

GWEN

I'll pay it. I promise.

Tracy gives her a long look.

TRACY

Are you going to make me drag it out of you? How was the date? What's Bennett like?

GWEN

(as she crunches)

Wonderful. Amazing. Bennett is literally too good to be true.

TRACY

I've never heard you talk that way about any guy.

Gwen knocks back her coffee as she stands.

GWEN

I've been thinking about him all night. Bennett is... a man. Not a dude, not a boy, not a... He's well read, he listens, he asks me questions that make me stop and think. It's crazy, but with him I feel... invincible.

Tracy takes her in.

TRACY

Sugar, that's great. Is he single?

GWEN

I didn't ask. I am not coming off as the desperate girl. Too eager.

TRACY

God forbid you put yourself out there.

GWEN

He's a celebrity. He was my law professor. It would never work.

TRACY

Enough with the "nevers." Go get 'em!

GWEN

Oh my God, I'm going to throw up.

TRACY

It's called love. Get used to it.

Tracy heads for the bathroom.

TRACY (CONT'D)

Electric bill!

But Gwen can't hear her, deep into her own head as she is.

INT. ARRAIGNMENT COURT - DAY

Vanessa, already wiped out from the day, watches Charlie and Tracy bicker at the Defender's table. Tracy thumbs through a stack of case files in a wire basket.

TRACY

Robbery, Robbery, come on Robbery.

CHARLIE

You can take my B&E.

TRACY

Forget it. I hate burglars. They're sneaky. At least robbers have the balls to put a gun in your face.

CHARLIE

Want a resisting?

TRACY

I had one before lunch, thanks.

Tracy keeps flipping.

TRACY (CONT'D)
Drug sale, drug sale... so
pedestrian, pandering...
(Yahtzee)
Rape!

CHARLIE
Then I get your trespassing.

TRACY
Deal.

Happily, Tracy and Charlie trade files. Vanessa takes note.

INT. COURTROOM 50 - DAY

Gwen's trial. DaShay's witness, OFFICER BRIAN CRATER, White, 46, looks like a recruiting poster.

OFFICER CRATER
When we arrived at the location of the shooting, the bus had already emptied. There were people lying on the avenue bleeding. Several passengers sustained shrapnel wounds from the flying glass. A male in his early twenties was deceased. A vet just back from overseas.

A.D.A. DASHAY
After you arrested the defendant, did he make a statement?

OFFICER CRATER
(takes out a document)
He stated "I heard Fast Trigga' and his set was coming for me. They shot at me, so I shot back."

A.D.A. DASHAY
Did you voucher any evidence?

OFFICER CRATER
The defendant had a .32 caliber revolver in his waistband.

A.D.A. DASHAY
At the scene of the first shooting, were shell casings recovered on the street?

OFFICER CRATER

No, but a revolver would not eject casings.

A.D.A. DASHAY

So given the ballistics evidence, who do you believe provoked the initial altercation?

GWEN

Objection.

JUDGE PINKNER

Sustained.

DaShay smiles. Gwen stands.

GWEN

If the rival gang also had revolvers, it would be entirely possible that they shot first, right?

OFFICER CRATER

We know that the defendant had a revolver, and we know that there were no casings. So...

GWEN

So whoever shot had a revolver. But those are very common weapons. Right?

OFFICER CRATER

Yes.

INT. ARRAIGNMENT COURT - DAY

Vanessa sits alone on the bench while everyone busies themselves with court business. She eyes the case files on the desk for a three count.

Quiet as a church mouse, Vanessa stands and inches to the stack. She picks through the first several until she hears --

CHARLIE

What are you doing?

VANESSA

I thought I'd find a case that played to my strengths.

CHARLIE

And what would those be exactly?

Tracy joins them.

TRACY
What did she do now?

CHARLIE
Tried to cherry-pick.

VANESSA
But I saw you and Charlie do it.

CHARLIE
There's a difference between horse-
trading and cherry-picking.

TRACY
Horse-trading is collaborative.
Cherry-picking is the worst kind of
selfish.

VANESSA
I just want a chance to defend the
innocent.

TRACY
When you see one of those float by
here, you let me know.

Tracy hands her a file.

TRACY (CONT'D)
Here's an indecent exposure to keep
you busy. Spoiler alert: he did it.

Tracy shoos her away. Vanessa's phone vibrates. What she sees
makes her come to a dead stop.

INT. COURTHOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Vanessa rounds the corner and catches up to Gwen, who walks
towards Courtroom 50.

VANESSA
It worked! Fast Trigga' accepted my
friend request!

Vanessa shows Gwen her screen captures. Gwen contains her
excitement.

GWEN
Thank you, plan B. I need you to
authenticate these. I'm putting you
on the stand.

VANESSA

What? When?

GWEN

Now.

VANESSA

But I've never testified before.

GWEN

Get a grip, girl. This is happening.

INT. COURTROOM 50 - LATER

Vanessa on the stand.

GWEN

Did you recently create a social media account?

VANESSA

Yes.

GWEN

And what did you do with that account?

VANESSA

I friended "Fast Trigga." He friended me back within a few hours. Along with 27 other men. And three women. And one gender non-conforming --

GWEN

Did you have access to Fast Trigga's full page?

VANESSA

Yes. And in the week before the shooting, he was making constant threats against Willie.

GWEN

Could you read a representative sample?

VANESSA

(from her sheet)

Fast Trigga' -- "Ima smoke that punk-ass mutha fucker next time I see him." And on the day of the

(MORE)

VANESSA (CONT'D)
shooting: "little bitch ran like a
pussy when I fired on his ass."

Warily, DaShay eyes the jury. They're locked on Vanessa. As
Gwen tries to hide a hint of a swagger --

END OF ACT THREE

CASTING

ACT FOUR

INT. COURTROOM 50 - DAY

CARLOTTA SANCHEZ, a frail, vacant-looking young woman, early 20s, Hispanic, fidgets on the stand as DaShay directs.

CARLOTTA

We were coming back from seeing Miguel's brother's new baby daughter. We had dropped off our daughter's infant clothes that she'd outgrown. We got on the 37 bus.

A.D.A. DASHAY

And what happened on that bus?

CARLOTTA

I was staring out the window. When I heard yelling. A bunch of boys had stopped the bus. One was holding the door open and another one got on. I looked behind me and I saw the defendant pull out a gun.

A.D.A. DASHAY

What did you do?

CARLOTTA

I screamed. Miguel was sitting next to me, on the row side. I grabbed his arm and could feel he was tensed up. He was in go mode. He couldn't help it, his training.

Carlotta stops, the rush of memory choking her words.

CARLOTTA (CONT'D)

He stood up and I heard a loud pop. Something soft hit me on the right side of my face. It was --

She dissolves into tears.

CARLOTTA (CONT'D)

It was part of his head. It was his head. There was so much blood. I screamed so much I couldn't speak. I grabbed him in my arms but there was nothing I could do.

Gwen glances at the jury. Several of them are in tears.

A.D.A. DASHAY
I have nothing further.

JUDGE PINKNER
Ms. Harrison?

GWEN
No questions, Your Honor.

Willie won't raise his head. Gwen puts her hand on his shoulder.

INT. COURTHOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

A break. Gwen clocks the scrum of press cordoned off at the end of the hallway. DaShay exits the men's room.

GWEN
You got an offer?

A.D.A. DASHAY
Sure. 18 to 36.

GWEN
He's only a kid, E.J.

A.D.A. DASHAY
And Miguel Sanchez was only an innocent veteran.

GWEN
(exhales)
Some white kid in Texas drives drunk, kills four people, claims "affluenza," and gets probation. A Black kid kills one person while defending himself, he gets 18 years?

A.D.A. DASHAY
This isn't about race, Gwen. And I find any insinuation that it is offensive.

GWEN
It's always about race. What's offensive is that you convince yourself it's not.

INT. HOLDING CELL - COURTROOM 50 - DAY

Gwen and Willie. He paces in tight, nervous circles.

WILLIE

I don't wanna testify.

GWEN

We have no choice. You saw how the jury reacted to Miguel's widow. The Prosecution has emotion and patriotism on their side.

WILLIE

So, what do we have?

GWEN

You.

That makes him stop.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Let the jury know you, Willie, know your story. Drop the banger thing.

WILLIE

What about Mr. Dashay?

GWEN

He's going to go after you, but that's OK. I get to come back and fix whatever he tried to break. That's called a re-direct.

Willie looks into Gwen's eyes, very much a frightened boy.

GWEN (CONT'D)

I'm going to be there on your side every step of the way. You can do this, Willie.

Gwen doesn't push. She lets the silence form the answer.

WILLIE

Okay.

INT. ARRAIGNMENT COURT - DAY

Vanessa stands with SERGEI DOLINSKY, 40-ish Russian immigrant. His dutiful wife, SONJA, is at his side.

VANESSA

I understand you jumped the turnstile, Mr. Dolinsky.

SERGEI

I lost my fare card. It was stupid. Who gets caught doing that?

VANESSA

Well, fortunately, fare evasion is more like a parking ticket than a crime. If you plead guilty, you just pay a seventy-five dollar fine.

SONJA

Is that all? Thank God. We've never been through something like this.

VANESSA

Okay. Let's go before the judge.

Vanessa passes Charlie and Tracy. Before Charlie can ask:

VANESSA (CONT'D)

I got this.

INT. COURTROOM 50 - DAY

Gwen questions Willie, who sits nervously.

GWEN

When you saw the other boys get on the bus, what did you think?

WILLIE

I knew it was over.

GWEN

What do you mean?

WILLIE

They were gonna take me out. They were gonna kill me.

GWEN

In that moment, when you saw those boys force the bus to stop and then get on, how sure were you that they were coming to kill you?

WILLIE

Real sure. It was all over the 'net. My friends told me.

A.D.A. DASHAY

Objection. Hearsay.

GWEN

Not offered for the truth, Judge. It just goes to his state of mind.

JUDGE PINKNER

Overruled.

GWEN

Willie, were you scared? Is that why you shot your gun?

WILLIE

I had to. It was them or me.

GWEN

You thought you were going to die?

Willie's lip trembles. He fights back tears.

WILLIE

Yes. I didn't want to die.

GWEN

No further questions.

DaShay stands.

A.D.A. DASHAY

You had a loaded gun that day because you knew the guys on the bus were going to kill you?

WILLIE

Yes.

A.D.A. DASHAY

Because they were from a rival gang?

WILLIE

Right.

A.D.A. DASHAY

And that's what rival gang members do, right? They shoot at each other. You try to kill them, they try to kill you.

WILLIE

I guess.

A.D.A. DASHAY

'Cause you're in a war.

WILLIE

True.

A.D.A. DASHAY

In a way, you're a warrior. I mean, a gang war is almost like being in combat, right?

WILLIE

Yeah. It's like that.

A.D.A. DASHAY

I have nothing further.

DaShay sits. Willie goes back to the defense table.

WILLIE

How'd I do?

GWEN

You did fine.

She looks at DaShay, who smiles at her. She frowns, not sure what he just did.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - NIGHT

As Tracy walks out of the office, she sees a Lincoln Town Car pull up to the curb. A CHAUFFEUR exits and opens the passenger door. Vanessa exits the building and walks up to the car.

TRACY

Oh hey, Vanessa.
(off the Town Car)
And Vanessa's driver.

Vanessa sighs and forces a smile. Tracy looks past Vanessa into the car and spies a stylish WHITE COUPLE in their 50s.

TRACY (CONT'D)

Your entourage?

VANESSA

(to her 'rents)
This is Tracy, the one I told you about.
(to Tracy)
This is Evan and Catherine... my parents.

Tracy halfway covers her surprise. She double downs on her Southern charm.

TRACY

Really, your... Well, it's a pleasure to meet you both.

Tracy extends her hand through the window. For Vanessa, the moment can't end fast enough.

VANESSA
We've got to go.

Vanessa whispers to Tracy.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Any chance you'll keep this to yourself?

TRACY
Nope.

Vanessa glares at Tracy as she gets into the car. Tracy smiles sweetly as the car pulls away. Ain't great gossip grand?

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. COURTROOM 50 - DAY

DaShay stands.

A.D.A. DASHAY

Your Honor, the Commonwealth requests the Court instruct the jury on combat by agreement.

GWEN

Are you kidding me? Did we just teleport back to 1789?

A.D.A. DASHAY

Earlier the defense stipulated that the defendant was in a gang. The jury should be instructed that if they find that his gang and another gang have an ongoing understanding that when they see each other, violence will ensue, then the gunfight on the bus was a consensual, mutually engaged in fight. Much like a duel or a boxing match. Under the common law, a claim of self-defense is therefore void.

GWEN

That definition is so specific, the jury would have no other choice but to convict my client!

A.D.A. DASHAY

The defendant conceded that he walks around the world in a state of on-going consensual violence. These gangs are dueling all the time and her client therefore can't claim self-defense. When you join a gang, you give up that right.

Judge Pinkner takes a beat before rendering a decision.

JUDGE PINKNER

It's an original argument, Mr. DaShay. But I'm not going to instruct the jury that way.

Gwen releases a relieved sigh.

JUDGE PINKNER (CONT'D)

However, I will allow you to argue the concept in your summation. Let the jury decide whether self-defense should apply.

GWEN

But Judge --

JUDGE PINKNER

We're adjourned.

Gwen sees Earliene looking on anxiously. Gwen looks stricken, her breathing becomes short and shallow...

INT. COURTHOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Gwen slams into a handicapped bathroom. She grabs onto the sink as her heart races, her chest in pain. She looks up into the mirror. She looks like she's being suffocated by an invisible hand. Someone knocks on the door. A beat. A second knock. It takes Gwen's all to rasp --

GWEN

Busy!

Gwen sits on the commode as she regains her breathing. A few beats later, the terrors subside. She wipes away her tears, flushes to cover the panic attack.

INT. COURTHOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Gwen exits the bathroom looking as sharp as she did before. She nods to the impatient woman in the wheelchair who had been waiting. She folds her arms, pissed.

GWEN

Sorry. Bad hot dog.

INT. ARRAIGNMENT COURT - DAY

Vanessa and Sergei stand before JUDGE ADLER.

VANESSA

Your Honor, this is a simple fare evasion. My client has a steady job and it's his first offense --

Charlie and Tracy watch nearby. They speak sotto.

CHARLIE

Her parents are White-white? You sure? They're not like

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Beyonce/Halle Berry light-skinned,
mocha latte Black?

TRACY
Sugar, they're as white as...
sugar.

CHARLIE
That explains a lot.

TRACY
Sure as a billy goat likes lettuce,
she won't last the week.

A C.O. shushes them with a look. At the bench --

A.D.A. SHAW
Actually, Your Honor, the
Commonwealth would like to dismiss
the charges.

A.D.A SANDRA SHAW, female, early 30s, dowdy, easily offended.

VANESSA
What? Really?

But Shaw hands the judge and Vanessa some paperwork.

A.D.A. SHAW
There's a warrant.

VANESSA
What's going on?

Charlie swoops in to look at the papers.

CHARLIE
You had a first degree assault
conviction fifteen years ago?

SERGEI
No...

CHARLIE
Look. This is based on your
fingerprints. You tell me this 100%
isn't you and we'll fight it but --

SERGEI
Okay, yes. Yes, I had a case.

CHARLIE
You skipped out on the trial. Got
sentenced in absentia to 10 years.

SERGEI

I freaked out. I thought they would come and get me but they never did.

VANESSA

What does this mean?

CHARLIE

It means he's going to prison.

SERGEI

What? When?

CHARLIE

Now.

SERGEI

Sonja. My wife. She doesn't know...

VANESSA

Isn't there something we can do?

CHARLIE

Your Honor, we request that reasonable bail be set while we investigate the circumstances of his sentencing in absentia. Mr. Dolinsky has been an upstanding citizen for over fifteen years, he has a full-time job, a wife and kids --

JUDGE ADLER

Forget it, Mr. Riggs. He jumped bail fifteen years ago. I'm not giving him the opportunity to do it again. Mr. Dolinsky, I am executing sentence...

Sonja is at the rail.

SONJA

What's happening?

As they lead Sergei out --

SERGEI

Sonja, honey, I'm sorry --

SONJA

What's happening?

INT. COURTHOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Vanessa and Sonja step into the hallway.

VANESSA

Mrs. Dolinsky. I'm afraid I have some bad news...

PULL BACK as Vanessa delivers the sad particulars. A beat. Sonja's face goes slack. She collapses onto the bench as Vanessa sits down next to her, looking like she just got hit by a bus.

INT. DEFENDER ASSOCIATION - CLOTHES CLOSET - DAY

Gwen works through the facts of her case on a whiteboard as she thinks out loud. Charlie enters.

CHARLIE

When do I get my suit back?

GWEN

Very soon. I'd throw in a new set of cuff links - if I could afford a new set of cuff links.

CHARLIE

We can work it out in trade.

Charlie moves to grab her ass. Like a ninja, Gwen pushes his hand away.

GWEN

Can I talk something through with you?

CHARLIE

Damn. Women and talking. When does it end?

GWEN

(moving on)

I proved the existence of threats... the prior shooting, but now they're still saying he's a kid in a gang... no self-defense. I'm screwed, right? It's almost like I need to explain to these jurors why a kid joins a gang? Not because he wants to be in a war but... he doesn't have a dad... How do I get that out without a dad? What I need is an expert... Unless I don't need

(MORE)

GWEN (CONT'D)
an expert. I need a gang expert. I
need a gang expert! Thanks Charlie!

Gwen leaves in a hurry.

CHARLIE
Anytime.

INT. COURTROOM 50 - DAY

The jury has been cleared. Gwen and DaShay confer before Judge Pinkner. DaShay is barely holding his anger in check.

A.D.A. DASHAY
Your Honor, I have a continuing
objection to this. It's the worst
kind of legal... dinner theatre.

GWEN
If he testifies in open court about
gangs and how they work, he has a
death sentence on his head.

A.D.A. DASHAY
He's not even an expert.

GWEN
He's the very best expert there is.

JUDGE PINKNER
How do you know this so-called
"expert"?

GWEN
He's a former client and he's
currently serving a life sentence
on a federal RICO case.

Judge Pinkner mulls it over.

JUDGE PINKNER
The witness does bring a unique,
valuable knowledge --

A.D.A. DASHAY
But, Your Honor --

JUDGE PINKNER
Dinner theatre can be entertaining,
Mr. DaShay.
(to clerk)
Set it up.

INT. COURTROOM 50 - LATER - DAY

Gwen stands by the witness stand where, behind a silhouetted screen, an imposing figure of a stocky, muscled man sits. LOFTIN DUBAR's voice is filtered to aid his disguise.

DUBAR

It's simple. If you not in Arch Street, you the enemy.

GWEN

Arch Street is Arch Street Posse?

DUBAR

That's right.

GWEN

Could you explain what O.G. means?

DUBAR

Original Gangster. A senior member. That's me. They my boys. I'm the father and the Godfather. I teach 'em right from wrong. I'm the Black Pied Piper.

Dubar laughs at his own joke. The synthetic voice sounds alien-like.

GWEN

What do they get out of this?

DUBAR

Protection. Community. A life.

GWEN

What if someone like my client just says no.

DUBAR

Nobody says no to me. If we peg you to be a shorty in my set, there ain't no comparison shopping. You say yes, or you run for your life. But that just mean you gonna join somebody else's crew.

GWEN

So there's really no choice?

DUBAR

Everybody got a choice. You choose us or you choose another set. But you do that, you off the count.

GWEN

"Off the count." Meaning?

DUBAR

Marked for death.

Gwen watches the jury. They're by turns fascinated and horrified by the testimony. Gwen and Willie lock eyes. Willie nods. This is my life.

END OF ACT FIVE

CASSTING

ACT SIX

INT. COURTROOM 50 - DAY

Summations. Gwen puts a gentle hand on Willie's shoulder as she stands.

GWEN

It'd be nice if we got to choose the world we were brought up in. Me? I would have liked Paris, or maybe Southern California...

(wistful)

Imagine a life of surfing and privilege. But we don't get to choose. We, all of us, are forced to live when and where we are born. Sometimes that means a violent, volatile world of abuse, pain and brutality. That's the world where Willie was raised. That's the world he had to navigate - not by choice, not by agreement, but by the accident of being born there. Yes, he joined a gang. As a matter of personal survival. Yes, he carried a gun. As a matter of personal survival. And yes, he fired that gun... as a matter of personal survival. You recall the testimony. Those gang members shot at him, and hijacked a city bus like they were hailing a cab. They were going to kill this boy. This boy. A boy who looks like he's already a man. But he's not a man. He's just like your own child, or the child you used to be. There can be no doubt about the fact that the gang was going to kill this boy. And when it's them or you, gang or no gang, So Cal or South Philly, that's called self-defense. And it's because Willie acted in self-defense that you cannot convict him of murder.

Gwen sits. DaShay stands.

A.D.A. DASHAY

Lack of opportunity and a lack of hope are not William Iverson's fault. But what is his fault, what makes Mr. Iverson an unrepentant gangbanger and a murderer is his

(MORE)

A.D.A. DASHAY (CONT'D)
utter lack of personal
responsibility. His utter disdain
for the basic principles of right
and wrong. Juvenile offenders are
no longer scruffy little ruffians
who steal apples from a street
vendor. They're drug dealers,
rapists, and gang members. Bluntly
put, Mr. Iverson's chosen path was
gang warfare. He was a willing
soldier in that war.

DaShay looks the jurors in the eye.

A.D.A. DASHAY (CONT'D)
But let us not be so callous as to
forget the willing soldier who
fought in a real declared war --
the innocent bystander the
defendant shot and killed. Private
First Class Miguel Sanchez. U.S.
Army, Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st
Infantry Division. 22 years old.
Back home all of four months. Let
us give tribute to his family --
his grieving young wife, and their
two-year-old daughter.
(beat)

That is the bitter legacy Mr.
Iverson left in his wake once he
voluntarily engaged in gang
warfare. And let us be clear: once
this man started carrying loaded
guns, he forfeited his right to a
legal claim of self-defense. It is
called "combat by mutual agreement"
and is among the oldest of legal
doctrines. When you agree to a
duel, you don't get to say, "He
shot at me first."

DaShay takes a confident stride back to his table.

INT. DEFENDER ASSOCIATION - TOM'S OFFICE - DAY

Tom works at his desk, door open. Vanessa approaches, knocks
politely.

VANESSA
Do you have a minute?

TOM
Sure.

VANESSA

Today, I... I don't get it. There's no time to care about the clients here. They're just names and faces, not people. How are you supposed to administer fair and thorough legal justice in a system that's rigged against it?

A beat. She considers her words.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

I don't know. Maybe I'm not cut out for this.

Tom listens thoughtfully, nods like a wise sage.

TOM

Listen, the truth? It would be really bad if you walked out right now. McPherson is out on disability. Martinez is about to go on maternity leave and I'm pretty certain Bisker is not long for this world. Frankly, we need a warm body with a pulse and a JD degree.

Not exactly the Kodak moment Vanessa was expecting. Tom stands, grabs his briefcase.

TOM (CONT'D)

Do you know the author, Bennett Sherman?

VANESSA

Sure. I read his books in college.

TOM

He's going to be hanging around here for a while.

VANESSA

For real? I love him. His photo spread in O Magazine...

TOM

Then don't quit yet.

INT. COURTROOM 50 - LATER - DAY

Gwen, Willie, and Earliene wait anxiously as the jury foreman hands the verdict papers to the CLERK of the court. The middle-aged man reads aloud.

CLERK

Superior Court of Pennsylvania,
Philadelphia County. In the case of
The Commonwealth vs. William James
Iverson. We the jury find the
defendant not guilty of the murder
of Miguel Emmanuel Sanchez.

Gwen squeezes his hand as Willie's mouth drops open. Earliene
exclaims a "praise Jesus!"

CLERK (CONT'D)

On the second count. We the jury
find the defendant guilty of
unlawful possession of a firearm.

GWEN

Your Honor, in light of the
verdict, I would request that this
matter be transferred to juvenile
court for sentencing.

JUDGE PINKNER

Granted.

EARLIENE

What does that mean?

GWEN

It means he'll be sentenced on the
gun possession in family court. It
means we won.

Willie leans over, gives Gwen a brief, heartfelt hug. He
hands her the Star Wars notebook, whispers in her ear.

WILLIE

Thank you, Miss Harrison.

Willie is taken away by two court officers. In the gallery,
Earliene cries as she watches Willie go. He looks back at
Earliene and mouths "I love you, Auntie Grandma" before he
disappears. Gwen turns to Earliene.

EARLIENE

You saved him.

GWEN

I gave him another chance. Now it's
up to you.

EARLIENE

You are a blessed woman, Ms.
Harrison. You are blessed.

Earliene hugs her tightly, then leaves. Gwen opens the notebook, flips through pages of beautiful sketches. One, a lioness in the grass, is labeled: Miss Harrison.

INT. NULA'S BAR - NIGHT

Post-work decompression. The gang's all there.

TRACY

Hey, isn't it Tom's birthday today?

GWEN

I thought it was a few days ago.

CHARLIE

It was yesterday. Pitiful.

Tom enters the bar with Bennett.

ALL

Surprise!

TOM

Guys, my birthday is next week. You always screw it up.

(beat)

Some of you may recognize our guest, the writer Bennett Sherman. Bennett will be shadowing us for a few weeks for his latest project. Try to be on your best behavior.

(to Bennett)

They're all yours. God help you.

CHARLIE

What are you drinking?

BENNETT

Single malt.

CHARLIE

The right answer.

The guys walk off to the bar. Gwen and Tracy watch them go.

TRACY

I can't tell if they're polishing each other's knobs or sniffing each other's asses.

VANESSA

Thanks. I won't be able to get that visual out of my head.

Tracy looks at Vanessa as if just now realizing she exists. She gives Vanessa a ten dollar bill.

TRACY

Be a lamb and go fill the jukebox.
No boy bands or Bieber.

Tracy gives her a knowing look. Vanessa retreats. Gwen keeps her eye on Bennett.

GWEN

I can't tell if he's into me.

TRACY

My mama used to say a friend'll
shoot a warm glance over as if to
say, "good to see ya." But a double-
take with a smile...

The women both regard Bennett. He glances over. Then... he does a double-take with a smile.

TRACY (CONT'D)

That's like warm biscuits and
gravy, honey.
(yelling, to Vanessa)
Make sure you play some Blake
Shelton.

Tracy moves off. Gwen looks back at Bennett again. This time, just behind Bennett, Charlie does a double-take of his own followed by a tip of his cocktail.

OFF Gwen, contemplating her choices --

END OF EPISODE