

PROLOGUE

FADE IN:

INT. GRAY HOME, KITCHEN - MORNING

The refrigerator door closes with a thud.

AMY

The answer is no.

Amy carries a cold carton of milk to the waiting bowl of cereal and pours as Lauren sulks over its top.

LAUREN

Julie's mom is letting her go.

AMY

Is Julie's mom also headed for a cliff? 'Cause I won't be doing that either.

She sets the milk on the bar next to the enormous box of cereal that sits like a wall between them.

LAUREN

You just don't want me to grow up.

AMY

Yes I do, just not at warp speed.

She pushes the bowl closer to Lauren.

AMY

(continuing)

Although the risk of growing at all gets slimmer when you don't eat.

Maxine descends the stairs into the kitchen, but she and her lovely outfit go temporarily unnoticed.

AMY

(continuing)

So, how about you use that mouth of yours for something other than discussion.

LAUREN

All the other moms are cool.

AMY

I guess that makes me special.

At last, Amy and Lauren notice Maxine's attire.

AMY

(continuing)

Wow, Mom, if that's the new dress code at work, we're gonna have to sell the house.

MAXINE

For your information, I've been invited by an old client of mine to have lunch.

LAUREN

Must have been an important client.

MAXINE

He was, Lauren. He was a boy whose parents weren't very nice. I took him away from there, gave him to a family who deserved him.

AMY

How long ago was that?

MAXINE

He reminded me it's been fifteen years. He called me yesterday, and we caught up.

(proudly)

Jeremy's a political analyst now. He's consulting on the Matley for governor campaign. And guess who's invited to today's campaign brunch.

LAUREN

If it's you, can I go?

MAXINE

What about school?

LAUREN

(pointing at Amy)

She won't let me go.

AMY

'She' won't let you go on a field trip to Planned Parenthood, and it's not today anyway.

MAXINE

Planned Parenthood?

Maxine opens her mouth to say something else.

AMY

My sentiments exactly. You're nine, Lauren.

Obviously not sharing the same sentiments, Maxine stuffs her comment behind a prudent smile.

LAUREN

My teacher says that in a few years we'll be having to make decisions about that stuff, and we should have all the facts.

AMY

Well, I think I've provided quite enough 'facts' so far.

LAUREN

Not about contra..., contra...

Lauren strains to remember the word.

LAUREN

(continuing)

...contradiction.

MAXINE

Contradiction?

LAUREN

See, you don't know about it either. My teacher says that we might need it when we get a little older so we can prevent accidents. What is 'contradiction,' Mommy?

AMY

Um, well, Lauren, that's what couples do. They contradict each other so much that they don't want to make babies.

Maxine flashes Amy a shrewd smile.

LAUREN

Is that right, Grandma?

MAXINE

Well, Lauren, I'll say that it was definitely because of explanations like your mother's that Planned Parenthood was formed in the first place.

Amy flashes the shrewd smile right back at her as Maxine collects her bag.

MAXINE

(continuing)

Well, I'm off. The campaign trail waits for no woman.

AMY

Hey, Mom.

Maxine stops, turning back to her.

AMY

(continuing)

That's pretty great, you know -  
influencing someone's life like  
that.

MAXINE

Isn't that what you do, Amy,  
effect young lives - everyday?  
Don't worry, someday it'll be your  
turn for them to tell you how you  
did.

Maxine scurries out the door, but Amy is now stopped in her  
tracks, the comment hitting her squarely. At last, she turns  
back to Lauren who, unimpressed, shakes her head disgustedly.

FADE OUT:

END OF PROLOGUE

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. JUDGE AMY GRAY'S FAMILY COURT - LATE MORNING

Amy reads from a file she holds before her.

AMY

Mrs. Dobson, you wish to remove  
your three-year-old daughter,  
Allison, from life support.

A tear in her eye, MRS. PAULA DOBSON nods silently as her  
lawyer, SAM PERVY, stands to answer.

SAM PERVY

That's right, Your Honor.

AMY

Your husband, however...

Amy looks to the other table, but Mr. Dobson is not present.  
His lawyer, TRENT WILLIS, squirms just a little.

AMY

(continuing)

...wishes to create an injunction  
preventing you from an act that  
appears...

She turns a page in the file.

AMY

(continuing)

...will result in your daughter's  
immediate death. Is that correct?

SAM PERVY

Yes, Your Honor.

Again, Amy looks to the other table, appearing annoyed by Mr.  
Dobson's continued absence. She consults the file.

AMY

Allison has been on life support  
following severe injuries  
sustained exactly ten days ago.

SAM PERVY

Yes, Judge Gray.

AMY

It appears that these injuries have caused internal bleeding as well as cranial hematoma, leaving Allison's brain damaged and unable to sustain life without support.

Mrs. Dobson shakes her grieving head and wipes a tear.

SAM PERVY

That is the situation, Your Honor.

AMY

I apologize, Mrs. Dobson. I'm sure this is not easy to hear, but I need to be familiar with the facts of the case as well as relate them to the court.

MRS. DOBSON

I understand, Judge Gray.

Her eyes heavy with compassion, Amy turns again annoyedly to the other table.

AMY

Mr. Willis, would you please tell me why your client isn't here.

TRENT WILLIS

(standing)

I'm sorry, Your Honor. I can't imagine what the hold-up could be. The marshals were supposed to bring him to the court over an hour ago. But I'm sure he'll be here, Judge Gray. Mr. Dobson is adamant that his wife's intention to remove little Allison from life support must be stopped.

Amy looks to Bruce in confusion.

AMY

I don't understand. Why is Mr. Dobson to be accompanied by marshals?

TRENT WILLIS

Why that's protocol for anyone attending session from jail.

AMY

Jail?

On the other side of the court, Sam Pervy stands.

SAM PERVY

Yes, Your Honor. My client's husband is responsible for the injuries to their little girl. It is my client's contention that this is the reason her husband is seeking an injunction. If young Allison is taken off life support, his current charge of child abuse will change to murder.

Mrs. Dobson's head sags sadly forward as Amy and Bruce trade a weighty glance.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - SAME MOMENT

Tables buzz with chit-chat. Obviously proud as the punch she sips, Maxine ogles and star gazes amongst the many PARTY GUESTS. Seated next to her and watching her with self-satisfied, dash handsome eyes, JEREMY LITT smiles.

JEREMY

You see who that is over there?

Maxine follows his line of sight to a garishly adorned woman seated two tables away.

MAXINE

That's Madge Aldridge! I haven't seen her since she won the Academy Award for 'Porcelain Shame.'

JEREMY

Nor has anyone else, believe me. The only appearances she makes anymore is at these fund-raisers. I can always get her to come.

MAXINE

You know her that well, Jeremy?!

JEREMY

As well as anyone knows an aging recluse.

Maxine's smile is abbreviated as a tremor of excitement hits the crowd. BOB MATLEY enters the room.

MAXINE

You know, I think it's healthy for me to be around Republicans now and then. It reminds me they're flesh and blood - which I guess means there's a heart around somewhere.

JEREMY  
 (smiling)  
 Retract the claws, Maxine. We're  
 all playing at being nice here.

Despite her obvious distaste of the Republican venue,  
 Maxine's proud smile couldn't be larger as she continues to  
 gaze wide-eyed around the expansive ballroom.

JEREMY  
 (continuing)  
 Are you impressed yet?

MAXINE  
 Oh, heavens yes, Jeremy.

She places an affectionate palm on his cheek.

JEREMY  
 Good.

INT. JUDGE AMY GRAY'S FAMILY COURT - LATER

Amy, Bruce, the lawyers, and Mrs. Dobson listen solemnly as  
 DR. BOSE gives his opinion from the stand.

DR. BOSE  
 The patient has undergone two  
 operations to relieve pressure on  
 the medulla from blood that has  
 pooled at the base of her spine.

AMY  
 Your prognosis, Dr. Bose.

DR. BOSE  
 Once young Allison is removed from  
 the life support systems which  
 sustain her now, including any  
 further effort to relieve the  
 intense pressure occurring in the  
 rear portion of her brain, I'm  
 afraid the child will be dead  
 within twenty-four to forty-eight  
 hours.

Sam Pervy rests a consoling palm on Mrs. Dobson's hand as  
 RANDALL DOBSON at last enters the courtroom dressed in  
 incarceration orange and flanked by two MARSHALS.

Barely concealing her disgust, Amy watches the burly man as  
 he is escorted to his seat.

AMY  
 Nice of you to join us, Mr. Dobson.

MR. DOBSON  
Not my fault, Judge. I was  
hurrying, but these clowns...

Bruce ejects from his seat.

BRUCE  
You will watch your tone. And if  
she ever does wish to hear your  
comments...

Revolted, Bruce shakes his head as if the idea were  
preposterous.

BRUCE  
(continuing)  
...you will stand when addressing  
Her Honor.

TRENT WILLIS  
My client understands now. There  
will be no further misbehavior.

Mr. Dobson slumps insolently.

AMY  
You were saying before the  
interruption, Dr. Bose.

DR. BOSE  
Young Allison was badly beaten,  
Your Honor. She incurred fourteen  
contusions to her face, head, and  
torso, at least four of which have  
led to serious internal  
hemorrhage.

Mr. Dobson's features pinch painfully, and he averts his gaze.

DR. BOSE  
(continuing)  
She was shaken badly and her  
cranium crushed in two places by  
an object of undetermined origin.

Amy winces in empathy as Bruce regards Mr. Dobson with  
disdain.

DR. BOSE  
(continuing)  
The trauma her little body has  
suffered is beyond repair. If the  
child's mother had not found her  
when she did, I'm sure she would  
already be gone.

MR. DOBSON  
 (to Mrs. Dobson)  
 See, you wanted to save her then!  
 Now you just want to leave her for  
 dead.

AMY  
 Mr. Dobson!

MR. DOBSON  
 (standing)  
 She's the murderer, not me!

Again, Bruce is out of his seat.

BRUCE  
 Mr. Willis, you will control your  
 client, or he will be removed at  
 once!

Half Mr. Dobson's size, Trent Willis at last urges his client  
 to his seat.

AMY  
 Mr. Dobson, you have admitted to  
 these offences against your little  
 girl, have you not?

He rouses ashamed eyes slowly to hers.

MR. DOBSON  
 Yes...

His lawyer prods him, and he remembers to stand.

MR. DOBSON  
 (continuing)  
 Yes, Your Honor.

AMY  
 You took the gift of your  
 daughter's little life and stole  
 from it everything that was vital.  
 And now you're fighting to keep  
 her alive. What am I to make of  
 this sudden change of heart?

Mrs. Dobson is emotionally propelled out of her seat.

MRS. DOBSON  
 He wants to keep my baby alive as  
 a vegetable just so he won't have  
 to go to prison for killing her!  
 Selfish son-of-a-bitch!

Now it's Pervy's turn to reel in his client. Amy watches  
 with understanding and turns back to Mr. Dobson.

AMY

Answer the question, Mr. Dobson.

MR. DOBSON

(still standing)

I haven't had a change of heart.

AMY

Excuse me?

MR. DOBSON

It's not like that, Judge. I never meant to hurt Allison this bad in the first place. And I sure never meant to kill her.

He begins to cry, but, in one manly swoop of his arm, he erases any trace of a tear.

MR. DOBSON

(continuing)

Sure, keeping her alive means I get to take it all back as much as I can - you know, something I didn't mean to do. But what I really just want is to have my little girl alive. Is that so much to ask?

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - NOON

The tables are quiet as everyone listens to Bob Matley now at the podium.

BOB MATLEY

The road to the governor's mansion is a bumpy one. I won't kid you on that. But, as I hope I've illustrated today, there have been a lot of people who have helped me along the way. I've gotten to introduce you to a few, and the one I'd like to leave you with now is truly someone special. Believe me when I say I couldn't have made it this far without him. He's probably the youngest one in the whole lot of us. And, by damn, if he doesn't know his stuff. I think he's even made me look bad on occasion.

Jeremy grins good naturedly as Maxine begins to get it, her proud smile re-igniting.

BOB MATLEY

(continuing)

Won't you welcome one of the best  
campaign advisors this country has  
to offer, Jeremy Litt.

Jeremy stands, gives Maxine's shoulder a squeeze and heads  
for the podium. Maxine nearly squirms in her chair in barely  
contained delight.

JEREMY

Good afternoon. Thank you for  
that kind introduction. Truly  
it's been my pleasure to  
contribute to this campaign  
because I do believe Bob Matley is  
the very best candidate for  
governor of this state. You know  
it's funny, but one of the main  
reasons I was drawn to this  
campaign was Mr. Matley's  
unwavering support for smart  
social programs.

Cheers all around. Maxine's toothy smile is enormous.

JEREMY

(continuing)

That's very significant to me  
considering, if I had anything to  
do with Mr. Matley making it this  
far, he has the Connecticut  
Department of Children and  
Families to thank.

Confused Partygoers cross eyelines.

JEREMY

(continuing)

Because if it weren't for DCF and  
the amazing angel assigned to me  
fifteen years ago, I wouldn't be  
here.

Sobering quickly, Maxine's smile dissolves.

JEREMY

(continuing)

In fact, without her efforts, I  
can't guarantee that that  
frightened teenager would even be  
alive. I owe her everything.

(more)

JEREMY (cont'd)

So, if I've been able to do anything for this campaign, it is a result of organizations like DCF and the incredible woman who accompanied me here today. Maxine Gray, would you please stand up.

Tears glistening in her eyes, Maxine stands shyly.

JEREMY

(continuing)

Now if you'll excuse me, there's an angel at my table.

Shaking slightly from the flood of emotions, Maxine watches Jeremy as he walks quickly toward her. They embrace hard as the Partygoers applaud enthusiastically.

Another SPEAKER takes the podium. The applause settles, and Maxine and Jeremy at last disengage and begin to take their seats, tears in both their eyes. Ignoring the Speaker, Maxine leans closer to Jeremy and lowers her voice.

MAXINE

You terrible man! How could you do such a thing to me?

JEREMY

I guess I learned a thing or two from an incredible woman about saying it like it is.

Overwhelmed, Maxine shakes her head in mock disapproval.

JEREMY

(continuing)

Here, I want to give you something.

MAXINE

You have! You were a silly boy, and not much has changed. I can tell you that.

He reaches in his jacket pocket, and Maxine cringes as he retrieves a small box.

MAXINE

(continuing)

No.

As they huddle close together at the table, Jeremy opens the box revealing a beautiful pearl necklace collapsed inside. Maxine gasps.

JEREMY

There's no arguing, Maxine.

He pulls the necklace out of the box. Flabbergasted mute, Maxine watches as he reaches around her neck and clasps the necklace.

A blinding white flash.

Maxine and Jeremy are frozen in the sudden glare. Then they turn slowly, immediately spotting the PHOTOGRAPHER standing just a few feet away, his flash the size of a small lamp near his shoulder.

PHOTOGRAPHER

What do you say, let's have  
another - this time with smiles?

Though slightly perturbed and a little awkward, Maxine and Jeremy nonetheless smile for the camera.

Flash.

INT. AMY'S CHAMBERS - SAME MOMENT

Amy sets down the large photograph in her hand and picks up another, both depicting a little girl, young ALISON DOBSON, strapped to life by a network of tubes. Startling her slightly, Bruce and Donna enter.

BRUCE

Are you hungry? Donna's going out.

Amy takes one last look at the pictures in her hand then replaces them in the open file before her. She closes it disgustedly.

AMY

No, thank you. I don't think I  
can muster an appetite.

She hands the file to Donna.

AMY

(continuing)

Will you take care of this please.  
Don't let me see it for a while.

Donna accepts the file with some confusion but checks its tag and soon nods in understanding. She starts to walk away when she spies something that looks like menus or brochures on Amy's desk under where the file had been. She perks.

DONNA

Well, it looks like you were  
hungry. We can go to this place  
if you prefer.

Amy watches disbelievingly as Donna nabs the brochures off her desk.

POV - DONNA

The title of each of the two brochures reads: "Planned Parenthood."

DONNA  
(continuing)  
Oh, maybe not this place.

She sets them back on Amy's desk and fusses guiltily trying to achieve their prior arrangement.

DONNA  
(continuing)  
Sorry.

BRUCE  
Am I missing something?

DONNA  
No. It's her personal business.  
(to Amy)  
And I'm sorry again for getting into it. And you don't have to explain anything or tell us anything - unless of course you want to.

Amy listens to Donna with more good natured incredulity than irritation.

AMY  
These are not my brochures.

Donna leans closer for the full dish. Bruce steps closer and can now read their titles.

DONNA  
Whose are they?

AMY  
Lauren's.

DONNA  
Good for you, Judge Gray. I think that is so smart.

AMY  
They're not from me. Her teacher passed them out to let the parents know about an upcoming field trip there.

DONNA  
Wow, I hope they still have trips like that when Ariadne's her age.

Bruce eyes her askance.

DONNA  
(continuing)  
We sure didn't get to do anything  
like that when we were pups. Did  
we, Judge Gray?

AMY  
I'm not letting her go.

DONNA  
Oh. Well... ..it's a choice.

BRUCE  
Not that this conversation is any  
of my business, but, Donna, don't  
you think Lauren is a little young  
for this sort of thing?

DONNA  
When is a person too young to  
learn how to protect herself?

She looks guiltily down at Amy whose eyes volley between them  
as they trade opinions.

DONNA  
(continuing)  
Of course, that's just my opinion.  
But think about it. What about  
this guy?

She holds up the file with the pictures of little Alison  
Dobson on life support.

BRUCE  
Careful, Donna.

DONNA  
I'm not talking about the case -  
just Mr. Dobson. How different do  
you think things would be if early  
on he had had a little lesson in  
family planning?

BRUCE  
But you see, if people just met  
their responsibilities, we  
wouldn't have to make decisions on  
either end about whether or not a  
child should live.

DONNA  
If everyone 'met their  
responsibilities,' we would all be  
out of a job.

BRUCE

I can live with that.

Amy swallows the conversation solemnly.

AMY

So can I.

INT. JUDGE AMY GRAY'S FAMILY COURT - LATER

The courtroom settles, everyone in their places. Amy addresses DEBORAH HARRIS, seated with her lawyer, TOM PUGE.

AMY

Ms. Harris, two years ago you were awarded custody of your then twelve-year-old daughter, Savannah, when you were able to demonstrate that your ex-husband, Cole Harris, was unable to care for her appropriately due to the travel demands of his job, which is...

She flips a page in the file lying open before her.

DEBORAH

He's a professional boy.

AMY

I'm sorry?

On the opposite side of the room, seated next to COLE HARRIS, RYAN BARTLETT stands quickly.

RYAN BARTLETT

My client is a professional cowboy, Your Honor, a rodeo performer.

DEBORAH

Like I said.

AMY

Ms. Harris, your comments are duly noted. Now, if they could be restrained, that would be preferable.

Momentarily put in her place, Deborah backs down, her lawyer holding her arm firmly.

TOM PUGE

Thank you, Your Honor.

From his seat at the opposite table, Cole Harris shakes his head disgustedly at his ex-wife and looks behind him to where his daughter, SAVANAH, sits squarely on his side of the room.

Amy notes the exchange as well as the lackluster smile the young girl returns to her father.

AMY

It appears, now that Savannah is fourteen, she wishes to have the custody arrangement altered.

RYAN BARTLETT

Yes, Judge Gray. Savannah has clearly indicated that she wants to live with her father.

Deborah Harris winces painfully.

AMY

And Mr. Harris' travel schedule?

Mr. Bartlett briefly looks down at Cole Harris, consulting one last time. Cole nods affirmatively.

RYAN BARTLETT

Mr. Harris has agreed to cut his performance schedule in half, maintaining the rest in regional competitions.

AMY

I wasn't aware that the New England area was a pulse point for the rodeo circuit, Mr. Bartlett.

RYAN BARTLETT

You'd be surprised, Judge Gray.

AMY

Yes, I reckon I would.

Bruce smiles as Deborah's lawyer stands impatiently.

TOM PUGE

Your Honor, regardless of the concessions in travel arrangements Mr. Harris is willing to make, Ms. Harris believes her daughter would be better off with her. As you can clearly see from the girl's file, she has done very well in her mother's care. She is at the top of her class. She is the captain of her soccer team. She has also begun volunteering at a local animal shelter.

Amy reads pages from the file, obviously corroborating the lawyer's version of events.

TOM PUGE  
(continuing)  
Most importantly, Judge Gray,  
Savanah Harris does not like her  
father.

Now it's Cole's turn to wince painfully. Savanah stiffens awkwardly behind him. Amy and Bruce trade a confused glance.

AMY  
I don't understand.

TOM PUGE  
Savanah has demonstrated no  
interest in her father or his  
activities. On the rare occasions  
he has attempted to make contact,  
usually Savanah has refused. She  
has never agreed to be with him on  
any holiday, and likewise never  
inquires into his well-being.

Savanah avoids Amy's eye as Cole slumps further in his seat.

AMY  
Let me see if I understand this.  
Savanah, while doing very well in  
the custody of her mother and, to  
date, indicating only apathy or  
less regarding her father, is  
suddenly motivated to live with  
him permanently.

TOM PUGE  
It is precisely those  
'motivations' which concern us,  
Your Honor.

AMY  
By all means, Mr. Puge.

TOM PUGE  
Savanah Harris is not interested  
at all in living with her father.

AMY  
Then what is it she's interested  
in?

TOM PUGE  
His horse, Your Honor.

Shocked, Amy eyes young Savanah who inches down in her seat.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. JUDGE AMY GRAY'S FAMILY COURT - AFTERNOON

The Harris family remains in their disparate places, but now Savannah is on the stand.

AMY

Now Savannah, I'd like to get a sense of your home life with your mom. I can have both your parents removed for this portion of the proceedings if you would like your statements to be confidential.

SAVANAH

No, that's okay. It's not like I'm gonna say something bad or anything.

AMY

So, you find no fault with how your mother is raising you?

SAVANAH

She's okay.

DEBORAH

Just okay?! I've given you everything.

AMY

Ms. Harris, it is your daughter's turn to speak.

Deborah retreats once more, shaking her head angrily at Savannah.

AMY

(continuing)

How do you feel about your mother, Savannah?

SAVANAH

What do you mean?

AMY

Do you love her?

SAVANAH

Yeah, sure, I guess.

Pinched, Deborah lowers her head.

AMY  
And your father?

SAVANAH  
What about him?

AMY  
How do you feel about him?

SAVANAH  
Well...

The girl looks at her father as if trying to drum up the appropriate emotion. Cole regards her hopefully.

SAVANAH  
(continuing)  
...he's my dad, you know.

Cole's disappointed eyes find the ceiling as Amy looks at Bruce, wrestling with the matter.

AMY  
Okay, you're gonna have to help me out. Why are you asking for a change in your custody arrangement?

SAVANAH  
I just think it would be better with him.

AMY  
Why?

SAVANAH  
I don't know.

AMY  
Is it because of the horse?

SAVANAH  
(squirming)  
Well...

AMY  
Savanah, are you asking me to make a judgement that will uproot you from your mother's home, potentially influencing your entire life, so that you can be with a pet?

SAVANAH  
He's not just a pet! I love Fistful. He means everything to me!

RYAN BARTLETT

Your Honor, my client gave Fistful to Savannah on her birthday four months ago, but their friendship goes back much further. You see, Judge Gray, Mr. Harris worked with the horse on the rodeo circuit for most of his career. So, Savannah and Fistful have been friends since she was a baby. The horse was retired earlier this year. That's when Mr. Harris got the idea to give him to his little girl.

DEBORAH

You mean use him to get to his little girl, don't you?

COLE

Now you know that's not true, Deborah!

AMY

Whoa, you two! This court is a different kind of arena than you might be used to. 'Round here, I'm the only one doing any wrangling, understood?

Both parties stand down as Bruce watches Amy under an inquisitive brow.

AMY

(continuing)

Okay, I'm thinking maybe we all could use a break. Savannah's been up here quite a while. We'll reconvene here tomorrow morning at...

She looks to Bruce.

BRUCE

Ten-thirty.

AMY

Ten-thirty.

INT. JUVENILE COURT BUILDING, CORRIDOR - LATE AFTERNOON

Donna scurries down the hall, skirting OTHERS deftly, missing elbows and briefcases by millimeters.

Behind her by several feet, his head visible above the crowd only when he jumps, is Kyle - and he's gaining.

KYLE  
Donna! Donna!

At last, she hears him and turns around. Kyle catches up.

DONNA  
Kyle, what a nice surprise. Come  
to take me to dinner?

KYLE  
Not exactly.

DONNA  
Join me for dinner?

KYLE  
Not exactly.

DONNA  
(grabbing her ear)  
Sounds like anything to do with  
food?

He scuffs his feet on the tile, avoiding her eye.

KYLE  
Sort of.

DONNA  
Okay, you give me a hint how it  
relates, and we'll go from there.  
How's that?

KYLE  
My teeth.

Disappointment dawns on her face.

DONNA  
Kyle, you didn't. Tell me you  
didn't cancel your dentist  
appointment again.

KYLE  
Not exactly.

DONNA  
But you didn't exactly go either.

KYLE  
See, now you're jumping to  
conclusions.

DONNA  
Kyle, I list amongst my amazing  
inventory of fine qualities an  
adaptive amount of patience, but...

KYLE

Alright. I went. I was in the chair. But then, I don't know, I was out of the chair, and they couldn't get me back in it.

DONNA

Everyone's afraid, Kyle.

KYLE

No, I'm not afraid. I'm blood-cold, hair-on-end, back-to-the-wall petrified. This tooth is killing me, but I think I need someone to go with me. I need a friend.

DONNA

(moved)

And you thought of me.

KYLE

What do you think? That's why I stopped here on the way back. I need to let the dentist know. He's agreed to do it over his lunch tomorrow if I can find someone crazy enough...

Donna recoils.

KYLE

(continuing)

...kind enough to join me.

Donna beams. She hooks a forearm around his shoulder awkwardly and begins to lead him down the hallway.

DONNA

Funny, I still think this sounds like dinner.

INT. GRAY HOME, KITCHEN - MORNING

Maxine pours coffee. Amy reads her mail. Lauren chews her cereal very loudly.

MAXINE

Lauren, more milk?

LAUREN

(still chewing,  
nodding no)

Mm-mmm.

MAXINE

Was that a no?

LAUREN  
(nodding yes)

Mmm.

MAXINE  
You are an engaging  
conversationalist, Lauren.

LAUREN  
(thank you)  
Mmm-mmm.

MAXINE  
Your welcome.

Amy and Maxine share a confused glance as Lauren continues to  
chew adamantly.

AMY  
What are you doing, Lauren?

Lauren chomps away.

AMY  
(continuing)  
Speak.

Lauren chews the rest of her bite, swallowing emphatically.

LAUREN  
Staying out of trouble.

AMY  
How?

LAUREN  
You said a mouth should be used  
for something other than talking.

The kitchen door opens, and Peter's wife, Gillian, bounces in  
smiling.

MAXINE  
Don't you wish word would get  
around?

GILLIAN  
Good-morning! What was that you  
were saying, Maxine?

MAXINE  
Just, my word, how good it is to  
see you this morning!

AMY  
(smiling)  
Good morning, Gillian.

Gillian turns to Lauren who only chews a new bite in response.

GILLIAN

I don't suppose anyone's had the chance to look at the paper today.

MAXINE

A person would have to get up pretty early in the day to beat you to the scoop.

Unsure how to take the comment, Gillian looks away, reaching inside her bag.

GILLIAN

Well, I just happen to have it right here.

She sets the newspaper on the counter in front of Amy.

POV - AMY

The large color photo shows Maxine and Jeremy just after the gift of the necklace.

AMY

'Campaign consultant, Jeremy Litt, lavishes pearls on hometown hero, Maxine Gray.'

Amy looks at Maxine confused. Surprised, Maxine leans toward the picture, then attempts to don nonchalance.

MAXINE

I wouldn't say pearls were 'lavished' exactly.

GILLIAN

But that man did give you pearls?

MAXINE

That's right, Gillian.

AMY

Why would he do that?

MAXINE

(slightly incensed)  
Well, Amy, I guess he thinks I did a good job once upon a time.

Gillian picks up the newspaper and looks at the picture a little dreamily.

GILLIAN

Wow, Maxine, you must be one hell of a social worker.

MAXINE

Thank you, Gillian. It is nice to be recognized once in a while.

She shoots Amy an accusative glance.

AMY

You didn't tell me about this.

LAUREN

(me neither)

Mm-mmm-mm.

MAXINE

You two were already in bed when I got home last night. Besides, you can always catch up with me on the society page.

INT. JUDGE AMY GRAY'S FAMILY COURT - AFTERNOON

Tears streaming down her cheeks, Paula Dobson sits on the stand.

MRS. DOBSON

Allison was so smart, Your Honor. She could already sing her alphabet.

Amy smiles sympathetically.

MRS. DOBSON

(continuing)

She could sing like an angel. She loved music, you know. She was even a good dancer.

MR. DOBSON

She ain't dead, Paula! Why are you talking about her like she's dead?

AMY

No, Mr. Dobson, you're right. Your daughter is not dead. But neither...

A FEMALE MARSHAL enters carrying a sealed envelope and at least some of Amy's attention.

AMY

(continuing)

...neither is she alive in the way your wife describes her, now is she?

Mr. Dobson retreats slightly, a modicum of shame weighing his countenance.

The Marshal continues all the way to Amy and hands her the envelope. Amy looks quizzically at both the envelope and Bruce who shrugs as Amy starts to hand it over to him.

FEMALE MARSHALL

Instructions are to have you  
address the contents upon receipt,  
Your Honor.

AMY

Um, alright.  
(to the Dobsons)  
Excuse me.

She opens the envelope, unfurls the letter and reads. Instantly, her face goes slack, her eyes widen.

BRUCE

Judge Gray.

She hands him the letter. In a moment, he is shaking his head warily. The Marshal watches both uncomfortably.

AMY

Thank you, Marshal.

The Marshal turns, leaving as quickly as she had arrived.

AMY

(continuing)  
I apologize, but I have just been  
made aware of a matter that  
requires my immediate attention.

Still on the stand, Mrs. Dobson grimaces.

AMY

(continuing)  
We will reconvene here tomorrow  
at...

She looks to Bruce.

BRUCE

Eleven o'clock.

AMY

Eleven o'clock.

Obviously upset and distracted completely, Amy stands and leaves immediately.

INT. AMY'S CHAMBERS - MOMENTS LATER

The newspaper lies spread eagle on the table, the photo of Maxine and Jeremy prominent.

Until Amy's hand comes crashing down on it, slapping it smartly.

AMY

Damn it!

BRUCE

Judge Gray, it was an honest mistake. There was no impropriety here.

He attempts to block her pacing, but she skirts him deftly.

AMY

You know that and I know that, but how does it look? How could she do this to me?

BRUCE

With all due respect, Judge Gray, this didn't occur to you either.

AMY

(stammering,  
frustrated)

Well, well... ..it should have.

She continues to pace.

AMY

(continuing)

This could get very serious, you know that?

BRUCE

Let's not jump to conclusions.

AMY

They're going to impeach me.

BRUCE

Okay, I think we should calm down, regroup.

AMY

Judge Keeler still has cronies around here, Bruce. Let's not forget that.

BRUCE

They won't be able to prove your mother did anything wrong.

AMY

But she did! As long as I'm a judge, my family can't accept any gifts from outside sources. Why didn't I see this?

BRUCE

It was an oversight on everyone's part.

AMY

Judge Keeler's old pals won't see a pearl necklace given by a campaign consultant as an oversight!

She stops pacing and looks fearfully at Bruce.

AMY

(continuing)

They'll see it as a reason. And that's all they need.

INT. DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES - SAME MOMENT

A balloon bursts.

Silence. Then more merriment.

The staff of D.C.F. encircles Maxine and raises their plastic cups in a toast.

SEAN

From social worker to socialite.

MAXINE

That's quite alright, Sean.

Her pearls glowing on her neck, Maxine sips nervously from her punch and waits for more comments.

SEAN

Like the pearls she wears, the rough edges have worn smoother with time.

MAXINE

(politely warning)

Sean.

SEAN

Okay, a lot of time and not everything's smooth yet.

MAXINE

I can't thank you enough. Now if we can just get back to work.

SEAN

The pearls, each distinct and  
different...

MAXINE

Oh, for the love of Pete.

SEAN

...each separate, yet they're held  
together by a single strand.

Maxine cocks her head to see where he is going.

SEAN

(continuing)

Like the one that weaves its magic  
around here - the social worker -  
who holds together lives and  
families like the chain that binds  
those pearls - no better  
exemplified, no better personified  
than in Maxine Gray.

STAFF

Here, here!

Smiling through the tears pooling in her eyes, Maxine looks  
at Sean with gratitude and sips shakily from her punch.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. DENTIST OFFICE - AFTERNOON

The DENTIST hunched over him, Kyle reclines in the chair, his eyes wider than his mouth, his knuckles white on the armrests. Donna stands at his side peering into his mouth, fascinated.

A shadow creeps over Kyle's open mouth, and the Dentist looks up irritatedly at Donna whose head now eclipses the light.

DONNA

Oh, sorry.

She backs away just slightly, still attempting to follow the Dentist's every move.

DONNA

(continuing)

So, I've heard that there's this vein at the back of the throat, and that's one reason why dentists have to train so long - so they don't slip and hit it.

Kyle's eyes widen further. He looks at Donna in panic.

DONNA

(continuing)

'Cause if you do, well let's just say the only cavity that needs to be filled then is the one in the earth where...

The Dentist turns, glaring at her.

DENTIST

I assure you, Miss...

DONNA

Koslowski.

DENTIST

I will do my best to avoid everything except teeth. Will that do?

DONNA

Oh, I didn't mean to suggest that you could slip, oh no. No, I'm sure you've never slipped, not once.

(more)

DONNA (cont'd)

In fact, I'm convinced this is a slip free practice you got yourself here.

DENTIST

(seething)

Your confidence is appreciated.

He resumes as Kyle grips the chair harder, the vinyl squeaking.

DONNA

You have my confidence alright.

She resumes her position over the Dentist's shoulder.

DONNA

(continuing)

Not like those other dentists you hear about. You know, the ones who can't seem to administer anesthesia without putting someone in the hospital.

More vinyl squeaks. The Dentist stiffens. He turns slowly toward Donna, the sharp instrument in his hand aimed her direction and shaking.

DONNA

(continuing)

Oh, did I get in your light again?

She backs away - just slightly.

DONNA

(continuing)

See, how nicely you're sitting for the doctor, Kyle? So, I guess that bonding thing between us is working out, huh?

Kyle only looks at her, his eyes huge.

DENTIST

Lucky for me.

INT. JUVENILE COURT BUILDING, LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

As if on pins and needles, Amy sits near one end of a long conference table in the prudently illumined room, alone with thoughts that weigh her features considerably.

The door opens, and JUDGE RODRIGUEZ enters the room. Amy ejects from her seat and stands stiffly at the table's side.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
At ease, Judge Gray.

Amy relaxes awkwardly.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
(continuing)  
Have a seat.

Amy obeys, still awkward as Judge Rodriguez assumes the head of the long table. Amy cringes as he spreads several files before him.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
(continuing)  
I'm Judge Rodriguez. I'm from the  
Judicial Code of Conduct Review  
Board for the state of  
Connecticut. You have been  
accused of impropriety due to the  
receipt of a substantially valued  
article of jewelry by your mother.

AMY  
It was an honest mistake, Your  
Hon...

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
Your mother works for the  
Department of Children and  
Families, is that correct?

AMY  
Yes, that's right.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
And you preside on the juvenile  
court.

AMY  
Yes.

Judge Rodriguez makes a perfunctory note in one of the files.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
Cozy.

AMY  
I assure you, it's not a problem.  
We've been very careful not to...

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
Are you aware that Bob Matley's  
campaign platform rests heavily on  
education and juvenile justice  
reform?

AMY

No, I can't say that I've followed his campaign too closely.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ

Well, perhaps if you care to follow along now you'll see the parallel I'm trying to draw here. The link between the emphasis each of your careers has taken is unmistakable.

AMY

But see, that's just it, there's been a mistake - a big one.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ

So you insist. Yet, from the beginning you have not come forward either to the review board or to the media with a formal statement to your innocence.

AMY

From the beginning? This just happened yesterday. It's happened so fast, I didn't even get a chance to figure it out on my own before I was handed this summons.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ

And since that time?

AMY

Well, I can't go to the media.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ

Why not?

AMY

(stammering)

Well, because... ..because Judge Krumble from the Criminal Division of Superior Court...

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ

Yes.

AMY

...a few months ago he sort of handed me an official censure and ordered me not to talk with the press.

Judge Rodriguez is mute for an incredulous second before gesturing to the array of files before him.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
 I must have missed that file  
 somewhere in the dearth of  
 material presented in your case.

Amy winces as he rubs his head in frustration.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
 (continuing)  
 Well, you have made certain, Judge  
 Gray, that this will not be a  
 simple matter.

AMY  
 But it is, I assure you.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
 I will be the judge of that. Keep  
 to your own matters, if that is  
 possible.

Amy sits indignantly straighter then slumps again self-  
 consciously.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
 (continuing)  
 I am forced to look further into  
 this matter. Tomorrow I shall  
 render my decision as to the level  
 of impropriety in this case and  
 the appropriate punitive action.

AMY  
 But...

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
 Good day, Judge Gray.

INT. GRAY HOME, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Around the dinner table, Amy, Maxine, Lauren, Kyle, Peter,  
 Gillian and Ned, the baby, definitely use their mouths for  
 something other than discussion. Each chews their food and  
 is completely silent.

All except Kyle whose swollen mouth still sports gauze and a  
 grimace. He attempts to sip juice out of a wide brimmed  
 glass.

Maxine takes a gulp of her wine and looks at her reticent  
 family.

MAXINE  
 I'm giving it back, you know.

Silence. Chewing.

MAXINE

(continuing)

The matter will be laid to rest  
with that, I should think.

Amy takes a gigantic forkful into her mouth and busies  
herself accordingly.

MAXINE

(continuing)

I'm sorry. I should have  
remembered. It's my fault.

Amy swallows hard.

AMY

Mom, it's not your fault.

KYLE

(mouthing around the  
gauze)

Yeah, Mathine, nod yo faul.

Everyone is silent as they turn to Kyle, trying for a moment  
to decipher his gibberish.

LAUREN

Does this mean I'm gonna have to  
give back the 'N Sync CD that  
Julie gave me?

AMY

In a just world.

Peter flashes his sister a chastising glance.

PETER

No, Lauren, it just means that,  
because your mom has a job that  
allows her to make a lot of  
important decisions, the people  
around her need to make sure she  
gets to do that job without any  
outside pressure.

LAUREN

Is the necklace that heavy?

Amy shoots Peter back with a look that says "thanks-a-lot."

AMY

No, honey, the necklace isn't  
heavy. But it is weighty because  
it's so valuable. Sometimes bad  
people use things that have value  
to get judges like me to make  
different decisions.

LAUREN

Oh, you mean bribery.

Kyle laughs but immediately grimaces in pain. He returns to his juice.

AMY

(stunned)

Well, yes, bribery. Why didn't I just say that in the first place?

LAUREN

So, Grandma, that important old client of yours was trying to bribe Mommy?

Maxine chokes briefly on her wine.

PETER

No, of course not. But because people who don't know us don't know exactly what that gift was for or what kind of people we are, we can't even look like we could be doing something wrong, even if we're not.

MAXINE

How could I have been so stupid?

AMY

Mom, it never occurred to me either. I feel terrible. I know how much that necklace means to you. And you should be able to receive such a reward for all you've done.

Lauren stands to leave the table.

AMY

(continuing)

Lauren, where are you going? You haven't finished your dinner.

LAUREN

I'm gonna get that CD. I better give it back.

AMY

I told you that's not necessary.

LAUREN

I think Julie was using it to get me to work harder on you for the Planned Parenthood trip.

GILLIAN  
 (aghast)  
 Planned Parenthood?

AMY  
 It's okay, Lauren. Sit down.

She does.

GILLIAN  
 What's this about Planned  
 Parenthood?

AMY  
 Lauren's class is planning a field  
 trip there.

GILLIAN  
 You're certainly not letting her  
 go?!

AMY  
 Hence the CD.

GILLIAN  
 Good for you, Amy.

Maxine and Kyle catch one another rolling their respective  
 eyes.

GILLIAN  
 (continuing)  
 It's way too early now. Don't you  
 think so, Maxine?

MAXINE  
 Gillian, you are the first to seek  
 my opinion on this particular  
 issue.

Amy catches the look Maxine shoots in her direction.

MAXINE  
 (continuing)  
 So, I'll deduce that my comments  
 are considered neither desired nor  
 timely for some reason.

AMY  
 No, Mom, I'd like to hear what you  
 have to say.

MAXINE  
 (indicating Lauren)  
 With all present?

AMY  
And accounted for.

Maxine sets down her fork.

MAXINE  
Well then, to be honest, when it comes to matters of sex education and family planning, I don't really know what 'too early' is. But in my line of work, I've seen countless examples of too late.

Amy takes this in, setting down her own fork.

INT. GRAY HOME, KITCHEN - LATER

Bundled and ready to go, Kyle, Peter, Gillian, and Ned head for the door. Amy, Maxine, and Lauren stand nearby bidding them farewell.

MAXINE  
Don't forget the leftovers.

Peter nabs them from the countertop.

PETER  
Haven't left my sight.

KYLE  
(mouth still filled  
with gauze)  
I gonna jus go. I gotta re-stuff  
my moud.

Amy fights obviously with herself not to offer a comeback.

AMY  
Tempting, but I'm not gonna bite.

Kyle tries to smile sarcastically, but the effort proves painful, and he winces instead.

KYLE  
Good night.

He leaves quickly.

MAXINE  
Have fun tonight, Gillian.

AMY  
Are you going somewhere?

GILLIAN

Yeah, some women from my painting class are meeting for late night happy hour. Hey, do you want to go, Amy? It'd be fun. Get your mind off things for a while.

PETER

Yeah, it'd probably do you good.

Amy's desire to go is evident.

AMY

I better not. Probably the last thing I should be seen doing is boozing it up in public.

GILLIAN

Who would see you?

AMY

It seems the walls have eyes.

PETER

I thought walls were supposed to have ears.

AMY

They're more multi-faceted these days, I've found. But it's really their mouths that you have to watch out for.

GILLIAN

Are you sure you can't go, Amy?

AMY

(enviously)

Just throw a couple back for me, okay?

GILLIAN

I'll do nothing less.

PETER

(to Amy)

Even you, Brutus.

Peter corrals his family through the door.

PETER

(continuing)

Good night.

GILLIAN

Good night, Maxine. Good night, Amy.

Amy watches them go regretfully. Maxine closes the door and begins to finish up the remaining kitchen duties.

LAUREN  
I have a question.

AMY  
What's that, honey?

LAUREN  
Don't we love Ned?

Maxine stops in her tracks, tuning into Lauren.

AMY  
Of course, we do! What makes you ask that?

LAUREN  
It's just that, even though you won't let me go, you said that Planned Parenthood was a good place, and they do good stuff.

AMY  
That's right.

LAUREN  
Well, Julie says they teach people how not to have babies?

Amy briefly looks to her own mother who appears just as tongue-tied as herself.

AMY  
Um, yes, well no. Yes, well that's part of what they do.

LAUREN  
You always told me that babies are blessings, gifts.

Amy kneels down in front of Lauren and reels her closer.

AMY  
They are. And Ned is definitely one of them. It's just that some gifts...

She looks up at Maxine.

AMY  
(continuing)  
...aren't always convenient.

LAUREN  
Convenient?

Amy and Maxine exchange a look of mutual apology.

AMY

Yes, honey. You see, a lot of life comes down to timing. It's strange, but sometimes what's good and bad is decided by when it happens.

LAUREN

So, when we get older, do we get better at telling time?

Amy and Maxine share another weighty glance.

AMY

Yes, we hope we do.

Lauren thinks about this a moment then raises her eyes to her mother's.

LAUREN

Will you promise me something?

AMY

What is it?

LAUREN

If I happen to miss it, will you tell me when it's time to go to Planned Parenthood?

Obviously touched, Amy smiles at Lauren warmly.

AMY

I promise.

Mother and daughter take the time to embrace as Grandma looks on.

INT. AMY'S CHAMBERS - DAWN

Several books lie open on Amy's desk. She closes one, refers to another immediately and flips its thin pages in an obvious search. At last, she slams this one closed too and massages the bridge of her nose. A sound at her door rouses her, and Bruce enters.

AMY

What are you doing here so early?

BRUCE

My job.

AMY

It's not your job to help me save mine.

BRUCE

But it's certainly in my best interest.

Bruce smiles warmly. Amy attempts a grateful grin, but her features immediately return south.

AMY

They've got me, Bruce.

BRUCE

That's not true.

AMY

Canon 4-B of the Code of Judicial Conduct states it pretty clearly.

She taps the open page for emphasis.

AMY

(continuing)

As long as my butt graces a bench...

BRUCE

Of course you're paraphrasing.

AMY

...my family cannot receive any gifts from any outside sources - certainly not thousand-dollar necklaces from paid political consultants.

She lets go of the page and grabs her head.

AMY

(continuing)

And if there are any of Judge Keeler's old friends still willing to go to bat for him...

Amy looks up at Bruce desperately.

AMY

(continuing)

...they've got me if they want me.

BRUCE

They haven't 'got' you. You're innocent.

AMY

See that's just it, isn't it? I work for a system where everyone is innocent until proven guilty. Everyone except me.

Bruce doesn't argue.

AMY  
(continuing)  
The review board just assumes my  
guilt.

BRUCE  
Well, we'll just have to prove  
otherwise. Here, hand me that  
thing.

He indicates the tome sitting in front of her. With weary effort, Amy pushes it toward him.

INT. JUDGE AMY GRAY'S FAMILY COURT - LATER THAT MORNING

Savanah is back on the stand, but Amy addresses her father seated with his lawyer at the table.

AMY  
Now, first of all, if you gave  
this horse, Fistful, to your  
daughter, where is the horse now?

COLE  
He lives on my little ranch,  
a'course.

RYAN BARTLETT  
(standing)  
When the gift was made, Your  
Honor, Ms. Harris refused to  
accommodate the horse.

TOM PUGE  
(standing)  
Judge Gray, my client lives in a  
condominium which does not allow  
any pets, much less a horse.

AMY  
Mr. Harris, were you aware that  
your daughter was interested in  
moving in with you because of the  
horse?

Cole looks up from where his head is slung in shame.

COLE  
Yes, Your Honor. I'd rather that  
something else was true, but I  
guess I'll take what I can get.  
See, since the divorce, Savanah  
hasn't wanted much of me  
whatsoever.

(more)

COLE (cont'd)  
 I think she kind of thought I  
 chose being a cowboy over her.

The truth cutting close to home, Savannah begins to squirm in her seat again.

COLE  
 (continuing)  
 But, a'course, that wasn't true.  
 It was just between her mom and  
 me, that's all. But I want you to  
 know, Judge...

Mr. Bartlett nudges Cole's arm, reminding him to stand, which he does, Bartlett at his side.

COLE  
 (continuing)  
 ...Judge, I swear I did not give  
 Fistful to Savannah so that she'd  
 want to stay with me. I just knew  
 she loved him, that's all.

RYAN BARTLETT  
 You see, Your Honor, it is clear  
 that Savannah shares her father's  
 love of animals. Ms. Harris' own  
 counsel told the court of  
 Savannah's volunteer work at the  
 shelter. Mr. Harris simply wanted  
 to give his daughter the gift of  
 an animal for which they both  
 shared their love.

Thinking, Amy turns to Deborah Harris.

AMY  
 You're aware of your daughter's  
 feelings toward animals?

DEBORAH  
 Yes, Your Honor.

TOM PUGE  
 But as I mentioned, my client's  
 living arrangements do not allow  
 for pets. What was she supposed  
 to do, move?

AMY

Mr. Puge, while I do not advocate the accommodation of a child's every whim, I do see the value of respecting and even encouraging her interests and, dare I say, passions where possible. It is obvious that Savannah's love for Fistful and animals in general is not a passing phase.

Amy's eyes course the broken family.

AMY

(continuing)

What is also obvious is the length to which she is willing to go to be around this animal. Apparently, the horse gives her something she is otherwise missing.

Ms. Harris snaps to attention. Amy turns to Savannah who remains on the stand next to her.

AMY

(continuing)

Savannah, I believe the issues underlying your parents' divorce have not been resolved for you. I also think that part of the value you place in Fistful is the opportunity to share something meaningful with your father, no matter how remotely.

Savannah's embarrassed eyes seek her father.

AMY

(continuing)

I think maybe you need to try a little harder with him. After all, he is willing to give up a good share of his career to take custody of a daughter who claims more interest in his horse.

Amy closes the file before her.

AMY

(continuing)

I'm denying the petition for change of custody.

Ms. Harris sags in relief, Mr. Harris in defeat. Savannah closes her eyes resignedly.

AMY

(continuing)

I am, however, ordering mandatory compliance with the visitation rights Mr. Harris should have been enjoying for the last two years. You need to get to know your father, Savannah. And Ms. Harris, you need to assist this process. I will do my part by ordering family of divorce counseling for each of you to begin no later than next week.

She looks at Ms. Harris pointedly now.

AMY

(continuing)

And, while I am not ordering you to find new accommodations, I am suggesting you take another lease on the idea of what makes a hearth a home.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. JUVENILE COURT BUILDING, CORRIDOR - AFTERNOON

Bruce eyes Amy's sullen posture as they walk silently.

BRUCE

Everything's gonna be okay today.

AMY

You know what, Bruce? I'm not sure I agree with you, not this time.

She stops, turning to him soberly.

AMY

(continuing)

You didn't find anything. I didn't find anything. There isn't anything in any book that can save me. The only thing I have in my corner is innocence.

BRUCE

With all due respect, I'd rather have that than a book.

Amy smiles sadly.

AMY

I'm tired. I'm not sure I want to live under a microscope anymore. And maybe what I'm fearing is going to happen today is exactly what I need to start living my life again.

BRUCE

You are living your life, Judge Gray.

AMY

Are you sure? It seems to me I'm not free - not as free as some of the people I've sent to prison. I'm sure their mothers get gifts all the time.

BRUCE

Again, Judge Gray, with all due respect - that's silly.

AMY

Look, it makes me sick that the law is more kind to criminals than to those who make and uphold it. Maybe it's all just one big joke, and I'm the one behind bars.

BRUCE

No. You're a judge - just one of a handful of people in the entire country who effects not only countless lives but our culture's legacy. You don't have the luxury of an agenda, or impropriety, or even the appearance of corruptibility. But, you do have the privilege of being pure.

Amy looks at him guiltily - and gratefully.

AMY

Not all gifts come in pretty packages, I guess.

BRUCE

But they're still something pretty special.

INT. JUDGE AMY GRAY'S FAMILY COURT - AFTERNOON

His wife glaring at him with unconcealed contempt, Mr. Dobson speaks from the stand.

MR. DOBSON

I know it probably doesn't seem like it, but I love my little girl. She means everything to me. I don't want her to die.

Again, he swipes a tear from his eye with a rough sweep of a forearm over his face.

MR. DOBSON

(continuing)

It's bad enough knowing what I did. I can't spend the rest of my life thinking I killed my only child. People think it's 'cause I don't want to go to prison for killing her, but it's really on account of what I'd have to live with, not where I'd have to live it. If I have to think about the fact that I killed Allison, that's prison enough.

Bruce's jaw clenches distastefully as he listens. Amy shakes her head sadly.

AMY

Not that you could ever answer to the court's satisfaction why you felt compelled to beat your daughter so brutally, but could you possibly share what the triggering factor was?

TRENT WILLIS

(standing)

Your Honor, Mr. Dobson was laid off from his job at the electric plant almost one year ago. He had registered with Job Service and Unemployment, but the most he was able to find was sporadic day labor. Mrs. Dobson's waitressing job was not making ends meet. The stress of the situation has been unbearable for my client.

AMY

Thank you, Mr. Willis, for the description of a scene shared by thousands of families across America whose children are not lying in a hospital tied to life by a tube.

Put in his place, Mr. Willis sits down.

AMY

(continuing)

Now I believe I asked you, Mr. Dobson, to describe what happened.

MR. DOBSON

I was watching the game. I had been drinking, I guess. Paula says I get mean when I drink.

Paula listens to the account through horror filled tears.

MR. DOBSON

(continuing)

So I say to Allison, I say 'get out of the way. Daddy's watching the game.' But she's hungry, you know. She's askin' me to get her something to eat. I'm telling her there's only a few seconds to go. She needs to leave me alone. But she won't.

(more)

MR. DOBSON (cont'd)

She keeps pulling my arm and crying that she's hungry. I tell her there's no food, and there isn't, you know. No food in the house nowhere. But she keeps begging and getting in the way of me and the game. It's the final seconds. So I push her.

He grimaces, squirming slightly, lost in the memory.

MR. DOBSON

(continuing)

She falls kinda hard. I tell her I didn't mean that. But she's crying. She's crying hard now. I tell her to be quiet. 'Time's almost up, and then I'll get you something. I don't know how, but I will. Stop crying. Time's almost up.'

Amy and Bruce share a pained glance.

AMY

I think we've heard enough?

Snapping quickly out of the memory, Mr. Dobson wipes his tears again with a hasty forearm.

TRENT WILLIS

Judge Gray, the state of Connecticut requires consent by both parents to have a minor removed from life support. As the father, it is Mr. Dobson's right to be heard.

AMY

Are you presuming to quote the law to me, Mr. Willis?

TRENT WILLIS

Um, no, Your Honor, but my client...

AMY

Your client better get used to the fact that, as a result of his own actions, certain 'rights' are no longer available to him. Now we're here to see if this is one of them. Welcome to potential precedence, Mr. Willis. Take a seat.

Fumbling slightly, he does as instructed. Amy's eyes course the courtroom. She calms slightly.

AMY

(continuing)

I find myself in a strange position. I'm told that my job is to protect children. Yet here I am today having to make a decision that, I'm also told, will lead to a child's death.

She takes an uncomfortable breath.

AMY

(continuing)

Evidence suggests that young Allison will never again enjoy the gift of life as it was given her. It made the mistake of getting in the way at the wrong time. And I find myself forced to question if Allison would not be better protected by allowing her to pass peacefully.

Mr. Dobson watches Amy, his eyes wide and scared as his wife cries.

AMY

(continuing)

I don't think that too many people would change places with me today.

She and Bruce share an inside glance.

AMY

(continuing)

Still I feel that the decision I'm being asked to make was made for me - ironically by the same person whose job it was also to protect Allison long before I stepped on the scene.

She looks harshly at Mr. Dobson.

AMY

(continuing)

As for you, Mr. Dobson, you should be grateful that my authority ends with the fate of your daughter. I'm not sure what will become of you, but it is the opinion of this court that no punishment could fit this crime.

Jaw clenched in reluctant public shame, Mr. Dobson matches her stare.

AMY  
(continuing)  
I believe that you're sorry for what you did. But whether it's the quality of Allison's life or your own behind bars that concerns you, I assume we'll never know.

He blinks away momentarily.

AMY  
(continuing)  
I find that, with each bruise, you not only robbed your daughter of her life, you stole her dignity. As her chief proponent in the family court system, I'm in a position to give some of it back.

Amy closes the file before her.

AMY  
(continuing)  
I'm going to allow Allison's little body to make its own decision.

Mr. Dobson's eyes widen in panicked defeat.

AMY  
(continuing)  
With her mother's blessing, I am ordering Allison to be removed from life support at once.

Mrs. Dobson nods tearfully and gratefully at Amy who, obviously upset, attempts to sit up straight under the weight of the ruling.

INT. JUVENILE COURT BUILDING, LIBRARY - LATER

Already seated at the head of the table, Judge Rodriguez looks up coldly from his files as Amy walks in and takes her seat.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
I've had a chance to look over your files more closely, Judge Gray.

AMY  
Is that good or bad?

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ

Is this funny to you?

AMY

Far from it, Judge Rodriguez. I just have no way of knowing which way you'll interpret the information you have - because there's no way you'll ever really know the facts - not like I do.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ

Excuse me?

AMY

You'll never be inside the walls that make up my family home. You'll never be inside the hearts that make my home a family.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ

Judge Gray...

AMY

There's no way for you to ever really know the kind of special people I'm blessed enough to share my life with.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ

Judge Gray, not only are you taking this personally, but...

AMY

You're damn straight I am!

He starts slightly.

AMY

(continuing)

I take my family very personally. Unlike you, I happen to know them personally. I know that it is impossible for them to behave with impropriety - not because it would be improper, but because there simply isn't a fiber sewn in any of us that is capable of actions like the ones of which we're being accused.

Judge Rodriguez massages the bridge of his nose and takes a deep breath, looking at her closely. Losing some of her steam, Amy begins to cower clumsily again.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ

If I may have a word.

AMY  
 (awkward)  
 Please.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
 I've decided to uphold the  
 recommendation of the review  
 board...

Amy sinks, paling instantly.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
 (continuing)  
 ...for the Criminal Division of  
 Superior Court.

AMY  
 Criminal Division?

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
 Yes. Judge Krumble.

AMY  
 Judge Krumble? I don't understand.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
 Yes, obviously he understands  
 better than both of us. Looking  
 over your files, Judge Gray, I had  
 already determined to adjourn any  
 further investigation and only  
 slap your hand again with official  
 censure.

Amy blinks in steady confusion.

JUDGE RODRIGUEZ  
 (continuing)  
 But then you came in here with  
 your soliloquy, and I determined  
 that Judge Krumble's order of no  
 contact with the media should also  
 be upheld as it demonstrates acute  
 insight into the nature of your  
 real problem. You really don't  
 know when to shut your mouth, do  
 you?

Amy's mouth begins to stammer a stunned reply, but Judge  
 Rodriguez shoots her an admonishing glance, and her mouth  
 shuts promptly.

EXT. PUBLIC PARK - LATE AFTERNOON

Maxine and Jeremy sit side-by-side on swings, swaying lightly.

MAXINE

At least the next campaign stop  
shouldn't be as jarring.

JEREMY

Oh, they're all pretty much like  
this, Maxine, a day at the park.

Maxine looks at him, squinting in sunlight and admiration.

MAXINE

You can still say that?

Jeremy considers the park, the CHILDREN and their PARENTS.

JEREMY

Do you remember that you used to  
bring me here, Maxine?

MAXINE

Yes, of course, you always loved  
this park.

JEREMY

That's one reason I wanted to meet  
you here - in addition to the fact  
that the only paparazzi within a  
hundred yards is much more  
interested in capturing ketchup  
stained smiles than you or me.

Maxine nods, smiling sadly.

JEREMY

(continuing)

I never cared much for these  
swings. I'd watch the other kids  
on them, and it used to scare me,  
you know. They'd get so high.  
Too high, I thought. I had this  
idea that, if you got really high  
up, you could never come down.

Maxine smiles again, scuffing a somber foot in the gravel  
under the swing.

JEREMY

(continuing)

And you know what? I was right.

Maxine stops scuffing and looks at him.

JEREMY

(continuing)

We've come too far to sweat the  
small stuff, Maxine. Bumps in the  
road are just that.

Maxine reaches in her bag, retrieving the small jewelry gift box. She hands it to him silently. He holds it for a moment, looking at it, swaying.

JEREMY  
(continuing)

What you gave me, they can never take away. I'm too high up.

MAXINE  
You don't know how happy that makes me, Jeremy.

JEREMY  
Funny, you don't look happy.

MAXINE  
I guess I never made it quite high enough. They can still reach me sometimes.

She watches as Jeremy stands quickly, shoving the small box in his pocket.

JEREMY  
Care for a lift?

He steps behind her, grabs the chains of her swing and begins to pull her backwards.

MAXINE  
No, Jeremy, that's not necessary.

He ignores her, continuing to pull her further back.

JEREMY  
The trick to getting there, Maxine, is having someone behind you. That's a treasure they can't ever take away. And every now and then it's your turn to receive it.

Jeremy lets go of the chains, pushing hard. Maxine swings high.

FADE OUT:

END OF EPISODE