

**in contempt**

Episode #102

"Combat by Agreement"

Written by

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Revised Network Draft

February 19, 2016

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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**



**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**