

NIGHT COURT

"PILOT"

Written by

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COLD OPEN

INT. SUBWAY CAR - DUSK (DAY 1)
(ABBY, CONDUCTOR, BLIND MAN)

IT'S THE EVENING RUSH HOUR. THE COMMUTERS ARE BURIED IN THEIR PHONES EXCEPT FOR -- ABBY STONE (30S, UPBEAT, OPTIMISTIC) WHO TAKES IT ALL IN AS THE TRAIN IDLES IN THE STATION. SHE'S HOLDING A GARMENT BAG.

SFX: "STAND CLEAR OF THE CLOSING DOORS, PLEASE."

THE DOORS START TO CLOSE, BUT ABBY HOLDS THEM FOR A WOMAN. A FEW PEOPLE SHOOT ABBY A LOOK, ANNOYED.

ABBY

(TO PEOPLE) Sorry, she was running and

I thought it was mean to not --

SFX: "STAND CLEAR OF THE CLOSING DOORS, PLEASE."

THE DOORS START TO CLOSE AND AGAIN ABBY STOPS THEM, THIS TIME FOR A BLIND MAN WITH A DOG.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Well, I had to do that one. No more, I swear. (CALLING OFF) Hear that, anyone out there! You're on your own --

THE DOORS CLOSE. THIS TIME ABBY'S IN THE WAY AND THEY POP BACK OPEN. THE PEOPLE ARE REALLY IRRITATED. THE SEEING EYE DOG BARKS AT ABBY.

ABBY (CONT'D)

OK, that's on me.

CONDUCTOR (ON P.A.)

(INDECIPHERABLE) Braaph, truuuff
smmmuff ruuukkk jjuuusssstt jiddip.

COMMUTERS GRUMBLE AND THROW UP THEIR HANDS.

ABBY

What? What did he say?

BLIND MAN

The train's out of service because
someone broke the doors. We gotta get
off and wait for the next one.

ABBY EXITS THE TRAIN, SHEEPISH.

ABBY

I'm sorry, I was just trying to be
nice and help people. I didn't know
it'd --

SFX: "STAND CLEAR OF THE CLOSING DOORS, PLEASE."

THE DOORS SHUT LEAVING ABBY ON THE PLATFORM. THE PASSENGERS
CHEER AS THE TRAIN PULLS AWAY. ABBY CALLS OUT:

ABBY (CONT'D)

Half you people wouldn't even be on
that train if it wasn't for me!

SHE TURNS TO A BUSKER WITH A BASS GUITAR.

ABBY (CONT'D)

You hear that? I just yelled at a
bunch of strangers like a real New
Yorker. (THEN) Know any good songs?

AS HE STARTS THAT FAMILIAR NIGHT COURT RIFF AND ABBY TOSSES
HIM SOME CHANGE, WE CUT TO:

MAIN TITLES

ACT ONE

INT. ABBY'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT (NIGHT 1)
(ABBY, NEIL, MONICA, GURGS, MAINTENANCE GUY)

ABBY ENTERS HOLDING THE GARMENT BAG. SHE TAKES IN THE ROOM.

ABBY

It's just like I imagined. The
stately desk, the big leather chair, --

SHE SEES A MAINTENANCE GUY ON A LADDER REMOVING DEAD PIGEONS
FROM THE DUCTWORK.

ABBY (CONT'D)

-- the man fishing dead birds out of
the ceiling. (CALLING UP) Hi there!
I'm Abby Stone. I'm the new judge.

ABBY EXTENDS HER HAND. THE MAN EXTENDS A BIRD. SHE GRABS A
NEARBY GARBAGE CAN AND OFFERS IT, HELPFUL. HE DROPS IT IN.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Don't let me interrupt. (CAN'T HELP
HERSELF) My dad was judge here back in
the 80s. Harry T. Stone. This was
his office. He's no longer with us,
but he used to tell the best stories
about this place. (LAUGHING TO
HERSELF) I knew the difference between
possession and possession with intent
to distribute way before any of the
other kids.

THE MAN CLIMBS DOWN HIS LADDER AND STARTS PACKING UP.

ABBY (CONT'D)

He taught me people should be judged
by more than what's on the surface.
Everyone's got a story, and I want to
hear it. (OFF HIS BLANK STARE) You
don't speak English, do you?

MAINTENANCE GUY

No, I do. Just didn't want to
interrupt. Cool assumption though.

HE EXITS AS ABBY CALLS AFTER.

ABBY

I thought, because you didn't -- I
believe we can get past this!

GURGS (50S, BAILIFF, BIG HEART, INTENSE) ENTERS AND GREETES
ABBY WITH A VIGOROUS HANDSHAKE.

GURGS

It's an honor, your honor. Donna
Gurganous; but I prefer Gurgs. I look
forward to taking a bullet for you.

ABBY

Well, I hope that won't be necessary.

NEIL (30S, COURT CLERK, CYNICAL, PRACTICAL) AND MONICA (MID-
20S, PROSECUTOR, CONFIDENT, BETTER THAN THIS PLACE) ENTER.

NEIL

I'm Neil, I'm the court clerk. Sounds
like Gurgs has the bullet thing
covered, so now I've got nothing. And
this is --

MONICA

A person who can introduce herself.
Monica Park, assistant district
attorney. Oh, I just love your --
(SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING) posture.

ABBY

(EXCITED) So this is the team.

MONICA/NEIL/GURGS

Not sure I'd say team./I'm kind of a
lone wolf./More like Dream Team; Larry
Bird and I have the same back surgeon.

ABBY

There's so much I want to know about
all of you, and I'm sure there's stuff
you want to know about me.

NEIL

Now that you mention it, we were kind
of wondering --

MONICA

Who'd you piss off to end up in night
court. I've got a refused-to-make-a-
state-senator's-DUI-go-away theory.

NEIL

I was thinking: big political donor
wanted help with helipad zoning and
you said heli-no -- (BAILING) nope,
hated it before I said it.

GURGS

(FINAL ANSWER) Ran over the governor's cat on your dirt bike. Tried to pin it on the gardener, but the cat came to and picked you out of a lineup.

(OFF EVERYONE'S LOOK) What? A very similar thing happened to my cousin.

ABBY

Whoa, great guesses. I can't wait to play charades with this crew. But the truth is, I really wanted this job.

NEIL

I can't tell if you're kidding.

ABBY

Before coming here I was a county judge upstate. And one day, the local paper wanted to do a story on me.

GURGS

Oh, I love print media.

ABBY

So I'm telling all these great stories about how a judge can make a difference in a person's life and I realized none of them are mine. They're my dad's stories from when he was a judge. You'll never guess where -- it rhymes with kite flort.

NEIL

And I was gonna say "night court
legacy," but it seemed too obvious.

ABBY

I decided if I really wanted to make a
difference, I needed to go to where
the action is: the Big Apple

MONICA

You must know no one calls it that.

NEIL

(NOT THRILLED) So, you're here to make
a difference?

ABBY

No. I'm here so we can make a
difference. (THEN) Now, be honest --

ABBY HOLDS UP TWO IDENTICAL BLACK JUDGE'S ROBES.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Which one for my first night?

MONICA

(TO NEIL) Is she kidding now?

GURGS

Don't make me choose! I like them
both, but for different reasons!

CUT TO:

INT. COURTROOM - LATER (NIGHT 1)

(ABBY, NEIL, MONICA, GURGS, PAUL, FRANK BERNARDONE, BECCA, PROTESTER, TATTOOED DUDE, TATTOO ARTIST, EXTRAS)

COLORFUL NEW YORK CHARACTERS FILE IN. ABBY TAKES IN THE SCENE AS MONICA AND NEIL PREPARE FOR THE NIGHT.

ABBY

I knew there'd be a lot of sex workers, but the variety is staggering. There's something for everyone.

MONICA

New York is like a Baskin-Robbins for pervs. Which reminds me, there's an ice cream shop on the corner that you should not go to with open-toe shoes.

ABBY

Speaking of food, dinner tonight is on me. I just love the idea of us all sitting in the cafeteria, ribbing each other while we talk shop.

NEIL

You've really given this some thought.

MONICA

I'm just not in a place where I can expand socially at this time. I need to focus on my career. Getting stuck here is not a good look.

MONICA MOTIONS TO PAUL (40S, PUBLIC DEFENDER, SCHLUBBY) SNIFFING A MARKER AND ACCIDENTALLY GETTING IT ON HIS NOSE.

MONICA (CONT'D)

But, if I keep my conviction rate up,
I'll land a job at one of the big
firms that -- (FUMING) for some reason
didn't hire me out of law school.

ABBY

And we can say "we knew you when."

MONICA

Not if I get you to sign an NDA.

MONICA LAUGHS, KIDDING, BUT DEFINITELY NOT.

NEIL

I have no career ambitions, but I like
to use the dinner break to get shot
down by women on Tinder. I find
rejection goes better with food.

ABBY

(PLAYING IT OFF) Yeah, I'll probably
have judge stuff to do anyway.

ABBY HEADS FOR THE BENCH, PASSING GURGS.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Gurges, you wanna make this official?

GURGS

(TO ROOM) All rise. Manhattan
Criminal Court Part Two is now in
session. The Honorable Abnort Stronk
presiding.

ABBY

It's Judge Abby Stone for those of you
keeping score at home.

GURGS

Sorry, judge. Opening night jimmers.
(THEN, FRUSTRATED) Jitters.

ABBY

(TO ROOM) Now before we start, quick
show of hands: Who here is guilty?

NO ONE RAISES A HAND.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Worth a shot. All right, let's do
some law.

MONICA, PAUL, AND THE DEFENDANT, FRANK BERNARDONE APPROACH
THE BENCH.

NEIL

Mr. Bernardone was picked up outside
Madison Square Garden for selling
Knicks tickets to an undercover cop.

ABBY

(CATSKILLS) I wish I could charge the
Knicks for impersonating a basketball
team. I'll be here all night!

MONICA

Your honor, we're starting off with an
easy one. I'd like to submit into
evidence the officer's testimony, the
scalped tickets, and this sign --

MONICA HOLDS UP A SIGN THAT READS "NEED TICKETS?"

MONICA (CONT'D)

-- which might as well read "I'm
Guilty."

ABBY

(RE: TICKETS) These seats any good?

FRANK BERNARDONE

You kidding? Three rows from the
court. A steal at two hundred a pop.

(THEN) Can I have that last part
strunken from the record?

ABBY

I would, but you forgot to call
undosies.

FRANK BERNARDONE

(TO PAUL) Do something. Object or
whatever.

PAUL

I thought we agreed you were taking
the deal. You're not gonna make me do
the whole lawyer thing, are you?

MONICA

Your honor, the law is very clear.
The DA's office can live with a fine
in lieu of jail time in exchange for a
guilty plea, if it means we can all
move on with our lives.

ABBY

What's the hurry? I know what the law says, but I'd love to dig in a bit and hear Mr. Bernardone's side of things. Don't want to rush to judgment when a man's life hangs in the balance.

NEIL

As court clerk, I should point out that we do need to get through -- (RE: MASSIVE DOCKET) this docket. And I haven't scheduled much time for "digging in."

ABBY

As judge, I should point out that I'm judge.

NEIL/MONICA

Digging in it is./(WEAK) Yay, digging.

ABBY

Now Mr. Bernardone, do you know why there is a law against scalping?

FRANK BERNARDONE

I guess so some tool doesn't buy up all the tickets and rip off a bunch of real fans. But that's not what was happening here, I am a real fan.

ABBY

Don't real fans go to the games?

FRANK BERNARDONE

That's why I bought the tickets. But I needed the money because I got laid off, due to an anger issue that was aggravated by going to Knicks games.

MONICA

This is a con-artist sob story. You're going to hear a lot of them here in -- (PANDERING) the Big Apple.

ABBY

Desperate fan or con artist? One way to find out.

ABBY (CONT'D)

(RAPID FIRE) Patrick Ewing.

John Starks' best game.

Reggie Miller.

FRANK BERNARDONE

Better than Jordan, better actor, too.

'93 Eastern Conference Finals, Game 2 vs. the Bulls.

Hope he gets a painful venereal disease.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Sir, you are a legit Knicks fan, which in this court's opinion, is punishment enough. I'm going to let you off with a warning and recommend you check out StubHub. (BANGS GAVEL) Case closed.

MONICA

Wait, what happened? Did I seriously just lose? That case was a slam dunk.

ABBY

People miss slam dunks all the time. Just ask the Knicks. Hey-yo! And speaking of pathetic defense -- count it -- I expected more out of you, Paul. Gonna need you to work a little harder next time. But hey, we all have off days. I believe in you.

PAUL

(BEAT) Welp, I quit.

ABBY

I'm sorry, you what? Like, quit quit?

PAUL

I don't need this. I didn't take this job to "work hard" or listen to some kid tell me she believes in me.

PAUL HEADS FOR THE DOOR.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I've never stormed out of anything in my life. I feel so alive. (THEN) I'm finally going to tell my sister-in-law I have feelings for her!

PAUL EXITS.

MONICA

(TO ABBY) Look at you already making a difference. We had a public defender, and now we don't.

ABBY

I guess we should bump up the cases with people representing themselves.

NEIL SHAKES HIS HEAD, ANNOYED AS WE BEGIN A MONTAGE:

A) A DRUNK SORORITY BECCA STANDS BEFORE ABBY.

BECCA

If they didn't want me to dance on the bar, then why were they playing the song from Coyote Ugly? That's like entrapment or whatever.

B) AN ANIMAL RIGHTS PROTESTER STANDS BEFORE ABBY.

ABBY

So you freed a carriage horse in Central Park? Do you know where the horse is now?

SFX: HORSE CLOMPING AND NEIGHING COMING FROM THE HALLWAY.

PROTESTER

She followed me.

C) A TATTOO ARTIST AND A TATTOOED DUDE STAND BEFORE ABBY. THE DUDE SHOWS HIS TATTOO TO ABBY.

TATTOOED DUDE

I'm not paying him. I asked for a Garfield tattoo.

ABBY

Let the record show the tattoo is of
President James Garfield.

WE SEE IT IS A TATTOO OF FORMER PRESIDENT JAMES GARFIELD.

TATTOO ARTIST

I can't read minds dude.

D) BECCA IS NOW SOBBING AS A TIRED ABBY TRIES TO HAND HER A
TISSUE. BECCA PULLS HERSELF TOGETHER AND THEN THROWS UP.

ABBY

And, that's lunch.

CUT TO:

INT. ABBY'S CHAMBERS - LATER (NIGHT 1)
(ABBY, NEIL, GURGS)

ABBY SITS AT HER DESK EATING A SANDWICH. GURGS ENTERS
CARRYING AN OLD BOX LABELED "JUDGE HARRY STONE OFFICE".

GURGS

Look what I found in storage. I think
it's some of your dad's old stuff.

ABBY CROSSED TO GURGS AND EXCITEDLY OPENS THE BOX.

ABBY

Wow, really?! This is so cool!

ABBY PULLS OUT AN ARMADILLO.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Welcome home, Clarence!

GURGS

Well, enjoy your box. I'm off to
investigate a report that someone
tampered with the directory board.
Apparently the culprit rearranged
letters to spell joke names.

ABBY

(LAUGHING) I saw that on the way in.
Hugh Janus was my favorite. (THEN,
CONCERNED) Is that a real person? Did
I laugh at a real person's name?

GURGS

So an attack on this court is funny?

ABBY

They just moved some letters around --

GURGS

And Jeffrey Dahmer was just a picky eater.

GURGS EXITS BLOWING PAST NEIL.

NEIL

Legal Aid said they'll send another public defender as soon as they can.

ABBY

So, someone just shows up and we don't have any say? Like when I wanted to adopt a 2-mile stretch of I-90 but wound up with a baby brother instead?

NEIL

That's how the system works.

ABBY

Well, the system stinks. What if we get another Paul? We need someone who cares as much about giving people a fair shot as I do.

NEIL

Well, if you know any lawyers who enjoy being overworked and under-appreciated, you should reach out.

ABBY GETS AN IDEA. SHE PULLS AN OLD ROLODEX OUT OF THE BOX.

ABBY

I just might do that.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSCALE APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - THE NEXT DAY (DAY 2)

ABBY KNOCKS ON AN APARTMENT DOOR.

DAN (O.S.)

You'd better not have forgotten the
coleslaw this time!

THE DOOR OPENS REVEALING DAN FIELDING (60S, ARROGANT,
RECOVERING NARCISSIST, SPORTING A SEVERE BEARD).

DAN (CONT'D)

I have all the Girl Scout cookies I
need.

DAN SLAMS THE DOOR. ABBY REACTS AS A DELIVERY GUY
APPROACHES.

ABBY

If you don't have coleslaw in there,
you better keep walking.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. UPSCALE APARTMENT BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER (DAY 2)
(ABBY, DAN)

ABBY KNOCKS ON THE DOOR AGAIN.

ABBY

Mr. Fielding. I'm not a Girl Scout.
I was, but I got kicked out for
expressing my true feelings about
Samoas. My name is Abby Stone. You
used to work with my dad.

DAN OPENS THE DOOR.

DAN

You're Harry's daughter. Abby Stone?
Sounds like an Irish church. Come in.

ABBY ENTERS.

RESET TO:

INT. DAN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS (DAY 2)
(ABBY, DAN)

DAN'S PLACE IS NICE, BUT MESSY. THERE ARE TAKEOUT
CONTAINERS, MAIL, AND PAPERS STREWN ABOUT.

ABBY

Hope you don't mind me dropping by.

DAN

No, it's OK. You caught me in the
middle of cleaning.

DAN SWIPES SOME TAKEOUT CONTAINERS INTO AN EMPTY DRAWER.

ABBY

I found a box of my dad's stuff and
your address was in his rolodex.

DAN

I was sorry to hear about your dad.
We lost touch over the years, but he
was a great guy.

ABBY

He said you were the finest prosecutor
he ever worked with. As well as being
a sensitive, caring, compassionate
friend. And also other stuff.

DAN

Well, he did have an irritating way of
always seeing the best in people.

ABBY

I almost didn't recognize you with the
beard. In pictures, you always looked
so put together. (BACKPEDALING) Not
that this isn't a great look. I'm pro-
beard. It's a great way to cover up a
weird neck. Not that your neck is --
(CHANGING THE SUBJECT) Wow, look at
that view.

DAN

That's what sold Sarah on the place.
High enough to avoid the garbage smell
in summer, low enough to see tourists
wipe out on the ice rink in winter.

ABBY

Your wife?

DAN

Was. Unfortunately, life had other plans.

ABBY

Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that --

DAN

Thank you. It's in the past and we should probably just leave it at that.

(THEN) So, what are you doing here?

ABBY

I moved to New York for a job. Guess where.

DAN

No.

ABBY

I'm the new night court judge! Isn't that cool?

DAN

Sure. Lets go with "cool."

ABBY

Anyway, our public defender quit -- one of those freak things, nobody's fault -- and I thought, who better to recommend a new one than a guy who's battled them in court for forty years.

DAN

It's not usually a judge's job to hunt down public defenders.

ABBY

I know, but it's important we get someone good who really wants to help people.

DAN

Ah, of course, chip off the old block. Well, I'm not sure I'm the person to ask. As a former prosecutor, I never really paid much attention to those bleeding-heart types. With a few notable exceptions.

ABBY

Former? So you're retired now?

DAN

Semi. I still have my license, but these days I work in more of a supportive role.

ABBY

Teaching?

DAN

I haven't sunk that low. No, I'm a process server.

ABBY

(THROWN) Huh. I hope you don't mind me saying, but that doesn't seem like the best use of your talent.

DAN

Oh, but it's good fun. Seeing the look on a person's face when you tell them they've been served... priceless. Plus, I like working alone and it's a great way to get my steps in.

ABBY

And that's enough for you?

DAN

The pay could be better, but money's not really an issue when you get in on the ground floor of Bitcoin.

ABBY

I'm sorry, so you're like a process serving Bitcoin millionaire?

DAN

Well, I will be just as soon as I remember my password.

DAN ENTERS A PASSWORD ON HIS PHONE. THEN REACTS, FRUSTRATED.

DAN (CONT'D)

I'm pretty sure there's a 9 in it.

ABBY

(RE: Dan) Wow, that's disappointing.

ABBY NOTICES A THANK YOU CARD ON THE FRIDGE.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Did someone you served send you a
thank you card?

DAN

Occasionally I'll throw in some free
legal advice, just to keep the poor
bastards from doing something stupid,
and they'll express their appreciation
with a note or twelve pounds of black
market ribeyes.

DAN OPENS HIS FREEZER. IT'S JAM-PACKED WITH MEAT.

DAN (CONT'D)

If I can give them a tip that keeps
them from being crushed by the system,
then why not?

ABBY

(REALIZING) Sounds like you're making
a difference in these people's lives.

(THEN) Maybe you should be our new
public defender?

DAN

(LAUGHING) Me, defending others?
Saying things like, "My client has a
lot to offer" and "He deserves a
second chance."

DAN USHERS ABBY TO THE DOOR.

DAN (CONT'D)

Well, I don't want to keep you from
your search. If I think of anyone --

ABBY

Come to the courthouse tonight!

DAN

Why would I do that?

ABBY

Um, because... (GETTING AN IDEA) I'm
in over my head and I really need
someone to tell me what I'm doing
wrong. I've been a judge upstate, but
night court is --

DAN

A non-stop freak show, a fetid swamp.
Am I close? I feel like I'm close.

ABBY

-- different. (THEN) Please. You're
the only person I know who gets how
that world works. Well, at least the
only person who's still around.

HEARTSTRINGS PULLED, DAN GIVES IN.

DAN

Sure, what's the harm. I'm up-to-date
on all my shots.

AS ABBY BEAMS, WE...

CUT TO:

INT. ABBY'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT (NIGHT 2)
(ABBY, NEIL, MONICA, GURGS, AUTOMATED PUBLIC DEFENDER)

NEIL, MONICA, AND GURGS ARE THERE.

MONICA

This judge is screwing with my plans.
I ran the numbers, and because of her,
I'm looking at a Supreme Court
appointment in 2045.

GURGS

Wait, that's bad?

MONICA

It's six months behind schedule.

NEIL

At least it's not your job to keep her
on schedule. An open and shut case
turned into a 30 minute therapy
session. Sure Ellie had a major
breakthrough, but the charge was
jaywalking!

GURGS

And what kind of name is Abby Stone?
It's impossible to say.

NEIL

I guess I'd probably believe one
person could make a difference, too,
if I was a privileged white lady and
things always broke my way.

ABBY ENTERS HAVING OVERHEARD THIS.

ABBY

For your information, I've taken some big swings hair-wise that haven't panned out, and I realize as I'm saying this, I'm proving your point.

GURGS

I had the Rachel. What a mistake that was. Now I know to specify Maddow.

NEIL

I spoke with Legal Aid and they still don't have a replacement for Paul.

MONICA

Apparently word's gotten around there's a PITAJ in the courtroom. (EXPLAINING, TO ABBY) Pain in the ass judge. Personally, I don't see it.

NEIL

But, we do have a temporary solution.

NEIL WHEELS IN AN OLD COMPUTER ON A CART.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Allow me to introduce the Automated Public Defender. The city bought them a few years back to save money.

NEIL INITIATES THE PROGRAM. SFX: OLD-SCHOOL MODEM SOUND.

AUTOMATED PUBLIC DEFENDER (V.O.)

Welcome to LawBot. Press one to plead, not guilty.

GURGS

I think that's the Moviefone guy.

AUTOMATED PUBLIC DEFENDER (V.O.)

(GLITCHING) I'm sorry you are having
trouble. Are you still there?

NEIL

AUTOMATED PUBLIC DEFENDER

Representative!

You've selected, insanity

Representative!

plea.

ABBY

Luckily, I may have found us a human
replacement. He doesn't know it yet,
and when I floated the idea he found
it laughable, but deep down, I think
he's dying to do it.

MONICA

Sounds promising. Who wouldn't want a
surprise job offer for a job they
already turned down?

AUTOMATED PUBLIC DEFENDER (V.O.)

I think you said you'd like to call a
surprise witness. Please enter the
number of witnesses you'd like to
call, followed by the pound key.

CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDOR - A LITTLE LATER (NIGHT 2)
(NEIL, GURGS, DELIVERY LADY)

NEIL WATCHES AS GURGS EXAMINES THE DIRECTORY BOARD.

GURGS

(TO BOARD) Tell me a story, board.

Who hurt you? (THEN) I can't believe
this is happening on my watch.

NEIL

It's possible you're overreacting.
Isn't this just a harmless prank?

GURGS

Oh, Neil. Innocent, naïve, simple,
narrow-hipped Neil. I wish I could
tell you the world was all sunshine
and flapjacks, but this is no isolated
incident. Or have you forgotten the
events of last Thursday when our Xerox
was filled with popcorn, or prior to
that when the courtroom's light bulbs
were swapped out for fingerling
potatoes --

NEIL

So you think this is the work of a
serial prankster?

GURGS

Whoever it is hasn't used cereal yet,
but it's only a matter of time. Mark
my words, he will strike again.

NEIL

We're not dealing with a criminal
mastermind. Look at the names they
came up with. (RE: BOARD) Gary
Buttmouth? That's not even clever.

A DELIVERY LADY HOLDING A PACKAGE CHECKS THE DIRECTORY.

GURGS

Can I help you with something?

DELIVERY LADY

I'm looking for Gary Buttmouth.

GURGS

OK, that's clearly not a real person.

DELIVERY LADY

Then why is he on the board?

GURGS

You think there's a Gary Buttmouth
working here, and his office is --
(PULLS UP) 305? That's my office.

SMASH TO:

INT. GURGS'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER (NIGHT 2)
(NEIL, GURGS, DELIVERY LADY)

GURGS, NEIL, AND THE DELIVERY LADY REACT TO GURGS'S OFFICE,
WHICH IS NOW GARY'S, COMPLETE WITH NAME PLATE, DIPLOMA, AND
PICTURES OF GARY'S KIDS AT A BUTTMOUTH FAMILY REUNION.

DELIVERY LADY

Could I get you to sign for this?

GURGS SIGNS FOR THE PACKAGE, BUT ISN'T HAPPY ABOUT IT.

CUT TO:

INT. COURTROOM - LATER (NIGHT 2)

(ABBY, DAN, NEIL, MONICA, GURGS, AUTOMATED PUBLIC DEFENDER, MARK CAMERON, JEFF RASKIN)

MONICA, A DEFENDANT, MARK CAMERON (TOUGH GUY), AND A VICTIM, JEFF RASKIN (RICH DICK), STAND BEFORE ABBY, WHO IS DEEP IN THOUGHT. DAN ENTERS THE QUIET COURTROOM AND TAKES A SEAT IN THE GALLERY NEXT TO A CRAZY LADY. SHE SHOOTS HIM A LOOK.

DAN

(TO CRAZY LADY) Yes, it's me. Lets not make a big deal about it.

ABBY

OK, I'm ready to rule. (RAISING GAVEL, THEN) On second thought --

THE COURTROOM REACTS, ANNOYED.

AUTOMATED PUBLIC DEFENDER (V.O.)

Objection! Objection!

ABBY

I thought I said to unplug that.

MONICA

(FRUSTRATED) Your honor, this isn't murder one; it's a parking spot fight. Multiple witnesses said that Mr. Cameron threw the only punch.

MARK CAMERON

I'd been shoveling that spot out all day, and the second I go to get my car, this jack-weed steals it.

ABBY

Mr. Cameron, you stated you used a kitchen chair to save your spot.

(MORE)

I'm not from around here, but is that
a thing people do?

MARK CAMERON

It is very common, your judginess.

JEFF RASKIN

It's a free country. I can move a
chair.

ABBY

Who thinks that moving the chair would
anger the person who put it there?

EVERYONE IN THE GALLERY RAISES THEIR HAND, EXCEPT MR. RASKIN.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Mr. Raskin, you are under oath.

RASKIN RELUCTANTLY RAISES HIS HAND.

ABBY (CONT'D)

So you knew your action would incite
violence. And while this is a free
country, that sort of behavior is not
protected. I'm sentencing the
defendant to anger management and (RE:
RASKIN) musical chairs gets community
service, something in snow removal.

(BANGING GAVEL) Let's take 10.

NEIL

We made it through a whole case. Why
not take the rest of the night off.

(OFF ABBY'S LOOK) That's 10, people!

ABBY CROSSES TO DAN.

ABBY

So is it weird being back, like going
to your old high school?

DAN

More like a trip to the dentist.
Slightly painful, and there's a decent
chance a stranger will try to put
their hands in your mouth.

DAN EYES THE CRAZY LADY, WARY.

ABBY

You want to have a look around? Maybe
check out dad's old chambers? I bet
that box of stuff we found will bring
back some memories of your glory days.

DAN

(SHUTTING IT DOWN) The smell of this
place is plenty of nostalgia for me.

ABBY FLAGS DOWN MONICA.

ABBY

Monica Park, this is Dan Fielding. He
used to be the assistant district
attorney of this court.

MONICA

Wow, a former night court assistant
district attorney. Of all the days to
leave my autograph book at home.

DAN

It's funny, I don't think I ever lost
a case to a man who was being defended
by a fax machine.

MONICA

Look who knows what a fax machine is.

ABBY

I'm liking this back and forth. Kind
of makes me wonder how (RE: MONICA)
Dan 2.0 --

MONICA

Eww.

ABBY

-- would stack up against (RE: DAN)
the wily veteran.

DAN

Also, eww.

ABBY

But Dan's lawyer days are behind him,
so I guess we'll never know.

MONICA

Judge, can I have a word?

ABBY

(TO DAN) Make yourself at home. I'll
be right back.

MONICA AND ABBY CROSS TO THE BENCH PASSING GURGS.

ABBY (CONT'D)

(TO GURGS) Keep an eye on that guy.

GURGS

Way ahead of you. (THEN) Who is he?

ABBY

He used to work here.

GURGS

Disgruntled former employee. Sounds
like a motive.

GURGS CROSSES OFF.

MONICA

If you think he's going to be our new
public defender, you're delusional.
It's like saying Neil isn't being
catfished.

NEIL

You're going to be eating those words
once Nadia uses the money I Venmoed
her to buy a phone that gets FaceTime.

ABBY

I know it's a big swing, but I think
he really wants to help people.

MONICA

I've worked in the DA's office a while
and guys like that don't come out of
retirement and switch sides just to
lose to me night after night.

NEIL

I think Monica might be right about this one. She's probably right about Nadia too, but I'm just in too deep at this point.

ABBY

You're just seeing what's on the surface. In fact, you writing him off just proves he's the perfect person to defend people who are consistently written off. There's more to him than you think.

THEY LOOK OVER AT DAN WHO IS BEING INTERROGATED BY GURGS.

GURGS

Does the name Buttmouth mean anything to you?

DAN

Have you tried mints?

ABBY

He's just going to need a little help.

ABBY GETS A TEXT.

ABBY (CONT'D)

And it looks like help has just arrived.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFETERIA CORRIDOR - LATER (NIGHT 2)
(ABBY, DAN, CRAZY LADY, BENNETT)

ABBY AND DAN TURN THE CORNER.

ABBY

You came down here, the least I can do
is buy you dinner in the cafeteria.

DAN

Truer words have never been spoken.

DAN PULLS UP, RECOGNIZING A GROUP OF MEN AND WOMEN.

DAN (CONT'D)

Wait, I know these people. They're
all people I've served. Am I dying
and only seeing the most irrelevant
parts of my life flash before my eyes?

ABBY

These aren't just people you served.
These are lives you changed. Thanks
to you, Linda can still work in a nail
salon, Ed can see his kids as long as
there are no fireworks present, and
Bennett is allowed to vote.

BENNETT

Even though both parties are
controlled by secret lizards!

ABBY HANDS DAN A SUMMONS.

ABBY

Mr. Fielding, you've been served.

DAN

(READING) I am to appear in Manhattan Criminal Court to serve as public defender. (TO ABBY) You did all this?

ABBY

New Yorkers are surprisingly helpful.

DAN

When a judge is asking.

ABBY

(TO THE GROUP) Is that why --? (THEY NOD) Well, that's a bummer.

DAN

Look, I appreciate the effort. And there's no way in hell I'm doing it. I'm happy with my life the way it is.

ABBY

You say you're happy all alone, ordering takeout and guessing Bitcoin passwords --

DAN REFLEXIVELY PULLS OUT HIS PHONE, FIRES OFF A GUESS, AND REACTS, FRUSTRATED.

ABBY (CONT'D)

-- but you like helping people. You're probably doing pro bono work for your delivery guys.

DAN

I'm helping one with his father-in-law's naturalization, but who isn't?

ABBY

I think you could thrive here. Don't you want that for yourself?

DAN

Well, you don't always get what you want. Or sometimes you do and then you lose it because of some unpronounceable disease. (THEN) Why are we talking about me? You're the one who needs help.

ABBY

I said that to get you to come here.

DAN

Really? Last I checked, your public defender quit, the rest of your crew is about to mutiny, and that computer lawyer said some things about you that I'm too much of a gentleman to repeat.

ABBY

I'm trying to change the way things work around here and if people aren't on board with that, that's on them.

DAN

Your problem is you think being right matters. Good judges decide what's right; great judges convince people. That's what made your dad so great.

ABBY

Now you want to talk about the past?

DAN

If you don't like what I have to say,
next time you find an address in a box
maybe just leave it there.

ABBY

Sure, because keeping stuff boxed up
seems to be your thing. Your past,
your feelings -- You put your whole
life in a box and won't let anyone in.

DAN

So am I in the box or putting things
in it?

ABBY

I kind of lost the thread. The point
is, you're afraid to open the box.

DAN

Well, it was lovely meeting you; good
luck saving the world. It should
probably happen any day now.

DAN EXITS. ABBY WATCHES HIM GO, DEFEATED. REVEAL THE CRAZY
LADY IS STANDING NEXT TO ABBY.

CRAZY LADY

Would it make you feel better if I put
my hands in your mouth?

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. CAFETERIA - A LITTLE LATER (NIGHT 2)
(ABBY, NEIL, GURGS)

NEIL BUYS A SANDWICH AND SEES A STRESSED-OUT GURGS PORING
OVER CASE RESEARCH.

GURGS

This case has really got its hooks
into me.

GURGS TAKES A DRAG OF A CIGARETTE.

NEIL

You're definitely not allowed to smoke
in here. And since when do you smoke?

GURGS

I've tried everything: following the
money, catching a criminal by thinking
like a criminal, police psychic, going
undercover as a teen --

NEIL

How many of those did you actually do?

GURGS

Two if I'm being honest. Three if you
count me Googling teen slang, but I
was probably going to do that anyway.
I like to stay current. (THEN) You're
missing the point.

NEIL

There was no way for me to know there
was a point here.

GURGS

All this work and I came up with Jack Diddly Squat, which incidentally is a name on the board. The guy is a criminal mastermind, like a Hannibal. (HORRIFYING REALIZATION) Or it's Fight Club. Maybe I am Gary Buttmouth.

GURGS GATHERS HER THINGS AND EXITS.

GURGS (CONT'D)

If anyone asks, I left to get a CAT scan.

ANGLE ON ABBY AT A NEARBY TABLE.

ABBY

Are you going to tell her it was you?

NEIL

("INNOCENT") I don't know what you're talking about.

ABBY

That look is a dead giveaway. I have some experience with pranksters. The bit in Gurgs's office was pretty impressive.

NEIL SITS AT ABBY'S TABLE.

NEIL

That one I had help on. (OFF ABBY'S LOOK) The maintenance guy, Nikolai.

ABBY

Oh, yeah. I accused him of not knowing English about a minute into my first day.

NEIL

He doesn't! I taught him that just to screw with people. (LAUGHING) My job isn't exactly fulfilling, so I've gotta find ways to entertain myself.

ABBY

I guess I forget that working here isn't everyone's dream job. (THEN) So if court clerk doesn't do it for you, what does?

NEIL

(EVASIVE) You know, court clerk is cool. It's steady, lots of pen access --

ABBY

Sorry, I don't mean to pry. I guess I'm always looking for what's going on underneath. My dad used to do a lot of magic tricks. And whenever I asked how they were done he'd say "It's magic," which drove me crazy. I'd make him do them over and over and watch from different angles until eventually I figured them out.

(MORE)

He thought if I knew how the tricks worked I wouldn't like them as much, but honestly it only made me like them more. To me, the truth was the magic. I feel that way about people. It's hard to not like them once you know what's going on underneath. I guess I see how that makes me a pain in the butt as a judge and as a magic fan.

NEIL

It makes my job harder for sure.
(THEN) I guess I could take a closer look at the docket. Maybe I can find a little more time for "digging in."

ABBY

Neil, that would be amazing!

NEIL

But, just a little more. Like 5 minutes here and there.

ABBY

I'm hearing 8 to 10!

NEIL SMILES AND TAKES A BITE OF HIS SANDWICH. ABBY SMILES BACK. THEY'RE SHARING A MEAL TOGETHER!

ABBY (CONT'D)

I didn't peg you for a prankster and I'm usually pretty good at reading people.

(MORE)

(INTRIGUED) Guess I've gotta keep an eye on you. (THEN) Oh, you would've really appreciated the one my dad pulled when he met my fiancé. He had him convinced we were all KGB spies like in The Americans. We ended up on a watch list.

NEIL

(THROWN) Fiancé? I didn't see a ring. Not that I was looking. I notice hands sometimes. It's normal.

ABBY

Yeah, he'll move down here when things get settled. The ring was his grandma's, and he was worried about it on the subway, so I leave it at home.

NEIL

Also makes it easier to pick up subway conductors, so that's... just a joke.

ABBY

Hey, I'm not going to rat you out to Gurgs, but you've got to find a way to get her to chill. I already lost a public defender. If I lose a bailiff, people are gonna start to talk.

CUT TO:

INT. ABBY'S HALLWAY - SAME TIME (NIGHT 2)
(DAN)

ON HIS WAY OUT OF THE COURTHOUSE, DAN SEES THE BOX LABELED
"JUDGE HARRY STONE OFFICE" ON ABBY'S DESK AND PULLS UP.

DAN

(SCOFFING) Afraid to open a box.

DAN HESITATES A MOMENT AND THEN ENTERS ABBY'S CHAMBERS.

RESET TO:

INT. ABBY'S CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS (NIGHT 2)
(DAN, MAINTENANCE GUY)

DAN CROSSES TO THE BOX. HE SPOTS THE ARMADILLO ON THE DESK
AND PICKS IT UP. DAN HEARS A SOUND AND SEES THE MAINTENANCE
GUY CLIMBING DOWN THE LADDER WITH ANOTHER DEAD PIGEON.

DAN

Dead stuff, am I right? (THEN) Let me
ask you something. Say a lifetime ago
you worked with a guy. Had your ups
and downs, but on the whole liked each
other. Respected even. Job ends, you
go your own ways. And life happens.
You live, you love, and you lose...
big time. So you close your heart.
Then one day the child of that just
about forgotten guy shows up and asks
for your help. No one's asked for
your help in a long time and you feel
just a pin prick in that atrophied
muscle. Would you take a chance and
let that feeling in, knowing one day
it could hurt?

THE MAINTENANCE GUY SHAKES HIS HEAD AND EXITS.

MAINTENANCE GUY

Usi vidkryvayut sya pered Mykoloyu.

SUBTITLE: "EVERYONE OPENS UP TO NIKOLAI."

DAN

I guess I'll think about it.

DAN TAKES ANOTHER LOOK AT THE BOX. HE OPENS IT AND SPRINGY
SNAKES LEAP OUT HITTING HIM IN THE FACE.

DAN (CONT'D)

(TO THE AIR) I said I'd think about
it!

CUT TO:

INT. COURTROOM - NIGHT (NIGHT 3)

(ABBY, DAN, NEIL, MONICA, AUTOMATED PUBLIC DEFENDER,
PERVERT)

ABBY ADDRESSES THE GALLERY. NEIL AND MONICA ARE THERE.

ABBY

I know we don't have time to get into
it right now, but courtrooms are
weird, right? You're in that
audience, and I'm up here on this
little stage, I mean, what is this? I
feel like I should be putting on a
show for you guys. (THEN) Full
disclosure: I sat pretty close to a
guy on the five train who may have
been smoking an illegal substance.

MONICA

(TO DEFENDANT) If a judge went missing
someone would notice, right?

NEIL

Your honor, we're still short a public
defender, and if you thought LawBot
was ineffective before, you should see
it now that it's been infected with
malware.

ANGLE ON THE AUTOMATED PUBLIC DEFENDER.

AUTOMATED PUBLIC DEFENDER (V.O.)

Cardiologists say this vegetable is
like a pressure washer for your
insides!

DAN BURSTS THROUGH THE DOORS. HE SHAVED AND IS IN A GREAT
SUIT.

DAN

Your honor, Dan Fielding for the
defense.

MONICA

(TO ABBY) Wait, you actually got him?

ABBY

(THRILLED) I guess so! (THEN,
CONCERNED) Unless that subway pot was
stronger than I thought.

NEIL

Wow, maybe there's a chance I'm not
being catfished after all.

DAN

(TO NEIL) We've never met, but you
definitely are. (TO ABBY) Permission
to approach the bench.

ABBY

Get that baby face over here.

DAN

Just so you know, this is only
temporary. I'm just helping out for a
few days.

ABBY

(GRINNING) I'm hearing weeks.

DAN

And if you keep smiling I'm out of here, so knock it off. (OFF ABBY'S SERIOUS LOOK) That's better.

ABBY

That's better, your honor.

DAN

I'm already regretting this.

DAN CROSSES TO THE DEFENDANT'S TABLE.

MONICA

(TO ABBY, RE: DAN) How'd you do it?

ABBY

I guess by being a pain in the (WHISPERING) ass.

NEIL

Oooh, judge said "ass."

MONICA

She whispered it.

NEIL

But she said it. Maybe there's more to her than what we see on the surface. Or maybe this place is rubbing off on her.

DAN IS STANDING BESIDE HIS CLIENT, A PERVERT.

DAN

Speaking of -- You know what, too easy. Mr. Gates here was brought in for lewd conduct. Your honor, this man is clearly a depraved menace who doesn't belong in decent society.

MONICA

You trying to do my job?

DAN

Someone has to.

ABBY

Mr. Fielding, just to remind you, you are the defense.

DAN

Right, old habits. Your honor, my client, dare I say friend is a pillar of the community. We are wasting the court's time with this gross miscarriage of justice.

ABBY

Mr. Fielding, if you'll indulge me, I'd love to know what's underneath all of this.

PERVERT

You're the judge!

AS DAN TRIES TO KEEP HIS CLIENT FROM DISROBING, WE...

END OF ACT THREE

TAG

INT. CORRIDOR - LATER (NIGHT 3)
(ABBY, DAN, GURGS, HUGH JANUS)

ABBY AND GURGS WALK DOWN THE HALL. GURGS IS A LITTLE BUMMED.

ABBY

My cousin once met Keanu Reeves.

GURGS

Mine too. The movie Speed is loosely based on him.

ABBY

You're better at this game.

GURGS PULLS UP. SHE SEES THE DIRECTORY BOARD NOW HAS A MESSAGE FROM HUGH JANUS (SIR ANTHONY HOPKINS) ON IT.

HUGH JANUS (V.O.)

To My Dear Adversary: I can no longer operate with such a worthy opponent hot on my trail. Perhaps one day we shall dance again. Until then, I bid you adieu. Sincerely, Dr. Hugh Janus.

ABBY SMILES AS GURGS WALKS OFF, THRILLED.

GURGS

I have a nemesis! They're gonna do a podcast about me!

SHE PASSES DAN WHO IS GETTING HIS SHOES SHINED.

DAN

That's without a doubt the second weirdest bailiff I've ever met.

END OF SHOW