

ROOMS OF EXPERIENCE

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - DAY - FLASHBACK SEVEN YEARS PRIOR

People stride in and out through the automatic doors of the brightly colored building on a sunny, spring day. Graceful willows line the walk.

DANA (20s) - attractive, long hair tied back in a loose, messy braid, dressed simply in jeans and a t-shirt - walks a few feet out of the doors, stops mid-step, her face tight with stress. People stream past her, around her.

A NURSE pushes a wheelchair with a WOMAN and her NEWBORN towards a car waiting at the curb, a MAN beams alongside. As they pass Dana, a tiny pink and blue hat falls on the ground in front of her.

Her gaze lands on the hat. She breathes heavy, something weighs on her, then walks, faster, towards the parking lot, the hat left abandoned on the cement.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Dana reaches her car, grabs the door handle. A sob almost escapes her lips, but she fights it back, wrenches the door open, gets in the driver's seat.

FADE TO:

INT. DANA'S CAR - MOVING - PRESENT DAY

Dana - impeccably dressed, expertly made up, hair in a tight bun - drives down a crowded city street, wiper blades THUMP away rain from her windshield.

Turns into a parking garage, deftly parks in her spot. Exits the car, a CHIRP of the alarm, her heels CLICK on the cement. Her actions smooth and controlled.

INT. OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY - DAY

Dana enters from the street, drops a wet umbrella in a stand by the door, heads down the hall.

INT. DANA'S OFFICE - DAY

Dana opens the door, which reads "DANA JEFFRIES ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY, HOMICIDE."

Hangs her purse on a coat rack in the corner, takes a seat at her desk, grabs mail from her inbox. Sifts through the mail, gets to a baby blue envelope, stops.

Stares at it, runs her finger over the handwriting on the front. Contemplates the letter opener on her desk.

Her desk PHONE RINGS, startles her. She opens a bottom desk drawer, throws the envelope on top of several other envelopes in the same color with the same handwriting, reaches for the phone.

EXT. ADA'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

ADA - elderly, close to 90, but trim and well put together - stands on the lawn in the dark, illuminated by a small shaft of light from a bulb above the sliding glass door to the house. She holds a yellow balloon gently to her chest.

There is the RUMBLE of thunder in the distance. She closes her eyes and opens her arms, lets the balloon float up into the night sky.

Opens her eyes and looks up, watches the balloon disappear, then turns and goes inside. Drops of rain fall on the cement.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

Drops of rain beat against the asphalt, reflect the street lights. The CLICK of a phone being answered:

911 OPERATOR (V.O.)
Nine-one-one operator. Where is
your emergency?

Silence.

911 OPERATOR (V.O.)
Hello? Nine-one-one. Is anyone
there?

ADA (V.O.)
I...my son is dead.

The WAIL of a siren heard in the distance.

EXT. ADA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A coroner's van approaches, stops in front. An ambulance and two police cars, lights flashing, are already on scene.

This is a well-kept but older middle class suburban neighborhood. All of the homes appear to have been renovated or upgraded except for this one; it appears frozen in time.

The front door is open, lights ablaze against the night sky, officers move about. Neighbors peer out their windows, some step out on porches to see what's going on.

INT. ADA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The body of a man, TEDDY (60s), dressed in pajamas, lies dead on the bed in a sparsely furnished room. Nothing in the room looks out of order or unusual, except that every inch of wall space is tacked with abstract drawings.

There is a folded cloth and a length of plastic tubing on a night stand, a tank of helium stands next to it. CSI #1 takes pictures while CSI #2 catalogues evidence.

DETECTIVE CURTIS (50s) pokes his head in, looks at the drawings.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

Quite the art collection. How's it going?

CSI #1

Just finishing up.

The detective nods.

INT. ADA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

All the furniture is fifty or sixty years old, with the exception of a laptop computer on a small desk in the corner. The walls are covered in shelves filled with hundreds of neatly arranged books.

Detective Curtis enters from the hall, surveys the room. Steps over to the books, pulls out a title: YOGA FOR HEALTHY AGING AND LONGEVITY. Scoffs, places it back on the shelf.

Notices an upright piano, crosses to it, TINKLES A FEW KEYS, walks into the kitchen.

INT. ADA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ada sits at the table with a uniformed officer. Another OFFICER stands in the background.

Ada still wears daytime clothes; her hands are folded in her lap, she stares straight ahead.

Detective Curtis takes a seat next to her. There is mail on the table, he picks up an envelope, looks at the name.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
Mrs. Wells?

ADA
(answers without looking
at him)
Yes.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
Are you the owner of this home?

She nods.

DETECTIVE CURTIS (CONT'D)
Mrs. Wells, can you tell me who
else lives here with you?

ADA
Just my son.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
(gentle)
Is that your son in the bedroom?

She nods again.

DETECTIVE CURTIS (CONT'D)
Has anyone else been in your home
this evening that you are aware of?

ADA
No.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
Mrs. Wells, there is a tank of
helium in your son's bedroom. Do
you know anything about that?

She still does not look at the detective.

ADA
We have it for the balloons. Teddy
likes to let them go outside. The
yellow ones are his favorite. He
thinks it's like the sunrise.

Detective Curtis and the seated officer exchange glances.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
(speaks louder and slower)
Mrs. Wells, do you have any family
in the area, is there anyone we can
call for you?

She finally looks straight at him, takes in his face for a
moment before she answers.

ADA
They're gone. Everyone is gone.
It's just Teddy and me, has been
for years. For as long as I can
remember, really.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
Excuse me for a moment, ma'am.

He stands up, motions to the standing officer. They walk out
of the kitchen into the hallway.

INT. ADA'S FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Detective Curtis and the officer stand by the open front
door.

OFFICER
Alzheimer's?

DETECTIVE CURTIS
Possibly. What do we know about the
son?

The CSI's enter from the bedroom. CSI #1 exits out the front
door.

CSI #2
We're done, you can send in the
wagon.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
Suicide?

CSI #2
Probably. No signs of a struggle,
the tank of helium - popular with
the Final Exit crowd. The artwork
is a bit curious though.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
Mental illness, maybe? Mom appears
to have dementia. Could run in the
family.

OFFICER
Maybe taking care of her was just
too much of a burden. Surprised it
wasn't murder-suicide.

CSI #2 shrugs, steps aside for the CORONER to enter.

CORONER
Ready for me?

OFFICER
Yeah, back this way.

The officer leads the coroner away. Detective Curtis pulls a
piece of gum from his pocket, steps out the front door.

EXT. ADA'S HOUSE - PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Detective Curtis notices some commotion as GINA (late 50s)
hurries up the walk. She is pleasant looking, but has
obviously been woken up in the middle of the night.

OFFICER #2 is close behind her as she heads towards Detective
Curtis.

OFFICER #2
Ma'am? Ma'am! You cannot be here.
This is a potential crime scene. I
am going to have to ask you to
leave immediately.

She looks back at the officer.

GINA
Crime scene?
(turns to Detective
Curtis)
Oh my God, what happened? Are Ada
and Teddy alright?

He indicates to the officer he will handle this, pulls out
his notepad.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
Detective Curtis, ma'am. Are you
family?

GINA
No, I'm their neighbor.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
What is your name, please?

GINA

Gina. Gina Gordon. Where's Ada?

DETECTIVE CURTIS

Ada, that's Mrs. Wells? The elderly female occupant of this residence?

GINA

Yes, is she all right?

DETECTIVE CURTIS

She's all right, she's inside.

Gina calms somewhat, is more willing to talk.

GINA

What did the officer mean by "crime scene" then?

DETECTIVE CURTIS

(ignores her question)

How long have you known Mrs. Wells?

GINA

Since I was a little girl. I grew up in the house across the street.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

And where do you live now?

GINA

Still there. I mean, I left and then I moved back after my divorce to take care of my parents. They moved to this neighborhood about the same time Ada did. My mother used to check in on her and now I do.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

So Mrs. Wells has been ill for some time then?

GINA

Ill? What do you mean? Ada's not ill.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

Then why was her son taking care of her?

GINA

What? No. Teddy's not taking care of Ada, Ada takes care of him. She has his whole life. He has autism.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

The drawings, right. Autism. Do you think that would have led him to commit suicide?

GINA

No, Teddy wouldn't commit suicide, he can't even talk.

(the reality hits her)

Oh my God, where's Ada?

Pushes past him, runs into the house, calls out:

GINA (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Ada!

INT. ADA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Gina rushes in, sees Ada at the table, kneels down in front of her, take her hands.

Detective Curtis follows, stands in the doorway.

GINA

Ada. Ada, honey, what happened? Are you all right? What happened to Teddy?

DETECTIVE CURTIS

We're going to need to take Mrs. Wells to the station.

Gina stands up, as if to shield her.

GINA

Now? In the middle of the night? What's wrong with you? She's eighty-nine years old.

The coroner wheels the body past the kitchen towards the front door. Ada does not react. There is complete silence except for the wheels of the gurney SQUEAKING on the floor.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

It looks like we have a few more questions to ask Mrs. Wells.

EXT. ADA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Detective Curtis escorts Ada down the walkway towards an unmarked car.

Gina, close behind, punches buttons on a cell phone.

GINA

Ada, it's going to be okay. I'm calling a friend of mine, she's a lawyer. We'll meet you at the station. Don't answer any more questions until we get there.

The detective assists Ada into the back seat of the car, shuts the door. Gina yells at him, phone pressed to her ear.

GINA (CONT'D)

You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

DETECTIVE CURTIS

I'm just doing my job, ma'am.

He gets into the driver's seat, shuts the door.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Ada sits at a table, coughs into a handkerchief. Detective Curtis stands nearby.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

Would you like some water, Mrs. Wells?

She nods. He pours a glass of water from a pitcher, hands it to her.

ADA

Thank you.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

You're welcome. You've taken care of your son for a long time, haven't you?

ADA

Yes.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

It must have been very difficult for you, all alone like that.

She opens her mouth to respond, then remembers.

ADA

Gina said I should wait until the lawyer gets here.

He takes a seat next to her.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

Sure, sure. You don't have to say anything, but you're not under arrest. We're just trying to understand what happened tonight.

(smiles at Ada)

The sooner we can sort it out, the sooner we can all go home.

She speaks plainly, almost monotone, still in shock.

ADA

I'm not senile.

He casually reaches up a hand, indicates to start recording.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

No, of course not. No one thinks that.

ADA

I didn't lose my mind, I knew what I was doing.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

You mean when you killed your son?

ADA

I wanted his last day to be with me, at home. Peaceful.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

Anyone would want that. Where did you get the helium?

ADA

The party store delivers it. We get a tank every other week or so. Teddy loves his balloons.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

How did you know how to use helium to kill your son?

ADA

I read about it on the internet. It
said it would be fast and painless.
I didn't want him to suffer.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

Were you trying to make it look
like suicide?

A KNOCK on the door. Detective Curtis rises to answer it,
steps halfway out into the hallway. A uniformed officer
whispers something to him. Detective Curtis leans back in.

DETECTIVE CURTIS (CONT'D)

Excuse me for a moment, ma'am.

The door CLICKS behind him.

INT. DETECTIVE CURTIS' CUBICLE - NIGHT

ALEXIS (early 50s) - a force to be reckoned with, energy
radiates from her even at this hour - stands next to Gina.

Detective Curtis approaches, smiles when he sees Alexis.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

Ah, Alexis Martinez. Counsel for
Mrs. Wells, I presume?

ALEXIS

Does she need representation?

DETECTIVE CURTIS

Well, she did just confess.

ALEXIS

In that case, I'd like to know why
my client was being questioned
without me?

DETECTIVE CURTIS

She wasn't under arrest. We were
just having a friendly chat.

ALEXIS

At four o'clock in the morning? I'm
taking her home.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

I'm afraid I can't let you do that.

ALEXIS

Why not? I thought you said she wasn't under arrest.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

She wasn't when we were talking, but now that she's confessed to murder, I can't simply let her walk out of here.

ALEXIS

Yes, heaven forbid an eighty-nine year old woman with no passport and no car who's barely stepped foot outside her home in six decades should be out roaming the streets. Thank God you boys are keeping us safe from the likes of Ada Wells.

She looks around; several cops mill about not doing much of anything except eating and drinking coffee.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

I would have confessed too to get the hell out of here. I'm taking her home. She's not a danger to you or anyone else. We'll be back in the morning.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

Nine a.m.

ALEXIS

Eleven.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

She can't go home. It's an active crime scene.

Gina steps forward.

GINA

She can stay with me.

ALEXIS

See there? All settled.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

I'm holding you responsible, Ms. Martinez.

ALEXIS

I think I can handle it. Now please release my client.

DETECTIVE CURTIS

Yes, ma'am.

He walks away, smiles as he hears Alexis call out:

ALEXIS

"Friendly chat", my ass!

EXT. GINA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Gina's car pulls into the driveway. She exits, helps Ada.

Ada looks across the street at her own house until Gina gently ushers her inside.

INT. GINA'S DINING ROOM - DAY

Alexis and Ada sit at the table. Gina sets out mugs, pours coffee.

ALEXIS

Gina told me a little of your story on the way to the station last night. Taking care of your son by yourself and barely leaving the house for all those years, I can't even imagine. That kind of isolation, the effects on the psyche...you're an incredible woman, Ada.

She takes a drink, thinks.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

I'm not certain which way the D.A.'s going to go with this but based on your, please forgive me, advanced age and the circumstances, I really can't see them pushing to prosecute this. So, we'll go talk to the nice officers and get you released on your own recognizance until we can get the charges dismissed. I don't want you to worry. Everything will be taken care of.

ADA

I want to have a trial.

ALEXIS

Why would you want to do that?

ADA

I don't want anyone to think after all those years I finally just snapped. That's not what happened. It's important to me that people know...he was my son and I loved him.

Alexis tries to think of an argument.

ALEXIS

Okay, Ada. I promise you'll get to tell your story. But you should know this is the kind of case people like to use as a soapbox. If we go to trial it could be very difficult for you.

ADA

I'm not worried about difficult.

Alexis nods, gives Ada's hand a squeeze.

INT. DANA'S OFFICE - DAY

Dana types on her laptop at her desk, her ASSISTANT pokes her head in.

ASSISTANT

Harvey is asking for you.

Dana pulls out a compact from the top drawer of her desk, unnecessarily checks her appearance; not a hair is out of place.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY HARVEY DAVIS' OFFICE - DAY

The inner door is open, Dana KNOCKS lightly.

DANA

You wanted to see me, sir?

HARVEY (mid 60s) - all business, exudes authority - waves Dana in.

HARVEY

Dana, come in. Have a seat.

She perches lightly on the edge of the chair across from him.

HARVEY (CONT'D)

How's Homicide treating you?

DANA
Well. Very well, actually. I enjoy
the challenge.

HARVEY
Good, good.

He peers intently at her, she shifts slightly in her seat.

HARVEY (CONT'D)
Nice job on the Hansen case.

DANA
Thank you. Sir. I appreciate that.

HARVEY
Two for two in this department, not
bad. You're already earning a
formidable reputation.

DANA
Thank you.

HARVEY
Think you're ready for something a
little more high profile?

She sits up even straighter, if that's possible.

DANA
Absolutely.

He pulls out a file from a desk drawer, drops it with a thud
on the desk in front of her.

HARVEY
Glad to hear that, because I'm
giving you the Wells case. Carter
will second chair.

DANA
The Wells case? I thought that was
going through Elder Abuse.

HARVEY
Not anymore. The case is gaining
ground since the disability rights
groups got wind of it.

She flips through the file, takes out a picture of Ada, holds
it up, studies it.

DANA
Disability rights...how so?

HARVEY

The son had autism, so they're calling it open season on the disabled, accusing society and the justice system of devaluing people who are--

(makes air quotes)

"differently abled." It's looking to get political, too many photo-ops not to.

Turns his computer screen for Dana to see.

CLOSE ON screen, article headline reads "DISABILITY RIGHTS FOREFRONT OF MURDER CASE".

DANA

It's only my third homicide and I don't have any political aspirations. With all due respect, sir, why would you choose me?

HARVEY

A female prosecutor sits better on this one. The defendant's eight-nine years old, we don't want to look completely heartless. We're already up against the sympathy vote.

(turns the screen back)

Kendra's tied up with the Carruthers case and Lauren's about to go out on maternity leave. That leaves you. You look good, you speak well. Just be sure to brush up on your sound bites.

DANA

So, I'm getting the case by default, not because I'm the most qualified.

He shrugs as an admission.

HARVEY

There's a always chance it won't be a win for you, but relax, it'll be fine. At least you have a confession.

Alexis breezes in, waves a document in the air.

ALEXIS

Speaking of confessions...

Harvey throws his hands up.

HARVEY
Counselor, do come in.

Alexis brushes imaginary lint off his jacket, he tolerates it.

ALEXIS
Harvey, always a pleasure. I can hardly believe I left all this behind.

HARVEY
Dana, meet Alexis Martinez, opposing counsel and former A.D.A. Sadly, she defected long before you arrived.

ALEXIS
Not fast enough.
(to Dana)
Pleasure.

She offers her hand to Dana. They shake, then she immediately hands Dana the document.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
Motion to suppress your "confession".

Harvey and Dana speak simultaneously.

HARVEY/DANA
On what grounds?

Alexis ignores Dana, speaks directly to Harvey.

ALEXIS
A frail, elderly lady who wasn't properly Mirandized being questioned without a lawyer in the middle of the night? Come on.

HARVEY
She wasn't under arrest at the time, as I understand it.

ALEXIS
Seriously. I can't believe you even filed this in the first place. A murder charge? And to place her in custody? I knew you were ruthless, but this over the top even for you.

HARVEY

We represent the people, Alexis.
You know that. They talk, we have
to listen. Murder is murder, no
matter who commits it.

ALEXIS

Oh please. Save it for the
reporters. That's not true and you
know it.

She whirls around to Dana.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

At any rate, there's something I'd
like you to see. Are you free for a
bit?

Dana looks at Harvey, who shrugs.

HARVEY

Despite outward appearances, she's
relatively harmless.

ALEXIS

Nice to see you too, Harvey.

She strides out, does not wait for Dana, who grabs the file
off the desk, scrambles after her.

EXT. ADA'S HOUSE - DAY

Alexis and Dana pull up in separate cars. Yellow crime scene
tape hangs limply from one side of the front door frame.

Alexis strides up the walk without looking back at Dana,
pulls out a key, unlocks the door, enters. Dana follows.

INT. ADA'S FRONT HALLWAY - DAY

The house is dark. Alexis moves towards the living room.

ALEXIS

This way.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

An old movie projector sits on a small table between two
upholstered chairs. A screen is pulled down over the
fireplace.

Alexis crosses to the sliding glass door, flings open the curtains, light floods in. Dana blinks to adjust her eyes.

GINA (O.S.)
Alexis, is that you? Sorry, I
locked the door behind me, I wasn't
sure how long I'd be and there were
reporters nosing around here this
morning.

She emerges from the bedroom hallway with a stack of clothing.

Dana spins around.

DANA
Excuse me, who are you?

ALEXIS
Dana, Gina. Gina, this is the
prosecutor who's trying to convict
Ada of murder.

Gina narrows her eyes, takes a step towards Dana.

DANA
This is a crime scene, you can't be
in here.

GINA
So I've heard.
(to Alexis)
I came over to grab a few of Ada's
things.
(clears her throat)
For when she's released tomorrow.

ALEXIS
Okay, I'll see you at the
courthouse in the morning.

GINA
Okay.

She leaves with a parting glance at Dana.

Alexis crosses to one of the book shelves, pulls out several volumes.

ALEXIS
(reads titles)
Dr. Atkins Age Defying Diet.
How To Live Longer And Feel Better.
Neuroendocrine Theory of Aging.
(MORE)

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
Life Extension. Meditation As
Medicine. Reversing Human Aging.

She steps up to Dana, dumps the books in her arms.

DANA
What is all this?

She struggles to keep the books from slipping, looks around for somewhere to put them down, then gives up, sets them on the floor just before they fall.

ALEXIS
Ada Wells' attempt to outlive her son. The kitchen is full of supplements; DHEA, CoQ10, Resveratrol, stuff I can't even pronounce. She's not a murderer, Dana.

(gestures)
Look around this house. Books, vitamins, exercise equipment. She did everything she could to make sure she would always be here to take care of him. Teddy lived his whole life here, this is all he ever knew.

She closes the curtains part way, turns on the projector.

Black, scratchy lines snake across the screen; the film is very old. Home movies of Teddy as a child appear.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
She recorded some of this because she thought it might be useful one day. She hoped there would finally be a doctor who could properly diagnose Teddy and help him.

INSERT

Grainy footage shows five year-old Teddy in various stages of distress: hitting his head against the wall, screaming uncontrollably, lining up objects, flapping his arms, hitting his ears.

A YOUNG ADA is seen in some of the shots. Through it all she remains calm, does her best to soothe her son.

BACK TO SCENE

Alexis stays silent for a moment while Dana watches the film.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

Can you imagine trying to cope with this all alone, all but cut off from the rest of society? Trying desperately to help your child when no one could even tell you what was wrong with him? Telling you instead that your best hope was just to lock him away? After all those years on her own, how would she know who to call or where to go for help?

Dana remains fixed on the screen.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

She barely even recognizes the outside world anymore. Do you have any idea of the unrelenting stress she must have experienced every single day of her life?

CLOSE ON movie screen, Young Ada holds little Teddy tightly, rocks him as silent tears stream down her face.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

Drop the charges. She's been through enough. Prosecuting this woman doesn't serve anyone.

Dana's eyes don't leave the screen.

DANA

The media's already all over this. People will want justice.

ALEXIS

Justice? Put yourself where she's been for even a moment. Imagine this was your life. Imagine he was your child. Think of all the heartbreak, the struggling, the guilt she must have felt. Where's the justice in that?

Dana flips off the projector, faces her.

DANA

We're not in court, Ms. Martinez. Save your argument for the jury.

(MORE)

DANA (CONT'D)
She could have walked away. She
didn't have to kill him.

ALEXIS
Then make a deal.

DANA
No, no deals. She had a choice.
There's always a choice.

ALEXIS
You're not a mother, are you?

Turns the projector back on.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
Why don't you watch a little longer
and then tell me what her choice
was. I'll be expecting your call.

Her heels CLICK on the way out.

Dana watches the screen, then looks around the house, takes
it all in. Fumbles to turn off the projector, rushes out of
the house.

EXT. ADA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dana stumbles down the front steps, blinks in the bright sun,
takes deep breaths of air.

Directly across the street, Gina holds a garden hose, waters
her front lawn. Dana sees her, immediately collects herself,
walks quickly to her car.

She grabs her door handle, pulls her hand back. The car drips
with water. She looks over at Gina, who shrugs slightly and
turns away.

INT. DANA'S HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

Dana enters through the front door, hangs her purse and keys
on a wall hook. She speaks low into her cellphone.

DANA
It's not a good time, mom. I really
can't talk now.

She hangs up, lets out a deep exhale.

INT. DANA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dana's boyfriend, ETHAN (mid 30s) - looks like he would immediately be your best friend, as relaxed and easy going as Dana is controlled - watches ESPN on a split screen T.V., a laptop open next to him.

He looks up as Dana comes in.

ETHAN

Hey babe, you're home early. What a nice surprise.

DANA

Looks like you're in the middle of an article, don't let me interrupt.

Gives him a quick kiss, ready to head off, but he grabs her, pulls her in his lap.

ETHAN

You are a very welcome interruption.

Kisses her longer, slower. They break apart. She looks as though she wants to say something.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Everything ok?

DANA

Yeah, fine. I've got some case stuff in my head I need to work out. I'm going to change and go for a run.

She disappears down the hallway towards the bedroom.

ETHAN

(calls after her)

Do you want to go out after? Or I can order in?

DANA (O.S.)

In would be better.

ETHAN

Chinese? Or maybe Greek? There's that new place that opened up downtown. I grabbed a menu the other day, it should be around here somewhere.

He rummages through a basket under the coffee table.

DANA (O.S.)
You decide.

ETHAN
Or would you rather do sushi?
Unless you had it for lunch.

Dana emerges from the hallway in running clothes, gym shoes in hand.

DANA
Anything is fine. I'll be back
later, go ahead and order if you
get hungry.

ETHAN
I'll wait for you. It tastes better
when you're here.

She gives a little laugh, shakes her head, moves towards the front door. Halfway there, she stops, turns back around.

DANA
You're probably better than I
deserve, you know?

ETHAN
I love you, too. Have a good run.

She blows him a kiss.

EXT. CITY STREET - MOVING - DAY

Dana runs, drenched in sweat and near exhaustion. Rounding a corner, she enters a crowded park, turns on the speed, gives it everything she has.

A soccer ball rolls into her path. She swerves to avoid it, missteps, falls to the dirt.

A BOY (10) - has a prosthetic leg - runs over to claim the ball.

BOY
Sorry, lady! Are you okay?

She nods, hands the boy the ball, watches him run off; his prosthesis doesn't hinder him at all.

INT. DANA'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Dana sits at her desk with a glass of wine, types on a laptop.

CLOSE ON Dana's screen as she types in "autism". The screen instantly fills with thousands of results. She clears it and types in "down syndrome". The top bar of the results shows pictures of children and adults with the disorder.

Dana stares at the screen, absently chews a fingernail. Sound of FOOTSTEPS in the hall.

ETHAN (O.S.)
Hey babe, did you want to watch something?

She looks towards the door, her hand hovering to close the laptop if necessary, calls out:

DANA
Yeah, that sounds nice. I'll be right there.

Ethan sticks his head in, she keeps her hand over the screen.

ETHAN
Do you want some popcorn?

DANA
Uh, sure.

ETHAN
Two minutes, don't make me come back and get you. You've worked long enough today.

DANA
I promise.

He leaves. She looks back at the screen, CLICKS it off, finishes her wine.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Ada, dressed in jailhouse clothes, stands with Alexis at the defense table, Dana across from them, the JUDGE at the bench.

Ada looks drawn, coughs intermittently. Gina sits behind the defense table.

JUDGE

The court has recorded the defendant's plea of not guilty. I assume, Ms. Jeffries, you have feelings about bail?

DANA

The state requests remand, your honor.

ALEXIS

Your Honor, as Mrs. Wells is neither a danger to herself, nor to society, and has limited means, we ask that she be released on her own recognizance. Remand is completely unwarranted, not to mention just punitive on the part of the State.

DANA

Your Honor, the defendant did take the life of her own child. The people are concerned Mrs. Wells may be suicidal and request remand for her own safety.

JUDGE

While your concern is touching counselor, I'm not certain we need to keep Mrs. Wells locked up at this point. Is there a third party willing to take custody?

ALEXIS

Yes, your honor. A longtime neighbor and friend, Gina Gordon.

JUDGE

Is Ms. Gordon present?

ALEXIS

Yes, your honor. She's right here.

She turns around to indicate Gina, who stands up.

JUDGE

Ms. Gordon, do you promise to return the defendant to court when necessary and to assure compliance with any other conditions set?

GINA

Yes, your honor.

JUDGE

Very well. Defendant is released to the custody of Ms. Gordon.

The judge consults her court calendar.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Preliminary hearing is set for Monday, May eleventh, nine a.m.
Court is adjourned.

The judge raps the gavel. Gina comes around to the defense table, gives Ada a hug.

EXT. ADA'S HOUSE - DAY

Ada stands in her driveway, wears a black dress, very dated, gazes at her front door.

INSERT - FLASHBACK 1960

Young Ada walks up the porch steps, carries Teddy as a newborn.

YOUNG ADA

Are you ready to see your new home,
Teddy?

BACK TO SCENE

Gina crosses the street from her house, comes up behind Ada, touches her gently on the arm.

GINA

Ada? Are you ready?

Ada turns to her.

ADA

He was a good boy. I loved him more than anything.

GINA

I know.

She leads her to the car.

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

Ada looks down at Teddy's grave. Next to it, a tombstone bears Ada's name and birthdate. Gina and Alexis stand a few feet behind.

A PASTOR speaks briefly with Ada, then walks away. She turns to Alexis and Gina.

ADA

Would you mind terribly if I took a moment alone?

GINA

Of course not.

She gives Ada a hug.

GINA (CONT'D)

Take all the time you need. We'll be in the car.

ADA

Thank you. I don't know what I would have done without you. Both of you. You've been so kind.

Gina and Alexis walk towards the car.

GINA

I'm worried about her, Alexis. She seems so lost. And she's so thin now. She was always slight, but I think she's dropped ten pounds in the last couple of weeks. She barely eats a thing. Without Teddy to take care of, she hardly knows what to do with herself. Thank you for taking her case.

ALEXIS

Are you kidding? I would have taken it even if we weren't friends. You really care about her, don't you?

GINA

My mom used to always talk about Ada, how much she admired her for keeping Teddy at home. My uncle had cerebral palsy and my grandparents placed him in an institution, so I think that really struck a chord with Mom.

(looks back at Ada)

(MORE)

GINA (CONT'D)

The attitude towards people with disabilities was so different back then, Ada was kind of a pioneer I guess. What's going to happen to her, Alexis?

ALEXIS

I don't know. I find it hard to imagine a jury would put an eighty-nine year old woman in prison given the circumstances, but you never can tell. This case has the potential to stir up a lot of emotion. The prosecution certainly seems to be gunning for her for some reason. Thankfully her house has been cleared, so at least she can go back home.

Without warning, Ada crumples to the ground.

GINA

Ada!

They run to Ada, kneel down on the ground next to her. Alexis checks for a pulse.

ALEXIS

Ada, can you hear me? Gina, call nine-one-one.

Ada opens her eyes, reaches out a hand.

ADA

No! I'm alright. The heat just got to me. I just need to lie down for a while. Please. I'm fine. I just want to go home.

Alexis helps her sit up, checks her pulse again.

Gina runs to the car, dashes back with a bottle of water, hands it to Alexis.

GINA

Here.

Alexis helps Ada take a sip of water.

ALEXIS

Better?

Ada nods.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
Okay, let's get you to your feet.
Slowly now.

They hoist Ada to her feet, walk her to the car, help her into the back seat.

Gina shuts the door, turns to Alexis with a worried look.

GINA
Alexis, you've got to get the prosecutor to make a deal. Ada's not up for this.

ALEXIS
I know. I'll go talk to her again.

INT. DANA'S OFFICE - DAY

Dana holds her desk phone to her ear. A mail clerk enters, sets mail down in front of her; a familiar blue envelope is on top.

Dana sees the envelope and tenses, nods a curt thank you to the mail clerk.

DANA
Yes, thank you for your comments...I understand...Thank you very much.

She hangs up; the PHONE RINGS again almost immediately. She GROANS, lets it go to her voice mail, throws the envelope in the desk drawer with all the others.

She flips open the file in front of her, extracts a picture of Ada, studies it.

Alexis appears in the open doorway.

ALEXIS
Good afternoon. Mind if I come in?

Dana places the picture face down on her desktop, indicates the chair across from her. Alexis takes a seat on the corner of the desk.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
I'd like to ask you to reconsider a deal. My client collapsed today at her son's funeral. She's in no shape for a trial.

Dana's PHONE RINGS; she ignores it.

DANA
I'm sorry to hear that. She can
plead guilty. Avoid a trial that
way.

Alexis just looks at her.

DANA (CONT'D)
Okay then. Are you asking for a
postponement?

ALEXIS
No, Dana. I'm asking for a little
compassion.

The PHONE RINGS again.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
Do you need to answer that?

Dana picks up the receiver, sets it down with more force than
necessary.

DANA
Compassion? The same compassion she
showed her son? Sure. Let me just
figure out how I'm going to square
that with the dozens of disability
rights groups who won't leave me
alone.

ALEXIS
Ah.

She studies Dana, who automatically smooths her hair even
though it's perfect.

DANA
Was there something else?

ALEXIS
It goes deeper than just winning
this case, doesn't it? I recognize
it, that need for approval.

DANA
I'm sorry? What does that mean?

Alexis picks up a framed photo from Dana's desk, looks at it,
sets it back down.

ALEXIS

This office won't help with that. Harvey has a way of making you feel like you're not quite measuring up and before you know it, you've become someone you didn't want to be. I remember when this was my office. I was a lot like you then.

Dana straightens the photo to her liking.

DANA

Not to be rude, but I don't think you know me well enough to make that comparison.

Alexis walks around the office, inspects Dana's degree.

ALEXIS

I was the only one in my family who went to college, let alone law school. My friends from the neighborhood accused me of thinking I was better than them. When I changed my name from Alexjandra, they said I'd always be from the barrio no matter what.

Turns to face Dana.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

I was the only Mexican girl in my graduating class. Me, a scrappy, foul-mouthed kid from the streets of East L.A., graduating summa cum laude from Stanford Law. I had a lot of doubts about where I fit in, but I always knew what I wanted to do.

DANA

And what was that?

Alexis steps closer to her.

ALEXIS

Escape my past. I poured myself into my work. I thought if I could only work hard enough, long enough...sixteen, eighteen hour days, win every case, then I'd be good enough. Worthy enough. My past wouldn't matter. But I learned the past always matters, Dana.

(MORE)

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

You can't really go forward until
you take a look back. In law and in
life.

Dana's PHONE RINGS.

DANA

I'll be sure to remember that.
Thanks for the advice.

Alexis moves to the door, turns back around.

ALEXIS

Oh, by the way -- we'll be arguing
substantial capacity. Under the
circumstances, Ada couldn't
appreciate the consequences of her
actions. After the jury hears her
tragic story, I'm sure they'll
agree. Nice chatting with you,
Dana. Don't let this office, or
Harvey, eat you up.

She leaves. Dana chews a nail, stares out the door.

Harvey strolls in, Dana quickly pulls her hand away from her
mouth.

HARVEY

Was that Alexis Martinez I saw
leaving?

DANA

Yes.

HARVEY

And she didn't say hello? I'm hurt.
What did the esteemed Ms. Martinez
want?

DANA

To rattle me. Harvey, I'm concerned
about the strength of this case.
The confession is out, and as of
now, we only have two witnesses.

HARVEY

Do they both say she's guilty?

DANA

Yes, and I'm still waiting to hear
back from the medical examiner and
the psychiatrist.

HARVEY

Then that's all you need. Don't let Alexis get to you. She's a sharp lawyer - I should know, I taught her - but this case will likely be open and shut.

DANA

She's arguing capacity. Maybe we should offer a deal.

He removes a cigar from his suit jacket pocket, goes through the process of cutting and lighting it as he speaks.

HARVEY

Dana, do you know why I promoted you?

DANA

I assumed it was because I'm a hard worker who does a good job.

HARVEY

Because you're black or white. There's no middle ground with you, no shades of gray. Someone's either right or they're wrong. Guilty or innocent. "No Deal Dana", that's what they call you, did you know that?

Puffs on the cigar to light it.

HARVEY (CONT'D)

You don't allow yourself to feel any empathy for the criminal and that's what makes you a great prosecutor. You have the absolute courage of your convictions. You never waver, so the jury never does. It's why you're sitting in this office and it's why you're trying this case. Don't go getting soft on me now, Dana. I'd hate to find out I was wrong about you.

He blows a puff of smoke, exits.

Dana retrieves a bottle from a desk drawer, sprays room freshener in the air, then leans back in her chair, stares at the ceiling. The PHONE RINGS again, Dana exhales loudly.

INT. DANA'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT

Dana closes the front door behind her, sets down her briefcase. The sound of LAUGHTER floats in from the living room.

INT. DANA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dana enters to find Ethan with two other couples - IZZY and MARSHALL, and COREY and JAMES, all in their 30s.

They stand and chat, drinks in hand. Appetizers and plates adorn the coffee table. Everyone lets out a CHEER at the sight of Dana.

Ethan walks over to give Dana a kiss.

ETHAN

There you are!

DANA

I totally forgot, I'm so sorry I'm late.

(to everyone)

I'm sorry I'm late.

They move in to the group. Martin hands Dana a glass of wine.

JAMES

Not to worry, darling, we all know how hard you work. The least this slacker can do is keep us entertained in your absence.

INT. DANA'S LIVING ROOM (LATER)

The three couples sprawl on the sofas, board games on the coffee table along with dirty plates and half-empty glasses.

They finish a game of "CARDS AGAINST HUMANITY".

IZZY

Okay, final round.

(reads from a game card)

"What gets better with age?"

MARSHALL

You mean besides you?

JAMES

Ooh, nicely played.

IZZY
I just don't age, period.

MARSHALL
It's true, she's been twenty-nine
for six years now.

Izzy gives Marshall a playful backhand. Everyone looks
through their cards, reads their answers:

JAMES
"An ice pick lobotomy."

COREY
"Pre-teens."

MARSHALL
"Jennifer Lawrence."

Izzy gives Marshall a look, he shrugs.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
What?

IZZY
Okay, Ethan. What gets better with
age?

ETHAN
"Full frontal nudity."

Dana and Izzy groan, the men laugh.

IZZY
Ew!

ETHAN
I was saving that one. Dana, finish
us off.

DANA
Not funny, but it's the only card I
have left.
(reads)
"Yeast."

The laughter dies off.

DANA (CONT'D)
I know, not funny.

ETHAN
But kind of true, actually.

JAMES
Who won, Izzy?

IZZY
Who always wins? Ethan, of course.

Corey raises his glass to Ethan, everyone else CLAPS.

COREY
Here, here!

JAMES
It's always the nice ones you have
to look out for.

Ethan feigns being hurt.

ETHAN
Who, me?

Dana gathers up the cards. The guests finish their drinks,
stack plates and glasses, retrieve their belongings.

Dana stands with Ethan to see their guests out. Marshall pats
Ethan on the back.

MARSHALL
Another fantastic evening, my
brother.

Izzy gives Ethan a kiss on the cheek.

IZZY
Ethan, you are the best host. You
too, Dana.

COREY
Thanks again for the auction items,
Ethan. That training camp
experience is going to fetch a
pretty penny.

ETHAN
Happy to do it, all I did was make
a call.

COREY
Well, I appreciate it. We'll see
you both there?

DANA
(looks to Ethan for help)
Where was that?

ETHAN

Remember hon, the gala for
Alzheimer's in honor of Corey's
dad? It's next weekend.

DANA

That's right, of course. Sorry. It
depends on where the trial's at,
but I hope so.

COREY

Me too.

Hugs and goodbyes all around, Ethan waves as he closes the
door after all the guests make their way out.

INT. DANA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dana and Ethan sit up in bed, Dana rubs lotion on her legs.

ETHAN

That was a fun evening.

DANA

(non-committal)

Yeah.

ETHAN

What?

DANA

Your friends don't really like me.
They just tolerate me because of
you.

ETHAN

What? Babe, why would you say that?
Besides, they're your friends, too.

DANA

Not really, I gained them by
default. You knew them before you
met me. If you and I weren't
together, they wouldn't still be
my friends. Nobody likes lawyers.

He grabs her, pulls her onto the bed.

ETHAN

Well, I do.

He kisses her neck, tries to get her in a good mood.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
In fact, let me show you just how
much I like lawyers. This one in
particular.

They kiss more intently, he moves his hand up her thigh. She
rolls over to get up.

DANA
Hold on.

He tries to keep her in bed, she squirms out of his embrace.

ETHAN
It'll be okay this once, just leave
it.

DANA
I'll be right back.

She heads to the bathroom.

ETHAN
(calls after her)
You know, it wouldn't be the end of
the world.

He flops back on the bed, groans.

EXT. ADA'S BACKYARD - DAY

Ada sits at the patio table, a thick, plastic-covered book
open in front of her.

GINA (O.S.)
Ada?

ADA
I'm outside, dear.

Gina emerges through the sliding door.

GINA
There you are. Getting some fresh
air?

ADA
Yes. It makes me sad to be in the
house without Teddy.

Gina gives her a squeeze, sees the book on the table.

GINA
Is this his baby book?

ADA
Yes.

GINA
May I?

ADA
Of course.

Gina sits next to her, flips through the book.

GINA
Such a handsome boy.

ADA
You never had any children.

GINA
No. I have endometriosis and
couldn't get pregnant. I think
that's why I became a teacher. I
got thirty new children every year.

ADA
I'm sorry. So many expectations
around being a woman, being a
mother.

GINA
Yes, there are. That's why my
husband left. I couldn't give him
the son he wanted so badly.

ADA
That wasn't your fault.

GINA
He didn't see it that way.

Ada puts her hand on Gina's, they look through the book
together.

ADA
(points)
That's the only photo Teddy's
father ever took with him. He tried
to distance himself as much as
possible. I couldn't give him the
son he wanted either.

CLOSE ON a photo of young Ada seated with baby Teddy, an unsmiling man stands behind them.

ADA (CONT'D)

We were more alone when he was here than after he was gone.

GINA

What happened? Unless it's too painful to talk about.

ADA

There's nothing that can hurt me anymore. Jack, my husband, blamed me, just like the doctors did. He said I babied Teddy too much and that he needed to start acting like a "normal" kid, or else. I was afraid Jack might hurt him, especially after he'd been drinking.

(stares out, remembers)

One day Teddy woke from a nap screaming, he screamed for hours. Nothing I tried would make him stop. Jack flew into a rage, yelling he couldn't take it anymore and that it was Teddy or him. I guess he could tell by the look in my eyes what my choice was, so he left and never came back.

(turns the page)

I hated him for a long time, until I realized I didn't have the energy for it anymore. Sometimes I even felt sorry for him. I can only imagine what he experienced in the war, just to come home to another.

GINA

Are you sure you wouldn't rather stay with me?

ADA

No, thank you dear. I'm alright here.

GINA

Okay. I'll check in on you a little later. I've got lasagna in the oven for dinner, you'll join me?

ADA

That sounds wonderful, thank you.

Takes Gina's hand.

ADA (CONT'D)

You do such a beautiful job taking care of others. There's more than one way of being a mother.

Gina gives her a hug.

INT. OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY - DAY

Dana enters from the street, walks towards her office with a paper takeout bag. Her assistant runs up.

ASSISTANT

Dana! The M.E. called while you were out, says he's got fifteen minutes for you if you can get there before one.

Dana checks her watch.

DANA

Ah! Here, enjoy.

Hands the bag to her assistant, heads back the way she just came.

INT. MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE - DAY

Dana sits across from the MEDICAL EXAMINER, flips through the report.

DANA

What exactly is 'asphyxiation by helium'?

MEDICAL EXAMINER

Breathing in pure helium deprives the body of oxygen. If the body is unable to take in oxygen, it starts to die within minutes. Helium speeds up this process. When the gas fills the lungs, it creates a diffusion gradient that washes out the oxygen. In other words, each time the body breathes in helium, more oxygen is sucked out of the system.

(MORE)

MEDICAL EXAMINER (CONT'D)

The body's oxygen level can plummet to a hazardous level in a matter of seconds.

DANA

Could Teddy Wells have killed himself this way without any assistance?

MEDICAL EXAMINER

It is possible for someone to perform death by asphyxiation unassisted, but given Mr. Wells' substantial developmental disabilities, it's highly improbable he would have been able to do this by himself, or even agree to it.

DANA

So definitely homicide?

MEDICAL EXAMINER

Yes. The curious thing is though, helium is nearly undetectable in toxicological probes.

DANA

Meaning?

MEDICAL EXAMINER

Meaning if the defendant hadn't left the hood and the tubing out, I wouldn't have checked specifically for helium. With no signs of visible trauma on the body and no determinable cause of death, I wouldn't have ruled it a homicide. She have could have walked, so why did she confess?

Dana breaks the examiner's gaze to look back at the report.

INT. POLICE STATION - FRONT DESK - DAY

Dana approaches the desk sergeant, flashes her credentials.

DANA

I'm looking for Detective Raymond Curtis, is he available?

INT. ROBBERY-HOMICIDE OFFICE - DAY

Detective Curtis greets Dana.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
Ms. Jeffries, how can I help you?

DANA
Hello Detective. I'd like to see
the interrogation tapes for Ada
Wells, please.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
Of course. This way.

Motions for her to follow.

INT. DETECTIVE CURTIS' CUBICLE - DAY

Dana and Detective Curtis sit at his desk, a laptop open in
front of them.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
Looking for anything in particular?

DANA
Honestly, I don't know what I'm
looking for.

She watches the screen.

ADA (V.O.)
"I didn't want him to suffer."

DETECTIVE CURTIS (V.O.)
"Were you trying to make it look
like suicide?"

She presses pause, faces the detective.

DANA
The M.E. told me he wouldn't have
checked for helium if she hadn't
left the equipment out. It wouldn't
have been ruled a homicide. She
could have gotten away with it.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
It didn't appear she was trying to
get away with anything though. She
didn't try to hide it at all. She
gave us permission to enter and
search the home.

(MORE)

DETECTIVE CURTIS (CONT'D)
The hood, the tubing, everything
was in plain view. Her fingerprints
were clean, no attempt to wipe
anything off.

DANA
Would you find her guilty if you
were on the jury?

DETECTIVE CURTIS
I'm a police officer.

DANA
That isn't an answer.

DETECTIVE CURTIS
I've known Alexis, Ms. Martinez, a
long time. I was close with her
brother growing up, played ball in
school. I worked with her when she
was in your position.

DANA
Which means what exactly?

DETECTIVE CURTIS
She's good people. She only takes
cases she believes in. That's why
she didn't last in the D.A.'s
office. In all my years assessing
murder suspects, Mrs. Wells'
actions indicate she didn't believe
she had done anything that needed
to be covered up, so I'm guessing
the defense is arguing capacity.

DANA
They are.

He shrugs as if to indicate he agrees.

DANA (CONT'D)
I think I just struck you from my
witness list.

Gives her a sympathetic look.

INT. DANA'S OFFICE - DAY

Dana takes a bite from a sandwich, studies a brief. Harvey
breezes in with Alexis.

Dana swallows quickly, wipes her mouth, stands up.

HARVEY

Look who I found wandering the halls. Twice in one week. If I didn't know better, I'd say you were trying to get your old job back.

ALEXIS

You'll be the first to know, Harvey.

HARVEY

I'd love to stay and chat, but I've got a meeting. Go easy on this one, I don't want to lose another pretty face.

He nods his head at Dana, leaves.

ALEXIS

He's a peach, that one.

Dana does not respond; tries to wait her out, then:

DANA

Was there something I could do for you?

ALEXIS

No, I was in the neighborhood and thought I'd drop off our witness list in person.

Pulls a folder from her briefcase, hands it to Dana.

DANA

Thank you. I plan on reaching out to them.

ALEXIS

I'm counting on it. They're all more than happy to speak with you. I think you'll find what they have to say very enlightening.

She makes no move to leave.

DANA

Well, if that's all?

ALEXIS

That's all. Have a nice afternoon, Dana.

She leaves. Dana peruses the list, reaches for the phone.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH BUILDING - DAY

A staff member leads Dana down a hallway to an office, shows her inside.

MRS. MACCARIO (60s) - wears an American flag pin on her lapel
- stands and greets Dana, offers her a seat.

DANA

Thank you for seeing me. I know it
can be awkward talking to the other
side.

MRS. MACCARIO

Not at all, I've testified on both
sides. Facts are facts. What
questions can I answer for you?

DANA

You've been deputy director for the
Center for Health Care Quality how
long?

MRS. MACCARIO

Thirty-eight years. This year will
be my last.

DANA

Congratulations on your retirement.

MRS. MACCARIO

Thank you.

DANA

What exactly is the role of the
Center?

MRS. MACCARIO

We play a critical role in the
protection of patient safety by
evaluating health facilities,
agencies and professionals for
compliance with state laws and
regulations in order to license,
certify or register them.

Dana smiles at her, tries to win her over.

DANA

You've said that a few times, I
guess.

MRS. MACCARIO

Indeed. We also investigate complaints, compliance with federal laws and regulations, oversee the education, training and criminal clearance of nursing home administrators, assistants and home health aides. The abuse cases are the hardest part of the job.

DANA

I would imagine. How many complaints do you receive on average?

MRS. MACCARIO

Around six thousand per year. Physical and sexual abuse, sometimes patient to patient. Inappropriate use of restraints, medical or basic needs neglect. Patients going without food or lying in their own waste for days.

DANA

That's concerning.

MRS. MACCARIO

It's criminal. Most of the victims are not physically or mentally capable of speaking up or defending themselves, so if there aren't any living relatives to monitor their care, the abuse can go unchecked for years.

(shakes her head)

With budget cuts year after year, it's just not possible for us to reach every facility on a regular basis. It's sad to say, but the defendant's fears of her son being abused in an institutional setting were not unfounded or unreasonable.

DANA

In total, how many patients are there in the state? Approximately.

MRS. MACCARIO

A little over three hundred thousand.

DANA

So, six thousand out of over three hundred thousand, that's...less than two percent.

MRS. MACCARIO

Spoken like a true lawyer.

DANA

Still, less than two percent. That makes for a pretty small chance of being a victim of abuse, wouldn't you say?

MRS. MACCARIO

Did you know that less than one percent of our nation's military was killed in the Iraq war?

DANA

No, I didn't.

Mrs. Maccario turns a framed photo on her desk towards Dana; it is a young man in military dress.

MRS. MACCARIO

Less than one percent, that's a pretty small number, wouldn't you say? Unless of course that number included your child, then that's still too many.

DANA

I'm sorry for your loss. Thank you for your time.

She gathers her belongings, stands to leave.

EXT. OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY - DAY

Dana exits out onto the street dressed in running clothes, takes off towards the surrounding park at a fast pace.

INT. DANA'S OFFICE - DAY

Dana enters, flushed from her run, dabs at herself with a towel. Harvey sits at her desk, she startles at the sight of him.

DANA

Sir.

HARVEY

Apologies, didn't mean to surprise you. Just stopped by to see how the case was developing.

(takes in Dana's appearance)

Things must be going well, you have time to spare.

DANA

(tries not to sound defensive)

Running clears my head, helps me think.

HARVEY

Well, don't let me impede progress then.

He rises, moves towards the door.

DANA

Thank you, sir.

He exits.

She slinks down in the vacated chair, goes through her messages. Stops, grabs the phone, punches in numbers.

DANA (CONT'D)

Mr. Unger?...This is Dana Jeffries, from the District Attorney's Office. Thank you so much for returning my call...Today would work?...Four o'clock?...Yes, the address is in the file, thank you, I'll see you then.

Dana grabs her gym bag to change clothes and freshen up.

INT. DENNIS UNGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Mr. UNGER (early 60s) - with a kind but tired face - rises to greet Dana, they shake hands, he indicates for her to sit.

DANA

Mr. Unger. I appreciate you agreeing to meet with me, I won't take too much of your time. I see in the notes you have a brother with autism who lives in a group home?

MR. UNGER
Yes, my twin. Leo.

DANA
How long has he been in the group home?

MR. UNGER
This one? Four years.

DANA
There have been other placements?

MR. UNGER
Oh yes. Well over a dozen, probably closer to twenty by now.

DANA
I'm sorry, did you say twenty?

MR. UNGER
Yes, over the past forty years. My father passed away when my brother and I were only twenty-two. Heart attack. My mother couldn't handle Leo on her own. He was too big and too aggressive. She felt incredibly guilty about not keeping him at home, but her health was also failing. The stress was just too much.

DANA
I'm so sorry. Why was your brother moved so often?

MR. UNGER
Every time we'd visit there would be a new bruise, a missing tooth, sometimes even a cast. The staff would always dismiss the injuries as "self-inflicted" and tell us they needed to add another medication to the mile-long list he was already taking. Their way of controlling him was by keeping him incapacitated.

DANA
That's very unfortunate. I would have thought that kind of mistreatment is isolated, or rare.

MR. UNGER

Not from what I've seen. Leo has limited functioning and is completely non-verbal, and to be honest, caring for him is exhausting. Many of the staff work long, hard hours and are grossly underpaid. It's a recipe for disaster. It's easy to take out your frustrations on someone who doesn't have a voice.

DANA

But surely now, with all the safeguards and regulations, abuse can't just go unchecked.

MR. UNGER

It's always a concern for vulnerable populations. I know it's hard to believe if it doesn't directly affect you, but you don't think systems fail? Just read the news on any given day, it happens all the time. That lady, the one you're trying to convict? That'll be me in a few years, facing the same decision she did, because I'm the only one left to care about what happens to my brother.

He gives her a pointed look.

INT. DANA'S CAR - NIGHT

Dana parks outside her house, punches a button on her cell.

CLOSE ON phone in her hand, reads "MOM CELL".

Puts the phone to her ear. Sounds of a VOICEMAIL GREETING come through, then a BEEP. She hesitates, ends the call without saying anything.

INT. DANA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ethan sits on the couch, watches TV. The front DOOR UNLOCKS.

A few seconds later, Dana comes in, still in her coat. She drops her briefcase on the floor, crawls into Ethan's lap, curls into a ball. He turns off the sound on the TV.

ETHAN

Tough day?

She nods.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Do you want to talk about it?

She shakes her head, curls up even tighter. He nods to himself, loosens her bun, strokes her hair.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

I'm here.

She closes her eyes.

INT. GINA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ada and Alexis sit at the table, folders stacked on one end.

Gina clears plates; Ada's looks like it has barely been touched.

GINA

Are you all done, Ada?

ADA

Yes, dear. It was wonderful, I just can't eat much.

Alexis reaches over, grabs one of the folders. Ada coughs, takes a sip of water, smiles at Alexis.

ADA (CONT'D)

Down to business then. What happens next?

ALEXIS

Once jury selection is complete, we'll likely start trial the day or two after. We can go over some of your testimony now, if you're up to it.

ADA

Of course.

She continues to cough. Gina shakes her head at Alexis, out of Ada's sightline. Alexis picks up her phone.

ALEXIS

I'm so sorry Ada, I'm going to need to take this. We can talk tomorrow.

She moves off to another room.

GINA
I can walk you home, Ada.

ADA
Don't trouble yourself, dear. I'll
be fine.

GINA
No trouble at all. A little fresh
air will do me good.

She helps Ada with her sweater, they head for the door.
Alexis pokes her head back in.

ALEXIS
Good night, Ada. Sleep well.

Ada gives a small, tired wave as Gina opens the door.

INT. DANA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Dana sits on the edge of her desk in the near dark, watches
the news on a screen on the wall. She looks tired.

REPORTER (O.S.)
Jury selection concluded today in
the case of a South Pasadena woman
who allegedly suffocated her adult
son because he had autism. Autism
is a neurological condition...

She lowers the volume as CARTER (late 20s) - highly
efficient but perpetually anxious - enters with a stack of
thick files.

CARTER
Here are the briefs you wanted.

DANA
Thanks.

She stays focused on the screen, he glances at it.

CARTER
Looks like we made the news.

DANA
Mm hmm.

CARTER
Are you happy with the jury?

DANA

We'll see.

CARTER

It was surprising how many in the jury pool know someone with a disability. Probably close to fifty percent, wouldn't you say?

DANA

Something like that.

CARTER

There are a lot more disabled people out there than I thought. I guess it's the kind of thing you don't really pay attention to unless it happens to you.

She finally looks at him.

DANA

I suppose you're right.

CARTER

I guess we're lucky then.

DANA

Lucky? How so?

CARTER

I just mean it's good that we don't...I mean, well, you know what I mean.

She remains silent.

CARTER (CONT'D)

Okay, well, if there's nothing else, I'll, uh, see you in the morning.

He makes a hasty retreat.

INT. DANA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dana lies in bed in the dark room, stares up at the ceiling. Ethan is sound asleep beside her. She looks over at him, eases out of bed.

INT. DANA'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Dana sits down at her desk, turns on her laptop. Her fingers hesitate over the keyboard, then she types.

CLOSE ON computer screen as Dana types in "CHRISTOPHER MORELAND" and hits ENTER. Multiple listings and images pop up.

Dana scans the results for a moment, then SLAMS the laptop shut.

INT. DANA'S HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

Dana stares absently at herself in the mirror, chews a nail. Ethan enters with a travel mug of coffee.

ETHAN

You look great. You got this.

She takes her hand away from her face, turns to Ethan with a wan smile.

DANA

Thanks.

He sets the mug down on the hall table, rubs her shoulders.

ETHAN

Hey, you're not nervous, are you?
You never get nervous. Not my gal.

DANA

Do you think I did the right thing?

ETHAN

What do you mean?

DANA

Nothing, never mind. I'm going to
be late. Thanks for the coffee.

Gives him a quick kiss on the cheek, picks up the mug and her briefcase.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Several dozen people, many in wheelchairs, picket by the front steps. The protestors CHANT and carry signs that read "Remember Terry Schiavo", "Compassion & Choices", "Voice for the Voiceless", etc.

INT. TELEVISION NEWS STUDIO - DAY

A NEWSCASTER is on air:

NEWSCASTER

Opening arguments are underway today in the trial of Ada Wells, the eighty-nine year old woman who took the life of her adult son with autism. Disability rights organizations clashed with pro-euthanasia groups as they picketed outside the courthouse and emotions were running high. Some protestors were very strong in their views...

INTERCUT - COURTHOUSE/TELEVISION NEWS STUDIO

PROTESTOR #1

(speaks into microphone)

I'm the father of a severely autistic child. We have always gladly taken care of him and we always will. There is absolutely no excuse for killing an autistic person. Whatever the circumstances, there is no excuse, period.

NEWSCASTER

...while others were more undecided...

LADY ON STREET

(speaks into microphone)

I think the whole story is heartbreaking, just so sad for everyone involved. Caring for someone day in and day out for that many years...I just hope something good can come out of it.

NEWSCASTER

Jennifer Carr, an advocate for the right-to-die non-profit, Choices in Dying, spoke to our reporter outside the courthouse.

JENNIFER CARR

(speaks into microphone)

We continue to fight for a time when every citizen of this nation is free to live and die as they choose, according to their own values. This case does not exemplify the usual end of life decision for a terminally ill person, so we cannot condone the actions of the defendant. However, we do recognize that suffering is not limited merely to the physical body and can effect one's quality of life as a whole. Now more than ever, we need support systems for our aging population and for people with disabilities to avoid repeats of such tragic events as this.

NEWSCASTER

And prosecutor Dana Jeffries from the District Attorney's office had this to say:

Dana strides up the courthouse steps. A reporter follows, thrusts a microphone at her.

DANA

...condoning a crime of this nature is a lethal danger to the disabled population.

INT. COURTHOUSE - SECURITY CHECKPOINT - DAY

Ada and Gina pass through the metal detectors, head towards the courtroom. Alexis puts her briefcase on the conveyor belt.

Dana pushes through the front door, walks up behind Alexis, places her personal items in a bin. Alexis glances over her shoulder as she removes her jacket.

ALEXIS

We could have avoided all this.

DANA

The crowd outside seems to indicate otherwise.

ALEXIS

Is that what you're concerned about?

DANA

No, what I'm concerned about is what kind of message it sends if we allow people to murder other people with impunity.

ALEXIS

You know full well it wasn't "murder."

DANA

Call it whatever you want, but either way he's dead. If she really wanted what was best for him, she should have given him up. That was the right thing to do.

ALEXIS

I'm sure that will sound wonderful on the five o'clock news.

She steps through the detector.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Ada sits at the defense table with Alexis, coughs quietly into a handkerchief. Gina sits in the gallery behind them.

Dana and Carter occupy the prosecutor's table. The Judge enters from her chambers.

BAILIFF

All rise.

Everyone rises. The Judge sits, raises her hand.

JUDGE

Be seated. In the matter of the People v. Adelaide Wells, is the State ready to proceed?

DANA

Yes, your Honor.

JUDGE

Defense?

ALEXIS

Yes, your Honor.

JUDGE

We will now hear opening statements, beginning with the prosecution.

Dana rises from her chair, smooths her skirt, addresses the jury.

DANA

Euthanasia. Mercy killing. Assisted suicide. These phrases bring to mind terminally ill patients begging for someone to end their suffering. Despite what you may have heard or seen in the media, this case is not about that. Victim Theodore Wells was not terminally ill, clinically depressed or tired of living.

(looks at her notes)

Yes, he had autism, but that's not a rare disorder without treatment options. By some estimates, one out of every fifty-four people in this country have it. Look up autism on the internet and you can find hundreds, if not thousands, of resources, support groups, therapies, all available to help people and their families who live with this common disorder.

(gestures)

All the defendant had to do was simply pick up the phone and call one of them. Help was just a phone call away. Does that sound like a hopeless situation to you? Does that sound like a situation so bleak you would murder your own child?

(scans the jury)

No matter how "well-meaning" they try to tell you the defendant's intentions were, the fact is she planned and carried out the murder of her son. The victim's life wasn't worth any less because he had autism, and his mother had no justifiable reason for killing him. Murder is murder, no matter what, and that is what the State will prove. Thank you.

She takes her seat.

Alexis stands, walks to the jury box, leans in.

ALEXIS

Sixty-five years ago, autism was a completely misunderstood disorder. So much so, that it took Ada Wells nearly forty years to get a diagnosis for her son. For almost four decades, doctors told Ada that Teddy's condition was her fault, that she had done this to him because she was cold and unfeeling. A "refrigerator mother", they called her. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

(shakes her head)

Those doctors, even her own family and friends, told Ada to put her only child in an institution and walk away, forget he'd ever been born. Can you imagine? But Ada would have none of it. Instead, she dedicated her entire life to making sure Teddy knew he was loved and cherished. And she did this with almost no support. She lost her husband, her friends, her entire life as she once knew it.

Turns to give Ada an empathetic look.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

Ada lived confined within the walls of her home, giving up everything she wanted for herself. Sixty-five years of complete selflessness to protect her child. Sixty-five years.

She lets that number hang in the air, then returns to the defense table, squeezes Ada's hand.

JUDGE

Will the State call its first witness.

DANA

The State calls Dr. Martin Kressler.

Dr. Kressler steps into the courtroom, takes the witness box.

Dana straightens her notes, approaches the doctor. She glances out into the gallery, sees Ethan, who gives her a nod.

INT. DANA'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The table is set with flowers and candles, the lights are dimmed, soft MUSIC plays. The front DOOR UNLOCKS, FOOTSTEPS as Dana enters. Ethan pops out from the kitchen to greet her.

ETHAN

Surprise.

DANA

What's all this?

ETHAN

Oh, I just thought I'd give the warrior returning from battle a much deserved welcome home.

He takes her briefcase, sets it down, gives her a kiss.

DANA

I didn't know you were going to be there today.

ETHAN

You seemed like maybe you needed some support.

DANA

I'm fine. I was fine. But thank you.

ETHAN

Sit down, relax. Dinner's almost ready. Here, give me your jacket.

He removes her jacket, steers her towards the table. She sits, spots the glass of wine in front of her, takes a long drink.

INT. DANA'S DINING ROOM (LATER)

Dana and Ethan are at the table, plates pushed aside. Her shirt is still buttoned up, her hair still pulled back.

One wine bottle on the table is empty, Ethan reaches for a second bottle, moves to top off Dana's glass. She puts her hand out to cover it.

DANA

Not for me. I have to be in court early tomorrow.

He gets up, clears the dirty dishes.

ETHAN

Speaking of, you feel good about today?

DANA

You know I don't like talking about trial while I'm in the middle of it.

ETHAN

I know, but you're usually so fired up after a day in court, like there's electricity running through your veins. I kinda like it, truth be told.

He comes up behind her, kisses her neck, unbuttons the top button of her blouse.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

I'm not used to seeing you so low-key. Everything okay?

DANA

It's just a different kind of case, that's all.

He rubs her shoulders.

DANA (CONT'D)

If anything ever happened to you, if you couldn't take care of yourself, how you would feel?

ETHAN

What do you mean? Like, would I be upset?

DANA

Yes. I guess that's what I'm asking. Depressed. Hopeless. Not wanting to live.

ETHAN

Would I still be able to make love to you?

He leans down to nibble on her ear, she shrugs him off, turns to face him.

DANA
I'm serious.

He searches her face.

ETHAN
You are serious.

Pulls up a chair next to hers.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Okay, seriously. Life is great. I wouldn't want to die, even if things got tough. I think I could live with most things, if I was paralyzed or something like that.

DANA
You wouldn't be depressed?

ETHAN
I'm sure I would have low points, but who doesn't? Lots of people live with a disability and have very productive, meaningful lives. Remember that piece I did last year on the Paralympics? Those athletes can do more than most able-bodied people.

DANA
What if you were mentally disabled?

ETHAN
I don't know, I never thought about that before. What level are we talking about here? I wouldn't want to lie around in a vegetative state for years and years, if that's what you mean. That's why I have a D-N-R order. What is this about anyway?

DANA
But at what point do you make that decision to walk away? How long do you try before you give up?

ETHAN
I'm not sure. I don't think you can put an absolute on something like that.

(MORE)

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Everyone's situation is different. You might think you know what you'd do, but you can't really say until you've been there. I think you're right, one bottle of wine was enough. Come on, let's go to bed.

He stands, takes her hand. She gently pulls it away.

DANA

I'll be there in a bit. I have some work to finish up.

ETHAN

Always work. Don't be too long, I might pass out before you have the chance to take advantage of me.

Bends down to kiss her. She looks up at him, grabs his hand.

DANA

Thank you.

ETHAN

For what?

DANA

For putting up with me. I know it's not always easy.

ETHAN

It's not, but it's worth it. You're worth it.

He kisses her, their hands trail as he exits towards the bedroom.

She finishes the wine in her glass, contemplates the second bottle. Lets out a sigh and grabs it.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The judge enters from her chambers.

BAILIFF

All rise.

The room comes to its feet, waits while the judge settles herself. There is a sense of expectation in the courtroom.

JUDGE

Be seated. In the matter of the people of the State of California v. Adelaide Wells, court is now in session.

(raps gavel, looks at Alexis)

Counselor, please proceed.

ALEXIS

The defense calls Ada Wells.

Shuffling and whispering from the gallery as Gina helps Ada make her way into the witness box.

BAILIFF

Please raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

ADA

I do.

She sits, settles herself.

Alexis approaches the witness box.

ALEXIS

Good morning, would you please state your full name for the record?

ADA

Adelaide Marie Wells.

ALEXIS

Mrs. Wells--

ADA

(interrupts)

Please, call me Ada.

ALEXIS

(smiles warmly)

Of course. Ada, can you tell us about your son, Teddy?

ADA

Yes. Teddy was my first and only child. He was born four weeks early. I always said it was because he knew I couldn't wait for him to get here.

(MORE)

ADA (CONT'D)

My husband, Jack, was stationed in Vietnam at the time, so I drove myself to the hospital.

ALEXIS

That would be scary, having your first baby all alone. Besides being born a bit premature, were there any other delivery complications?

ADA

Yes. I was in labor thirty-two hours. Teddy was a breach birth and it was very difficult. I always wondered if that might have affected him.

ALEXIS

How did Teddy's development progress after that?

ADA

He was meeting some of his milestones at first, sitting up and crawling, but he never babbled, never cooed. He rarely smiled. He never seemed to look at you, it was more like through you. And he was so quiet in the beginning. He would get this far away look on his face, like he was locked away somewhere no one else could get to.

INSERT - EXT. ADA'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK

Young Ada holds 1 YEAR OLD TEDDY in the front yard, points up at the sky. JACK, Ada's husband, sits on the porch, beer bottles around his feet.

ADA

Look, Teddy! Look at the pretty bird.

Teddy does not look, makes no sound.

ADA (CONT'D)

Don't you see it? It's there, Teddy, right there. Look.

Jack throws a bottle to the ground, gets up in disgust and goes inside, SLAMS the screen door behind him.

ADA (CONT'D)
Just look, Teddy. Please. Look at
the pretty bird!

BACK TO SCENE

ALEXIS
Did anyone else notice or comment
on Teddy's behavior?

ADA
At first my family and friends told
me how lucky I was to have such a
calm baby, until they tried to hold
him. Teddy would scream and twist
away so violently, I thought he
would hurt himself if anyone
touched him besides me.

ALEXIS
How was he with his father?

ADA
Jack was overseas the first year of
Teddy's life, but then he was
injured in a training accident, so
he was discharged from the service
and came home. The pain from the
accident, he would drink to make it
go away. Things were difficult.

ALEXIS
Difficult how?

INSERT - INT. ADA'S LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK

Jack stumbles in the front door, clearly drunk. Little Teddy
sits on the floor, small toys lined in a row in front of him.
Jack approaches Teddy, pats him on the head, then picks up
one of the toys.

JACK
Hey buddy, whatcha' playing?

Teddy screams, repeatedly bangs his ears with his fists. Jack
gets in Teddy's face, yells:

JACK (CONT'D)
What the hell is wrong with you?
Stop that!

He kicks all of Teddy's toys. Teddy screams louder.

Young Ada rushes in, scoops up Teddy, attempts to console him.

JACK (CONT'D)
He's not my kid, he's freak! You
made him a freak!

He takes a swing at Ada, who ducks. He stumbles and falls.
Ada runs out with Teddy.

BACK TO SCENE

Ada coughs, pours herself a glass of water, takes a sip. Her
hand trembles slightly.

ADA
Finally, Jack left for good, our
friends eventually stopped coming
to visit, family died or moved
away. And then Teddy started
refusing to leave home. When I
tried to take him anywhere he would
bite himself or pull his hair out,
so we just stayed in after that.

ALEXIS
You were so alone, so isolated. How
did you survive, what did you live
on?

ADA
A few months after Jack left, the
police came to tell me he'd drank
himself to death. I started
receiving his benefits. Along with
my father's estate, it was enough
to get by on.

ALEXIS
What about human contact, someone
to talk to?

Ada finds Gina in the gallery, smiles at her.

ADA
I was blessed to have a neighbor,
Ruth, and her daughter Gina, who
looked in on us regularly, brought
us groceries. We had a doctor who
made house calls and our pastor,
Father Weida, also came by until he
got sick and passed away.

ALEXIS

So in sixty-five years, you had
contact with just four people?

ADA

(nods)

But I had Teddy. For every time he
was unreachable, he was also a joy.
He had a real sense of the earth,
loved tending the garden. Sometimes
he would lie down on the ground and
rub the dirt over him. I think it
made him feel connected to
something. He taught himself to
play the piano. He could listen to
a song on the radio once, then play
it back note for note. It was truly
a gift, the briefest glimpse of
what his life might have been like
if only...

She coughs again, quite uncontrollably. Alexis steps closer
to her.

ALEXIS

Ada, are you alright?

Ada nods, still coughing. Several jury members cast
sympathetic glances at her, Dana notices. The judge looks at
Ada with some concern.

JUDGE

I think that's enough for today.
(raps gavel)
Court is adjourned until nine a.m.
Monday morning.

People rise, make their way out.

INT. DANA'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Dana, still in court clothes, writes on a legal pad at her
desk. Scribbles furiously, drops her head in her hands.

Ethan comes in, steps behind her, puts his hands on her
shoulders. She startles.

DANA

I didn't hear you come in.

ETHAN

Still working? It's almost
midnight.

DANA

It is?

He pulls up a chair across from her, sits down, lifts her legs onto his lap.

ETHAN

You haven't even taken your shoes off yet.

He slides off her shoes, massages her feet. She tenses.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Hey, relax.

She leans back in the chair, they are silent for a moment.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Are you alright, Dana?

She sits up, pulls her feet away.

DANA

I'm fine. Why?

ETHAN

You've been on edge lately.

DANA

It's just the case.

ETHAN

Do you want to talk about it?

DANA

With a journalist? No.

ETHAN

It's me, remember? Your boyfriend? And I'm a sports writer, that's not quite the same. You're not sleeping with the enemy.

DANA

You're right. Sorry.

ETHAN

I have an idea. Why don't we take a break, do something fun this weekend?

DANA

I don't know. I have a lot of work to do, Ethan.

ETHAN

Just for a few hours. It's my niece's first birthday tomorrow. My sister is having a barbeque, it'll be fun. Do you good to get out for a bit, clear your head. Besides, she's my only niece and we've barely even seen her.

She hesitates, he nuzzles up to her.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Come on, just for a little while. We'll have some cold beer, gnaw on some ribs.

He leans in, bites her side in a playful manner. She laughs. He takes her face in his hands, looks at her with intent.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

It's good to hear you laugh.

DANA

Okay. You talked me into it. For a little while.

ETHAN

I'm hard to resist, aren't I?

He pretends to chew on her again, she shrieks in protest.

EXT. REBECCA'S BACKYARD - DAY

Tables and chairs are set up under canopies, balloons and "1st Birthday" party decorations everywhere. One table is piled high with brightly wrapped presents.

REBECCA (30s), Ethan's sister, holds a baby girl, SYDNEY, dressed in a tiara and a frothy pink dress, talks with an older couple.

Smoke rises from a corner of the yard. Rebecca's husband KEVIN (30s), wears a party hat, flips burgers on a large barbeque grill.

People mill about, chat, drinks in hand. Kids run in and around the adults with SHRIEKS of joy.

Ethan and Dana enter through the back gate. He carries a huge present.

ETHAN
(calls out over the noise)
Where's my little rock star?

Rebecca turns around.

REBECCA
Ethan!

Ethan sets the present on the table, Rebecca walks over to greet them. Ethan kisses her on the cheek, takes Sydney from her, kisses the baby all over as she SQUEALS in delight.

ETHAN
Here she is! What on earth has your mother dressed you in? You look like the birthday cake, not the birthday girl!

He pretends to nibble on Sydney.

REBECCA
Ha ha. She looks adorable.

She gives Dana a hug.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Dana, I'm so happy you could make it! We haven't seen you in ages. I know how busy you are though. We saw you on television, such a sad case!

Ethan shoots Rebecca a look, clears his throat.

ETHAN
Rebecca...

REBECCA
Oops! Not supposed to mention work, you're here to have fun. Let me get you two a drink. I'll be right back.

Ethan continues to play with Sydney, catches Dana's eye, grins widely.

Dana looks around at the partygoers. Her gaze lands on a family of three; MOTHER, father and a little girl, MOLLY, just beginning to walk.

It is apparent that Molly has Down syndrome. She takes a few faltering steps, lands on her bottom, laugh. Molly's parents cheer her on.

Rebecca returns with drinks, follows Dana's gaze.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Those are our new neighbors, I'll
introduce you. Isn't Molly just the
cutest?

Hands them their drinks.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Here you go, my secret Hawaiian
Punch. Definitely not the kiddie
version. Cheers! Now if Kevin
hasn't burned everything, I think
we might be ready to eat.

EXT. REBECCA'S BACKYARD (LATER)

Guests eat, talk. Dana and Ethan share a table with Rebecca,
Kevin and Sydney; Molly and her family at the table across
from them. Dana glances over repeatedly.

ETHAN
(pats his stomach)
Kevin, that wasn't half bad. I
think I might need another plate.

KEVIN
I think I might have to join you.

They head for the food table.

REBECCA
Time to get the cake! Dana, can you
hold her for a second?

Without waiting for a response, she hands Sydney to Dana; she
is visibly uncomfortable, unsure of what to do. She awkwardly
bounces the baby on one knee.

Sydney BABBLES and CLAPS her hands, which catches the
attention of Molly, who stumbles her way over to them.

Molly reaches Dana and Sydney, stretches out her arms for
Dana to pick her up. Dana looks around, ill at ease. Molly's
mother comes over.

MOTHER
Did you come to make friends,
Molly?

She picks Molly up, sets her on Dana's other knee. Dana
stiffens. The two children interact with each other.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Adorable, I have to get a picture.

She steps away. Molly turns her attention to Dana, touches her face and hair. Dana's eyes are frozen on hers.

Molly's mother returns, snaps a picture with her phone.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Say "happy birthday"!

Ethan approaches, smiles at the sight. Rebecca returns, scoops up Sydney.

REBECCA
Dana, who knew you had such a way
with kids!

Dana gives her a faint smile, hands Molly back to her mother.

DANA
Excuse me, I need to use the
restroom.

She hurries towards the house.

INT. REBECCA'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Dana sits on the side of the bathtub, bent over, her head in her hands. The doorknob RATTLES. She looks up, calls out:

DANA
Just a moment.

She stands, moves to the sink. Finds mouthwash and a paper cup in the medicine cabinet, rinses out her mouth. Catches her reflection in the mirror, her face is ashen.

EXT. REBECCA'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Dana gets into the passenger seat of their car as Ethan hugs his sister and niece goodbye. Rebecca makes Sydney blow kisses as the car drives away.

INT. ETHAN'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Ethan drives as Dana looks out the side window.

ETHAN
You've been quiet, you okay?

She does not look at him.

DANA

A little too much secret punch.

ETHAN

Yeah, it packed a wallop. It was great to see you loosen up for a bit though.

(puts his hand on her leg)

You were so cute with the babies, I think they fell in love with you.

She stays silent. He glances at her.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

I've never really seen you around kids before. What do you think?

DANA

About what?

ETHAN

About having kids. We've never talked about it.

She sits upright.

DANA

Yes. Yes we did. When we first got together. It was one of the reasons we were attracted to each other. We were both happy with our lives and our careers, and didn't want to change that.

ETHAN

Sure, that was what we wanted then, but that was a few years ago. People can change their minds.

DANA

I haven't changed my mind. I'm happy with things just the way they are.

ETHAN

So you don't ever want to have kids?

DANA

And now all of a sudden you do?

ETHAN

I don't know, Dana. We're just talking. But maybe there's more to life than working sixteen hour days.

DANA

I like my job. I like to work.

ETHAN

Yeah, I know.

DANA

What does that mean?

He pulls into their driveway, shuts off the car.

INT. ETHAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Ethan turns to look at Dana.

ETHAN

Nothing. It's just...you're so driven by work and only work. Maybe you should take some time to discover other interests, do other things.

DANA

Like have a baby?

ETHAN

It'd be fun trying.

DANA

Is that what you want? To have a baby?

ETHAN

You're so smart and strong and beautiful. Can't you just imagine what a perfect little baby we'd make?

DANA

No, and I don't want to imagine it. I don't want to imagine it at all. I can't have a baby.

ETHAN

You mean you can't get pregnant? We use birth control, so I thought...I'm so sorry. I didn't know that, Dana.

He moves to comfort her, she pulls away.

DANA

I just can't have a baby, I can't! Why are you bringing this up now?

ETHAN

I don't know, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. You just looked so beautiful holding those little girls today. It seemed so perfect.

DANA

Stop saying that! Stop it, stop it! I had a baby, do you understand? I had a baby and she wasn't perfect! She wasn't perfect! I tried and I couldn't do it! I couldn't be perfect!

She pushes open the car door, runs inside the house.

INT. DANA'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Ethan stops outside the closed door to Dana's office. He KNOCKS gently, then opens the door.

INT. DANA'S HOME OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Dana stands at the window with her back to the door. Ethan looks in.

ETHAN

Dana? Can I come in?

She doesn't answer or turn around. He takes one step in.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

You've been in here since last night. There's a pretty big elephant in the room. Can we talk about it?

She shakes her head.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

That's why this case has been so tough for you, isn't it? Why you don't ever talk about your family, why you moved thousands of miles away. Why you keep all your feelings bottled inside. Your baby...

She shakes her head again, slower this time.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Court is in session, Ada on the stand to resume her testimony.

ALEXIS

Ada, in your own words, can you tell us what happened the night of April twenty-fourth of this year?

ADA

It had been a good day, as close to perfect as a day could get for us. No meltdowns, no outbursts. The rain had held off 'til evening so Teddy was able to lie in the garden, feel the sun on his face...

INSERT - FLASHBACK - MONTAGE

- Teddy lies on his back in the garden. Ada watches him from the doorway.
- Ada runs a bath for Teddy, pours bubble bath into the tub. Teddy enters the bathroom, he wears a robe.
- Ada brings Teddy a dish of ice cream.
- Teddy gets into bed. Ada tucks him in, sits next to him, checks her watch.
- Ada picks up a cloth hood from the nightstand.
- Ada connects a tube to the helium tank, turns a valve on the tank.
- Ada sits on the bed with Teddy, holds his hand.
- Ada checks Teddy's pulse, strokes his hair and kisses his cheek, then lays her head on his chest and sobs.

- Ada removes a yellow balloon from a package and uses the tank to fill it.

BACK TO SCENE

ALEXIS

Ada, by your own admission, you're telling us you took your son's life. Why did you do it?

ADA

About a year ago I read an article about a woman who lived with her eighty-four year old mother, just the two of them. The woman was deaf, blind and mentally disabled. Her mother had taken care of her for many years, just like Teddy and me.

(takes a deep breath)

When the mother died at home, the woman crawled around on the floor, over her own mother's dead body, looking for food and water before she was finally found a week later. She was so traumatized, they had to put her in the hospital. All I could think was that could have been Teddy, all alone, unable to even walk out the front door for help.

ALEXIS

But Ada, there are state hospitals, residential living facilities. Why didn't you just find somewhere else for him to go?

ADA

Sixty-five years Teddy lived in that house with me. He knew every spot where the floor creaked, exactly how long it took the toaster to pop up, when it was time to plant the strawberries. That was his home, his sanctuary. It was where he belonged, where he felt secure, even happy. How could I take all that away from him?

Her voice breaks, but she keeps going.

ADA (CONT'D)

Where else in the world would they let him play piano at two o'clock in the morning if he woke up from a bad dream? Where would they let him lie in the dirt and take comfort from the earth? Where would they hold him and stroke his hair and tell him how beautiful he was, how truly beautiful? Where would he be safe? Where? Where is that place?

A juror fumbles for a tissue. Alexis waits a moment before continuing.

ALEXIS

Ada, did you also plan to take your own life that day?

ADA

I did.

ALEXIS

What stopped you?

ADA

I had to tell our story. I couldn't bear anyone thinking I took my son's life because I didn't love him, or because I thought he was a burden, or I was tired of taking care of him. Even when I was exhausted and sad and I couldn't understand what Teddy needed, never for a moment did I ever wish he wasn't my son.

Tears fall freely down her face.

ADA (CONT'D)

I'm not saying I never wished he didn't have autism. I wished that a lot, especially when he was young. It's only human to feel that way. You never expect to have a child with a disability, it catches you completely off guard, changes the way you think about everything. I hated watching Teddy struggle. It made me so angry, it was so unfair.

(MORE)

ADA (CONT'D)

But having Teddy in my life, even with autism, is always what I would choose over never having had him at all. How empty my life would have been without him.

Ada looks out into the gallery. In the front row she sees her twenty-four year old self with INFANT TEDDY in her arms, as she coos to him and lulls him to sleep, then brings him to her chest, kisses the top of his head, breathes deep in contentment.

Alexis steps closer to Ada, puts her hand on the rail of the witness box.

ALEXIS

Ada, on the day you took your son's life, did you believe at that moment what you were doing was wrong?

ADA

No.

ALEXIS

Thank you, Ada. No more questions.
(to Dana)
Your witness.

She walks back to her seat.

Dana stands, straightens her jacket, steps around to the front of the prosecution table.

DANA

Just so we're perfectly clear, Mrs. Wells, did you kill your son?

ADA

Yes.

DANA

And do you believe killing a person is wrong?

ADA

Under most circumstances, yes.

DANA

But not in your circumstance?
Because you didn't think your son
could adapt to living anywhere
else, a theory which you could have
easily tested while he was still
alive, but chose not to. Without
exploring any other options, you
planned and carried out the manner
of your son's death, you murdered
your son, because you, and you
alone, decided that your son's life
would be worthless without you.

ADA

All I can say to you is, everything
I've done in the past sixty-five
years was what I believed to be in
the best interest of my son, for
our situation.

(looks at the jury)

No one in this room can truly know
what that was. I realize though,
that you still have to judge me
from a place of law, or maybe your
own personal feelings, because
that's what keeps order and helps
you make sense of something like
this.

(looks back at Dana)

I never thought Teddy's life had
any less worth, any less meaning,
because he had autism. What I did
wounded me in a way I could never
make you understand, but I wouldn't
change it. It's all right, you do
what you need to do. It doesn't
matter what happens to me, I just
want you to see. We all have our
own peace to make in this world,
however we may find it.

Dana is silent.

JUDGE

Counselor?

DANA

No further questions.

ALEXIS

The defense rests, your Honor.

JUDGE

Does the prosecution wish to call
any rebuttal witnesses?

DANA

Yes, your Honor.

JUDGE

Then we'll resume after lunch.
Dismissed.

Raps her gavel.

INT. COURTHOUSE - ATTORNEY CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Gina opens a bag, takes out food. Alexis sits at the table,
reviews notes.

Ada stands at the window, looks down on the crowd of
demonstrators below.

ADA

All those years barely anyone knew
I even existed, now look at all the
fuss.

ALEXIS

You made people think, Ada. That's
never a bad thing.

Ada coughs; it gets louder and more insistent. Gina and
Alexis exchange glances. Gina brings Ada a box of tissue.

GINA

Here, Ada. Why don't you come sit
down, have something cold to drink.

She ushers Ada over to the table.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Court is back in session.

DANA

The State calls Dr. Monique Ogden.

DR. OGDEN (late 40s) - stylish appearance, walks with
authority - enters the courtroom, sits in the witness box.

The bailiff approaches.

BAILIFF

Please raise your right hand. DO you swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

DR. OGDEN

(raises her right hand)

I do.

DANA

Your Honor, Dr. Ogden is testifying as an expert in the field of autism.

JUDGE

Please state your qualifications, Dr. Ogden.

DR. OGDEN

Certainly, your Honor. I hold a PhD in Childhood Development, with postgraduate work at Harvard School of Medicine. My educational expertise is in the areas of Developmental Psychology and Developmental Psychopathology.

(sits back, crosses her legs)

I am the director of the Autism Clinic at the University of California, Santa Barbara and former co-director of the Marcus Autism Neurodevelopment Center in Atlanta. Additionally, I am a professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. I have worked with children with autism and their families for almost thirty years.

JUDGE

The court is satisfied Dr. Ogden has met the requirements of Rule seven-o-two. Any objections from the defense?

ALEXIS

No, your Honor.

JUDGE

You may proceed.

DANA

Dr. Ogden, could a person with severe autism, such as Theodore Wells, learn to adapt to a new environment after spending his entire life in the same house with the same caretaker?

DR. OGDEN

Yes, he could. It would take special consideration, someone to get to know him and how he communicates before his mother was gone, along with recreating a similar environment and routine in his new living space, but it most certainly could be done. People with low-functioning autism navigate their world almost like a movie with no soundtrack.

(gestures)

They don't want their routine broken because they are unsure how to restore the track. It would take some time, but with intense therapy, I'm sure it would not only be possible, but a highly successful transition in which he could thrive.

DANA

Just so I have it straight, in your expert opinion, as it relates to this case, Theodore Wells could have adjusted to living in a new home without his mother as his caretaker, and lived an equally fulfilling life?

DR. OGDEN

In my expert opinion, yes.

DANA

Thank you, Dr. Ogden.
(to Alexis)
Your witness.

Alexis smiles in anticipation.

Dana returns to her table, while Alexis remains seated.

ALEXIS

Dr. Ogden, do you work with many older autism patients?

DR. OGDEN
I have worked with them, yes.

ALEXIS
The key word there was "many".
Almost all of your work is with
children, isn't that correct?

DR. OGDEN
Children and teenagers, yes.

ALEXIS
You don't have a child with autism,
do you?

DR. OGDEN
No, I do not.

ALEXIS
Have you personally, as an autism
expert, ever come across a case
such as this, a man with severe
autism being removed from his only
home, his only family member, after
six and a half decades, and
continuing to thrive?

DR. OGDEN
I do not have any personal
experience with a case exactly like
this, but--

ALEXIS
(cuts her off)
Have any of your colleagues?

DR. OGDEN
I'm not certain, I would have to
check.

ALEXIS
Convenient. How about any case
studies? Read any of those? Sixty-
five years, same home, same
caretaker, moved him and he was
fine. Anything like that?

DR. OGDEN
There have been similar situations.

ALEXIS
Really? Similar how?

DR. OGDEN

I have worked with adults with autism after they were removed from their family homes.

ALEXIS

You have? How old were these adults?

DR. OGDEN

To my recollection, the oldest was twenty-three.

Dana bites the inside of her lip, a low MURMUR is heard through the courtroom.

ALEXIS

Twenty-three. That's not quite sixty-five, is it? Did these patients of yours still have living family members? Parents, siblings, loved ones to visit, monitor their care, take them home for visits and holidays?

DR. OGDEN

I'm not sure.

ALEXIS

You're not sure? Weren't these your patients, doctor?

DANA

Objection. Asked and answered.

JUDGE

I'll allow it. Please answer the question, doctor.

DR. OGDEN

Reflecting back, yes, they had family who visited.

ALEXIS

So even with all your expertise, you can't say with any degree of certainty that Teddy Wells would have been just fine. You can't say that he wouldn't have been utterly traumatized by the sudden upheaval in his life, unable to respond or communicate in any meaningful way.

(MORE)

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

You don't know, because you've never come across a single case study even remotely like Teddy's, have you?

DR. OGDEN

I can't say definitively, but based on--

Alexis stands, leans across the table and interrupts the doctor with force.

ALEXIS

Just answer the question. Yes or no, doctor? Do you have any actual experience with a case as extreme as this?

DR. OGDEN

No.

Alexis gives a dismissive wave of her hand, sits back in her seat.

ALEXIS

That's what I thought. I'm through with this witness.

JUDGE

(to Dana)

Redirect?

DANA

No, your Honor.

JUDGE

You may step down, Dr. Ogden.

She quickly leaves the courtroom, Dana does not look at her.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Does the State wish to call any further witnesses?

DANA

The State rests, your Honor.

JUDGE

Court is adjourned. We will reconvene at nine a.m. tomorrow for closing arguments.

The judge raps her gavel. People gather their belongings and file out, the noise level rises.

Dana stays seated. Carter speaks to her, but she isn't listening. She notices Ada looking at her and holds her gaze, then turns away when she realizes Carter is talking.

EXT. DANA'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Dana drives slowly down a residential street. She stops in front of Ada's house, turns off her lights.

INT. DANA'S CAR - NIGHT

Dana stares at Ada's house. Light shines from a front window.

Ada appears at the window, looks out into the night. The house goes dark.

Dana sits for a moment, then drives away.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The room is packed, everyone in position, except the judge. People fan themselves.

Dana dabs discretely at her forehead and upper lip with a tissue. Ada does not look well.

The judge enters, takes her seat.

BAILIFF

All rise. This court is now in session.

Everyone rises.

JUDGE

Good morning, be settled. As there are no more witnesses, we will proceed to closing statements, beginning with the prosecution. Are you ready to begin, Ms. Jeffries?

Dana remains standing as the rest of the room sits.

DANA

Yes, your Honor.

Dana turns to address the jury.

DANA (CONT'D)

Ada Wells committed murder. She told you so, right here in this very courtroom. She searched the internet, gathered the equipment she needed, selected the day and killed her son. No matter what the reasoning behind it was, no matter how sorry you may feel for her and what she has been through in her life, remember that she made a choice and that choice was murder. When you cut through all the emotion, all the heartbreak, you're still left with murder, plain and simple, and that is what you must find Ada Wells guilty of. Thank you.

She steps back as Alexis comes around the defense table.

ALEXIS

Some Buddhist teachings justify taking human life on the grounds of compassion in dire circumstance.

(picks up a book)

One text says:

(reads)

"taking life is unrepensible when it develops from a virtuous thought." Ada's only thought was that her son should die at peace, in the only place and with the only person he'd ever known, comforted and secure in her love, rather than lost and confused, alone amongst strangers.

(holds up the book, gently shakes it)

There was no malice, no deceit. No attempt to cover up what she had done, because there was no crime committed. On the day Ada took Teddy's life, she believed fully and completely that what she was doing was not wrong. In her mind, she was taking care of her son, just as she always had.

(moves closer)

(MORE)

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

John Steinbeck wrote: "There are those among us who live in rooms of experience that you and I can never enter." Ada Wells lived with her son in such a room, a room where none of us have ever been, for sixty-five years. Not because she had to, not out of obligation, but out of love...and her final act for her son was out of love too.

She takes a moment to let that connect, returns to her seat.

DANA

Rebuttal, your Honor?

The judge nods, Dana stands, steps right up to the jury.

DANA (CONT'D)

I don't think anyone here doubts that Ada Wells loved her son, that is not in question. But Ada Wells isn't on trial for not loving her son, she is on trial for killing him. Ada Wells thought her son would be better off dead if she were not around to take care of him, but that was not her decision to make.

(shakes her head)

Mrs. Wells had cared for her son all by herself and maybe that was part of the problem. Maybe by not seeking out others to share her burden, she in fact created the very situation she felt had only one solution, killing her own son.

(gestures)

Mrs. Wells told us there was no one else, no family, no one who would care for Teddy as she did. And maybe in the first few years of Teddy's life that was true. But now there are numerous organizations, agencies, schools, therapy centers, assisted living facilities, any number of places that would have taken Teddy in, given him the care and attention he needed, and even given her some of her life back in the process. Sadly, Ada Wells had no trust, no faith in these systems, based on what? Her intuition?

Sweeps her arm in Ada's direction.

DANA (CONT'D)

And that gave her the right to decide her own child would be better off dead? Perhaps if she had just let go of struggling alone and simply asked for help, none of us would be here today. I have no doubt it was frightening for Mrs. Wells to think of leaving her son to the care of strangers, but where then do we draw the line? At what point do we make the distinction of whether or not a life is worth living, worth continuing?

Takes a quick breath, keeps going.

DANA (CONT'D)

We talk about "quality" of life, as though it takes a certain amount of it for a life to be justified. Teddy Wells had music, he had art, he had his garden. By Ada's own account he was happy. This was a life that had value. Don't you think if Teddy could have spoken he would have said the same? Be his voice and return with a verdict of guilty.

She sits down, the judge's instructions to the jury drone in the background:

JUDGE

Members of the jury...

EXT. DANA'S OFFICE - DAY

Dana stands in the doorway, glances around at her books, her degree, her pictures. She walks to her desk, opens a bottom drawer, sifts her hand through the collection of unopened letters.

INT. DANA'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Dana sits at her desk in near darkness, still in work clothes, but for once they are wrinkled and in disarray.

A spot of light from a lamp illuminates one of the colored envelopes, open, with a letter and small picture next to it.

Ethan pokes his head in.

ETHAN

It's late.

Dana gathers up the letter and the picture.

DANA

I'll be there in a little bit.

ETHAN

Okay.

(pause)

Dana?

DANA

Yes?

ETHAN

You can talk to me. There isn't anything you can tell me that will make me love you less. You're safe with me, you know that, right? Sometimes you just have to let go and trust someone.

She does not respond. He waits, gives a small sigh, walks away. She lifts her hand off the picture, looks down at it.

INT. DANA'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

Dana sits in the same spot as the sun comes up.

INT. ADA'S HOUSE - FRONT HALLWAY

A KNOCK on the front door. Ada enters from the kitchen, her movements are labored. She opens the door to find Dana on the porch, dressed as earlier.

DANA

You don't have to speak with me. In fact, I shouldn't even be here and this will likely get me disbarred.

ADA

Is the verdict in?

DANA

No. This isn't about the case.

ADA

Come in.

Ada unlocks the screen door, pushes it open.

INT. ADA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Dana sits at the table. Ada pulls a WHISTLING kettle off the stove, crosses to the table and pours water for tea. Her hand shakes noticeably.

ADA

You know for years the medical community said I didn't love my son enough and that's what caused his autism. You're the first person who ever accused me of loving him too much.

DANA

I--

ADA

(waves Dana silent)

You may have been right in a way. I had held on for so long, I didn't know how to let go. Doctors always talked about Teddy like he was broken and needed to be fixed. I was afraid of what that meant. I really did believe I was the only one who would ever truly care about him and know what he needed.

DANA

And so you just accepted it, it was just that easy?

ADA

Oh no, it was never easy. I was depressed, I was angry. Sometimes after Teddy would finally fall asleep I would scream into a pillow until I had nothing left. I was angry at my husband for not even trying to understand, angry at my family for not being there for me.

(blows on her tea)

I wondered what I had done to deserve it. Then I used to feel guilty, until I realized none of it was a reflection on who I was as a person or my ability to be a good mother.

DANA

Did you ever have any doubts about your feelings? For Teddy?

ADA

My sister asked me once if I found it difficult to love Teddy. I told her it's only the disability you struggle to embrace, not the child.

Dana removes the colored envelope from her purse, opens it.

DANA

I asked my parents never to send anything after I left, but they did anyway. Frequently. All these years, I never opened any of them though. I don't know why I did now.

Dana takes the picture out of the envelope.

DANA (CONT'D)

I told them after I left I never wanted to talk about it.

She pushes the picture across the table to Ada. Ada picks it up.

CLOSE ON a school picture of a little girl. She is about seven years old and has Down syndrome.

Ada studies the picture, then looks at Dana.

ADA

This is your child.

DANA

I haven't seen her in almost seven years, since she was five months old. She was born with a hole in her heart, common for babies with Down syndrome. The pregnancy wasn't planned. I was twenty-four, my fiancé Chris and I were both in our last year of law school. Those first few months were just a blur. Doctor's appointments, tests, people constantly in and out. I was still trying to study in the midst of it all so I could graduate. Pretending I could keep it all together and that everything was just perfect.

Dana takes a sip of tea.

DANA (CONT'D)

Chris was so thrilled to be a dad. He was an only child, adopted, and family was everything to him. He didn't seem at all concerned about her disabilities, she was just his beautiful little girl. It made me feel like something was wrong with me for feeling so cheated.

INSERT - HOSPITAL ROOM - FLASHBACK

Dana stands back in a corner of the room. Her fiancé, CHRIS (mid 20s) bends over the bed, strokes the hair of a baby girl as a nurse removes wires and tubes from her.

A doctor speaks to Dana and Chris. Chris nods at the doctor, Dana stares off into space, chews a nail.

The nurse smiles at Chris, then wheels the baby out of the room. Chris and the doctor follow, Dana remains rooted. She looks around the room at all the cards, flowers and stuffed animals, her gaze lifts to a floating bouquet of "Get Well!" balloons.

Dana crosses over to the window takes a small stuffed cat and walks out.

BACK TO SCENE

Dana stares into her cup.

DANA

I sat there in the waiting room while she was having surgery and thought, maybe she'll die, maybe she'd be better off. Maybe I'd be better off. What kind of person has those thoughts about their own baby? I wasn't worthy of being a mother. I felt guilty, and ashamed, and lost. I was angry at myself and angry at Chris because he seemed so unaffected by it all and I really needed someone to talk to. Someone who would tell me it was okay to feel this way. Someone who wouldn't judge me for wanting back the life I'd lost.

Dana looks up at Ada.

DANA (CONT'D)

But I didn't have that, so I just walked out. I walked out of that hospital and I never went back, not to see if my daughter survived, not even to see my parents again. I couldn't, I couldn't face anyone. I was a coward, a failure as a mother. I was as far from perfect as I could possibly get. I didn't know how to love my own daughter, and here I've been in court trying to judge you. I'm so sorry, Ada. I don't know why I put you through this. I think I wanted so desperately to prove leaving your child to someone else was the right thing to do because it meant that I made the right choice too.

Ada closes her eyes.

INSERT - CONTINUOUS

Ada sees herself standing side by side with Teddy as he lets a yellow balloon drift up towards the shining sun.

BACK TO SCENE

Ada opens her eyes, looks closely at Dana.

ADA

There is an enormous sense of loss that comes with being the parent of a child with a disability. It never fades, but in time you learn to live with it. Life grows in and up around it, even though it waits below the surface and bubbles up just when you think you've forgotten it. But that part of you that feels that pain, or confusion, or resentment, that's the same part of you that feels love and tenderness and care.

She picks up the picture, looks at it, then puts it back on the table and slides it over to Dana.

ADA (CONT'D)
Not all choices are permanent.

She removes her hand from the picture and places it on top of one of Dana's.

ADA (CONT'D)
Do you realize in telling me your story not once did you ever speak your daughter's name?

Dana looks at the picture.

DANA
(almost a whisper)
Maddie.

Dana looks up at her.

DANA (CONT'D)
Her name is Maddie.

Her eyes well with tears.

INT. DANA'S OFFICE - DAY

Dana reads at her desk, she is dressed in court attire. The desk phone RINGS. She picks it up, listens.

DANA
I'm on my way down.

She hangs up, grabs her briefcase, yells as she hurries out:

DANA (CONT'D)
Carter! Verdict's in!

Her door SLAMS shut.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Everyone is present except for Alexis and Ada. Dana glances over at the empty defense table and checks her watch.

Alexis enters the courtroom, walks to the front. Her usual energy is missing.

ALEXIS
Permission to approach, your Honor?

JUDGE
(waves)
Counselors approach.

Dana joins Alexis in front of the bench. Alexis speaks in a low voice, the judge nods. Dana and Alexis return to their seats.

JUDGE (CONT'D)
Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury,
thank you for your service. This
case has been dismissed and you are
hereby released from duty.

There is a MURMUR about the courtroom. The jurors look at one another confused, gather themselves to leave.

Dana approaches Alexis.

DANA
When did she die?

ALEXIS
Sometime last night. An autopsy's
pending, but she'd probably been
ill for several months. She knew it
was her time.

DANA
Was she alone?

ALEXIS
Not completely. She was in the
garden. Looked like she just laid
down and went to sleep. In a
hollowed out spot a little bigger
than she was. Where Teddy used to
lay.

DANA
I just saw her...

Alexis gives her a questioning look.

DANA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry I didn't offer you a
deal.

Alexis nods and walks away. The last jury member steps down from the jury box. Dana calls out:

DANA (CONT'D)
Wait!

She rushes over.

DANA (CONT'D)
What was the verdict?

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

Alexis and Gina stand by Ada's grave site, a reverend reads from the Bible.

Dana approaches but keeps her distance, stands off to one side.

The reverend finishes, the casket is lowered into the ground.

Alexis and Gina hug. Alexis notices Dana, says something to Gina and breaks away.

Dana watches as Alexis walks towards her.

ALEXIS
I was hoping you might be here.

She pulls an envelope out of her purse.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
She left this for you.

Dana takes the envelope from her, their eyes meet.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
Take care, Dana.

Alexis rejoins Gina, they walk towards a waiting Town Car.

Dana walks over to Ada's grave, takes a flower from a wreath.

DANA
Rest in peace, Ada.

She places the flower atop the casket.

INT. DANA'S CAR - DAY

Dana sits, parked in front of Ada's house. There is a moving van in the driveway, a government car parked behind it.

She watches movers load furniture into the van.

INT. ADA'S - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dana enters from the front hallway, looks around the room. Moving boxes are everywhere, laden with Ada's possessions. She crosses to the piano, picks up a framed photo.

CLOSE ON a photo of young Ada holding Teddy as a toddler, a rare photo of both of them smiling into the camera.

Sets the picture back on the piano, walks over to the sliding glass door, looks out at the garden. She opens the door.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Dana steps out, glances around. Her eyes land on the hollowed out spot in the garden.

She crosses to the spot, kneels down. Presses her hand to the earth, closes her eyes.

A court appointed ADMINISTRATOR for Ada's estate appears in the doorway.

ADMINISTRATOR

Can I help you?

Dana stands up, whirls around.

DANA

I'm from the D.A.'s office.

The administrator just stares at Dana.

Dana fishes in her purse, produces her credentials.

DANA (CONT'D)

I need to finish some paperwork in regards to the legal proceedings. I won't be long.

The administrator peers at Dana's identification.

ADMINISTRATOR

Take your time. We'll be sorting through this junk for a while.

Disappears back inside, Dana follows.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dana re-enters from the backyard. She takes the photo from the piano, looks at it, and brings it to her chest.

She glances around the room one last time, walks to the front door, takes the photo with her.

INT. DANA'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Dana sits at her desk, Ada's unopened letter and the framed photograph she took from Ada's house in front of her. She opens the letter and reads.

A range of emotions play across her face, she struggles to rein them in. Finally, she can no longer hold back and breaks down, sobs as she gets to the end of the letter.

INT. DANA'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT

The front door opens. Ethan enters, hangs up his jacket. He hears CRYING, calls out:

ETHAN

Dana?

Hurries towards the back of the house.

INT. DANA'S HOME OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ethan rushes in, kneels in front of Dana's chair. Still clutching the letter, she dissolves in his arms. She clings to him as they sink to the floor, he rocks her.

CLOSE ON Dana's laptop screen, open to a social media account for "Christopher Moreland". There are multiple photos of a man with a young girl with Down syndrome.

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

Ethan's car pulls up in the departure lane, stops. Ethan exits the driver's side, steps back to the trunk, removes a suitcase.

Dana exits the passenger side, stands on the curb. Her hair is loose, flowing and she is dressed in a sundress and sandals.

Ethan brings the suitcase to her, they kiss.

ETHAN

I love you.

DANA

I love you, too.

She takes the suitcase, walks into the airport.

INT. AIRPLANE- DAY

Dana boards the plane, finds her seat, settles herself. The flight crew prepares for take off.

She leans back in her seat, pulls a small stuffed cat out of the pocket of her sweater, holds it in her lap. Closes her eyes as the plane shuttles down the runway.

MONTAGE - DURING ADA'S VOICE-OVER

- - The plane lands.
- - Dana walks through the airport.
- - Dana rents a car.
- - Dana drives through the suburbs.
- - Dana pulls into the parking lot of a ball field.

ADA (V.O.)

When you're going to have a baby,
it's like planning a fabulous trip -
to Italy. You buy a bunch of
guidebooks and make your wonderful
plans. After months of eager
anticipation, the day arrives. You
pack your bags and off you go. The
stewardess comes in and says
"Welcome to Holland." Holland?!?
you say. What do you mean
'Holland'? I'm supposed to be in
Italy. All my life I've dreamed of
going to Italy. But there's been a
change in the flight plan. They've
landed in Holland and there you
must stay. The important thing is
they haven't taken you to a
horrible, disgusting, filthy place.
It's just a different place. So you
must go out and buy new guidebooks.
And you must learn a whole new
language. And you will meet a whole
new group of people you would have
never met. It's slower paced than
Italy, less flashy than Italy.

(MORE)

ADA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills and Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts. But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy. And for the rest of your life you will say, "Yes that's where I was supposed to go." And the pain of that will never, ever, ever, ever go away because the loss of that dream is a very significant loss. But if you spend your life mourning the fact you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things about Holland.

EXT. BALL FIELD - DAY

Softball game in progress; Challenger League for children with a range of special needs. Some kids are in wheelchairs, some cannot speak or see, but everyone is having a great time. Parents in the stands CLAP enthusiastically.

Dana exits the rental car, watches the game. A big CHEER erupts as a child gets a hit and their "buddy" pushes the wheelchair to first base. She starts towards the stands.

Behind the backstop, Chris kneels next to MADDIE (7). He sees Dana approach, stands up. As she gets closer, he puts a protective arm around Maddie.

Dana stops a few feet away. Chris speaks to Maddie, then walks forward to Dana.

CHRIS

I didn't believe your mom when she said you were coming. You have no right to be here, not after all this time. What makes you think you can walk back in here like nothing happened?

DANA

Something did happen.

CHRIS

What does that mean? Why are you here? What do you want?

DANA

I made a mistake, a terrible mistake, because I didn't know who I was and I didn't believe in myself. I didn't think I could be a mother, or a good one anyway, so I did what I thought was best for everyone. I failed you and I failed our daughter. I don't expect you to forgive me.

She spots Maddie running towards them.

DANA (CONT'D)

But maybe she can.

Maddie runs up to Chris.

MADDIE

Daddy! It's almost my turn.

CHRIS

Okay, sweetheart. I'll be right there.

Maddie looks at Dana.

MADDIE

Hi!

DANA

Hello.

MADDIE

Are you here to watch the game?

Dana looks at Chris.

DANA

Would that be all right?

MADDIE

Sure! Are you for the home team or the away team?

DANA

I think home.

MADDIE

That's my team!

She takes Dana's hand.

MADDIE (CONT'D)
Come on, I'll show you where to
sit.

She leads Dana towards the stands.

Dana turns to look back at Chris, tears in her eyes.

He puts up a hand and shakes his head, as if to acquiesce,
makes no move to stop them.

Maddie continues to talk:

MADDIE (CONT'D)
That's a really pretty dress. Your
hair color is just like mine. Do
you have any pets? We have two cats
and a hamster. My name's Maddie,
what's yours?

Chris watches them walk away.

FADE OUT.

THE END

Credits:

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