

OnlyFans Girl: Chapter 455-480

By BreaktheBar

Chapter 455

You thankfully arrived at your place before Eric was supposed to get there. Imagining the awkwardness between Eric and Mosche if Eric had to wait for the three of you was almost painful and you couldn't imagine the damage to the universe that would be caused. Would Mosche be convinced by Eric to join his slightly misogynistic red pill stuff, or would Eric think that doing standup would be a good idea?

Mosche was home when the three of you got in, but Iris wasn't with him. He said she had 'family stuff' on Sundays and you didn't ask about him going to said 'family stuff' if he was Iris's boyfriend - either it was too early, or she didn't want her family to know about him. Both options seemed pretty valid. Mosche did, however, ask if he could hang out with you guys after you told him you were having a final study and prep session for a big work thing.

"Um," you said. "I... don't think so, my man. This is a *really* big deal for us and we need to stay focused."

"Oh, OK," he said and then let out a long sigh. You knew he wasn't doing it on purpose - Mosche was just too simple to be manipulative on purpose, he'd only accomplish it through *not* thinking about what he was doing - and yet somehow you still felt a little guilty about him being lonely.

"I'll tell you what," you said. "We'll probably order some dinner in, and what shows up you can join us for a bit to eat."

"OK," he said. "I guess I'll do some joke writing, and then I can try them out on you guys."

"...Sure," you said, already regretting the offer. "That should be fun."

Gemma and Sabrina had headed to your room rather than having a big interaction with Mosche. Even after the multiple times they'd interacted with him since the fallout with Tasha they were holding a bit of grudge stance against him.

"OK, we need to talk about something," you said as you entered the bedroom.

Gemma was sitting on the edge of the bed sorting files she'd pulled out of one of the bags you'd carried everything in, and Sabrina was at the desk doing the same. They both looked up at the tone of your voice, frowning slightly. "What's wrong?" Sabrina asked.

"I need to get clarity on something here," you said. "And it's how we feel about holding onto grudges. Which isn't healthy. I mean, it would be one thing if Mosche had actively hurt one of us, or was continuing to do so - a great example of which is Joy. But Mosche isn't... malevolent. He isn't acting out. And I'm not saying you have to like him, or even go out of your way to interact with him, but you two barely grunted hello before you disappeared back here. So I need to know if, as we go through life, this is the sort of stuff I need to expect?"

"John, he hurt Tasha *badly*," Gemma said.

"Did he do it on purpose?" you asked back.

Both of your girlfriends made slight faces at that.

"Seriously," you said. "Do you think he did it on purpose, maliciously and with intent, or do you think he did it because he's a gross cocktail of anxiety, self-deprecation, low confidence and weird sexual questions? Because if it *was* malicious I can see putting up some major walls, because that's some evil shit. But if it wasn't malicious, then I'm not saying we need to forgive and forget, but we should probably figure out a more mature way of handling it than what's happening now because you two are the ones coming off as rude and catty."

Sabrina was clenching her jaw, and she looked from you over to Gemma and then back at you. "Can we... have a minute? To talk?" she asked you.

You exhaled, realising you'd been holding some anxiety of your own in your chest. "Yeah, of course," you said. "Here, I'll take those files out to the table and get them set up. Just text me when to come back."

Taking the files, you left them in the bedroom and did exactly what you said - while trying your damndest not to think about the confrontation you'd just kind of sprung on them. It didn't feel like a fight, but it felt *more* like a fight than one of your usual little arguments that were good-natured and full of teasing or ribbing and could lean lawyer-y. Those were always about superficial things and you all knew it.

You had finished with the files and were starting to wonder if Eric would get there before the girls called you back, but the text came through first. You headed back to your bedroom and found both Gemma and Sabrina sitting on the edge of the bed now.

"OK," Gemma said when you closed the door. "So, we talked. And... you're right. We were kind of being dicks to Mosche when we came in. And you're also right that holding grudges isn't healthy."

"But we also don't want to be *friends* with him anymore," Sabrina said. "We're firmly on Tasha's side of things, even if he didn't do it on purpose. We don't want to be friends with someone who acts the way he does, whether it's on purpose or not. Mosche isn't an evil guy, but he became a

bad guy to us through his actions. We don't want to do the same back, so we'll make sure we're being civil."

"Thank you," you said.

"And you were right about grudges in general," Sabrina continued, then took a breath and let it out. "It's not healthy. But Gemma and I agree that somehow we have, like, *actual* enemies from this summer. Joy and Lucy are both more than just people we don't want to associate with. But we can't let everything going on make us feel like it's OK to be..."

"Cunts," Gemma said bluntly. "We can't start acting like cunts to just anyone."

You had to take a breath, not sure how to respond. "... " you said, then exhaled and shook your head. "Thank you," you said again.

They both got up and came to you, and the three of you had a long hug as you held each other.

You'd brought up something important, even if it was critical, and they'd absorbed it, talked about it, and processed it.

Was this being an adult?

Chapter 456

Eric was knocking on the apartment door not too long after your big throuple hug ended, and you, Gemma and Sabrina went out to let him in and get everything sorted. The various piles of files covered the kitchen table - one of the jobs for that day was organising and setting up redundant files so that you could keep the most relevant likely items handy while also having everything else available for fast reference if the opposition popped a surprise on you.

There wasn't any small talk when Eric first got there, the four of you got straight to work getting him up to speed on what you'd been doing with the case over Saturday. He'd spent his time helpfully as well, roughing out various pieces of a closing statement so that it could be mixed and matched depending on where the case went and how you felt things needed to be presented.

After a couple of hours of just reviewing everything, the four of you took a quick break as you brought out some beers that you'd had in the fridge.

"So, anything new with your new girlfriend?" you asked Eric as you all sighed and sipped your drinks.

"We aren't, like, putting a *label* on it," Eric said. "Casey and I are seeing each other."

"How do you see each other living hundreds of miles apart?" Sabrina asked. "And you've met, like, twice?"

"Three times, though two of those were in the same weekend I guess," Eric said. "Um, I dunno. We send flirty texts back and forth all the time. I bought her dinner last night."

"Wait, like, remotely?" Gemma asked.

"Well, yeah," Eric said. "It's not like I could reasonably get down to Miami for the night, but I still wanted to treat her."

Gemma and Sabrina glanced at each other and then looked back at Eric. "Are you sure she's not just taking advantage of you, Eric?" Sabrina asked. "That kinda sounds... I dunno."

"Hey, an Alpha guy takes care of his lady," Eric said. "Even if they're apart. She texts me when she's going out, and when she gets home safe, I try and spoil her a little with dates to show her I'm interested and she's my Number One."

You wanted to ask how that stuff was different from being a controlling simp - someone who shoved money at a woman and then expected some sort of position in their life - but you kept your mouth shut. Eric had his view of the way dating was supposed to work based on all the podcasts and stuff he listened to, and you weren't likely to change his mind any time soon.

The good news was that, by not questioning him, you didn't interrupt him from his next piece of juicy news.

"Oh, and I met up with Lucy again," Eric pivoted the conversation.

"What?" Sabrina asked, her eyebrows rocketing up in surprise.

"Why?" Gemma scoffed.

"She had some of my stuff, and had left a couple things at my place," Eric said, waving them off. "It wasn't a big deal. She came to my place."

"Did you get your stuff back whole?" Gemma asked. "I could see her being the kind of girl to, like, rip holes in your sweater or something out of spite."

"Um, I don't think she did that, but I guess I didn't check," Eric said.

"Eric," Sabrina said, looking at him seriously. "Did you two fuck?"

He actually had the decency to blush.

"Eric," you groaned. "Nooo."

"You cheated on Casey?" Gemma glared at him.

"Whoa, hold on," Eric said, holding up his hands defensively. "First off, it was breakup sex. Second, Casey had already told me that if the opportunity came up that I should do it for closure. And third, I mean, Lucy *is* super hot even if she's crazy."

You groaned. Gemma facepalmed. Sabrina sighed heavily. "Please tell me you used a condom," she said.

"Well, yeah, of course," Eric said. "It's not like I'd let her baby trap me or something. Plus, she's doing that whole gross sugar baby thing."

"OK," Sabrina said. "That's good. At least you were careful."

"Well, the first time," Eric said.

That got a whole new round of groans from you.

"I'm joking!" Eric said. "Joking. It was just once."

The four of you got back to work, and you tried not to think about Eric having sex with Lucy yesterday. Gemma was running her lines for the Opening Statement, and you'd helped her work on that enough that it was better if Eric and Sabrina gave their thoughts, which gave you time to review some of the other documents but you found your mind wandering.

The video FitNelli sent you last night was on your mind. She was gorgeous, and seemed super sexual if she sent you that little private video. The realistic possibility of Sabrina, and you, collaborating with her on a few videos seemed closer than you would have ever expected. And then you had Tasha and Becks both basically open for anything, and they would be joining you and Sabrina and Gemma on Wednesday night.

Four gorgeous women in one bed with you. It was... going to be a lot.

And of course, you couldn't forget Becca and Gemma's campaign of teasing her. Gemma only had a week and a half left in the States, so that would be coming to a head soon.

You had no fucking need to think about Lucy when you were pretty much inundated with sexual goddesses.

"Focus up, love," Gemma said, reaching across the table and stirring you from your thoughts. She was smiling at you. "We have work to do."

"Right," you said. "Just thinking about how lucky I am."

"Awe," Gemma and Sabrina just grinned.

"Yuck," Eric said and fake gagged. "Don't tell them that too often. Girls don't like to feel like they're better than their man."

"You know nothing, Eric Snow," Sabrina said as she rolled her eyes.

"That wasn't self-deprecating," Gemma said. "That was just sweet. And sweet goes a very, very long way."

Chapter 457

Dinner with Eric and Mosche was about as painful as you had expected. Ordering the pizza was, in fact, the easiest part of the whole thing. Mosche asked to change his order fifteen minutes after you had made it. Eric complained about how long it was taking and that you shouldn't tip the delivery driver - that got Sabrina into giving him a lecture on Tipping Culture and the unfortunate fact that it should never have become a thing but it *was* and so opting *out* of tipping people in traditionally tipped jobs like food delivery drivers and waiters wasn't making some big statement, it was just hurting people.

When the pizza finally got there Eric didn't have cash, and Mosche tried to talk to the delivery driver about how he got his order wrong and was wondering if he could change it - you thanked the driver and shut the door before Mosche could continue his rambling.

Then, with the files sorted and stacked off to the side of the table, you all sat down to eat.

And Mosche knocked a stack of files onto the floor by accident. And then got greasy fingers on them when he tried to help clean them up. He was not helping himself in the eyes of your girlfriends.

Once the files were mostly rescued, and everything had been moved out of the potential blast zone, you all settled in to eat. While it wasn't as awkward as that breakfast with Becks and Iris, it wasn't great either. You tried to keep the conversation going, pivoting it from work to college starting up again soon and the four of you heading back to classes, asking which ones they had picked. You'd already been over that stuff with Sabrina and Gemma before since you'd talked about it earlier in the summer when you had to pick them through the online portals for your schools, but it felt like a safe topic.

That was when Eric asked about what Mosche did, though, and it came out that Mosche was trying to be a standup comic. You still weren't entirely sure how Mosche afforded to live in the apartment with the very small amount of money he made doing standup at the comedy clubs.

Of course, Eric immediately suggested that Mosche should make a podcast. Morche thought that sounded like a great idea, but he didn't know where to start. Eric went on for a bit about the different stuff he would need and seemed like he had actually been putting a lot of research into the backend stuff of what a podcast would actually need, but then it came around to the fact that Mosche would probably need to have a cohost since, 'No offence, you're not a Joe Rogan.'

Then Mosche asked Eric if he wanted to be the cohost, and you were struck with the horror of what if Mosche and Eric actually became best friends and created some terrifying media empire by falling ass-backwards into everything and mostly just getting lucky. The immense level of destruction the two of them could cause to younger generations!

Eric, however, was going back to school to finish his bachelor's and was unavailable. Then Mosche turned to you hopefully, and you had to say the same.

Post-dinner it took longer than you, Gemma or Sabrina would have liked for Mosche to give you guys space, and you eventually needed to move on from the usual social niceties of mentioning how you all needed to get back to work and move on to, "Alright, Mosche. Thanks for joining us for dinner, but we've got a lot of shit to do. Can you give us the table back?"

Thankfully he took that in stride, and the four of you were able to get back to work.

"OK," Eric said, rubbing his eyes and then blinking rapidly as he set down the last folder in front of him. "My brain feels like mush. We've got the opener, we've got the parts of the closer we can use, and we've got all the middle bits. Are we done? Are we ready?"

"I think we're ready," Sabrina said. "All my lists are finished, and I can't think of anything else to do."

"Gemma?" you asked.

She sighed. "I probably want to go through the opening statement a couple more times tonight," She said.

"OK," you nodded. "I can't think of anything else we can prep. So unless you guys want to look at doing another read-through from the top, we can call it here and try and get some good sleep."

"I just wish we knew who we were facing off with tomorrow," Sabrina grumbled. "Do some research on *them* and find out if they're, like, secretly State debate champs or some bullshit."

"Wouldn't matter," you said. "We're going to kick their asses either way."

"Damn straight," Eric nodded. "Positive outlook. Manifest the outcome. We've worked hard, now we get to enjoy the easy win."

"OK, I like the attitude, but maybe don't start cashing checks we don't have yet," Gemma cautioned.

Then Sabrina groaned and leaned forward, pressing her forehead to the table.

"What is it?" you asked, immediately concerned.

She sat back up and sighed. "What if this whole thing has just been a teaching moment and there isn't a mock trial at all and tomorrow we go in and Garrison is just like 'Your client has fired you. This is what the law is like. Time to pick up and get back to work.'"

“Oh, that would be just evil,” you said.

“OK, everyone pray that *doesn't* happen,” Eric sighed. “And get some good sleep tonight.”

You all packed things up neatly, ready to carry all your notes to the office and on to wherever you were actually doing the (hopefully real) mock trial in the morning. Eric left, leaving just you and the girls since Mosche was holed up in his room.

“Mmm,” Sabrina hummed, coming from the table to the apartment door where you were closing and locking it. She took your hands and raised them up to her shoulders and you squeezed them softly. “If we’re going to get some good sleep, I think you have some *tension* that needs releasing.”

“Or, maybe not,” Gemma said, coming up behind Sabrina and hugging her, resting her chin on the brunette’s shoulder and your fingers. “We have a big day tomorrow, we had a very satisfying morning... maybe we should treat this like a ‘big game’ and no sex tonight.”

“That’s an awful idea,” Sabrina sighed.

“Would you rather be super wide awake and full of energy tomorrow morning, or still a little tired because we stayed up too late?” Gemma asked.

You groaned, sliding your hands from Sabrina’s shoulder and wrapping your fingers around Gemma’s twin blonde braids. “You sure, love?” you asked.

She groaned right back, smirking and rolling her eyes.

“That’s not a yes,” Sabrina grinned, looking into your eyes.

“It’s a yes,” Gemma said, pulling away. “Seriously, no sex tonight you guys.”

The three of you grabbed the files and started heading to your bedroom to get ready for bed.

“What about morning sex?” Sabrina asked. “That always wakes us up.”

“Not the point, Sabrina,” Gemma sighed.

“I mean, it’s kind of *my* point,” you said.

Sabrina snorted and Gemma groaned at the painful pun.

Chapter 458

“Good morning, folks,” Garrison said as he strolled into the intern conference room right at 9 AM. “Big morning, are we ready to get moving?”

“Absolutely, sir,” Sabrina said. “We worked through the weekend to make sure we’re more than ready, so unless you’re about to rug pull us as a teaching moment, we’re ready to go.”

Garrison smirked a little and shook his head. “No, no rug pull,” he said. “Though that’s a good idea for next year. Maybe not after *weeks* of prep, but a few days couldn’t hurt. Alright. Let me swing by my office and I’ll meet you four at the elevators.”

“Thanks, sir,” you said and he nodded and left. You turned to the others. “Alright, this is happening. Gemma, since it’ll look weird to do it beforehand, break a leg on the Opening Statement. You’re going to kick some ass.”

“Slowly and methodically, like beating a dead horse,” Sabrina chuckled.

“Thanks, love,” Gemma said to you, then smirked at Sabrina. Gemma’s personality definitely leaned more towards a fiery, impassioned speech than the even, passionless running of the facts that Garrison had taught the four of you about when you observed his case in court. You were all still good with the decision to have her lead off though - she was well-spoken, would provide a variation on the expected norm due to her accent, and was prepared to go the distance.

She was also, not that Eric would know, pretty relaxed. While there hadn’t been any sex between you, Gemma and Sabrina the night before, Gemma had woken up extra early and been pacing in your apartment quietly going through the details from her opening statement, murmuring them over and over. When you and Sabrina had woken up and realised where she was, you’d brought her back to bed and then loved on her, trading off eating her out and making out with her. She’d come several times in the hour before the alarm went off and you all really did have to get up, and she admitted that most of her anxiety and nerves had drifted away.

You, Eric, Gemma and Sabrina got your bags and files together and went to the elevators. Garrison joined you a few minutes later.

“Remember,” he said. “I can’t give you any tips or critiques until the whole thing is over. The other side is under the same rules. It’s just you against them. But you *are* representing the Firm and I expect you to live up to the opportunity. You’ve done great work so far this summer, now it’s time to show what you’re made of.”

“Way to not put us under any more pressure, sir,” Eric said with a little smirk.

“Well, I had to find some way to do it,” Garrison chuckled. “If this were a real case, you’d have the looming threat of your boss or clients being pissed off if you lose, and knowing you cost them hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars.”

You reached the ground floor and headed through the lobby.

“Good luck, you guys,” Becks called from her desk. “Knock ‘em dead.”

You, Gemma and Sabrina all waved your thanks to her and followed Garrison out of the building.

“She talks to you guys?” Eric asked you quietly. “She always just sort of ignores me.”

“Do you get her coffee on the coffee runs?” you asked.

“Why would I do that?”

You gave him a look.

“Ooooh,” he said.

Garrison had arranged for a driver with a big Escalade since there were five of us, and you piled into the blacked-out vehicle and were off. After all the Ubers and Lyfts you had taken through the city, having a private driver with a semi-luxury vehicle was definitely the best ride you’d had.

“So, where are we headed, sir?” Gemma asked. “Is the other firm hosting?”

“No, we got somewhere a little more interesting,” Garrison said, turning from the front passenger seat to glance back at you all. “Don’t worry, you won’t be out of your depth.”

“Why does that sound ominous?” Sabrina murmured to you in the back seat. She was wearing slacks, whereas Gemma was wearing a skirt, so she’d offered the blonde the bucket seat.

“Because he’s being mysterious, and messing with us on purpose,” you murmured back.

It was an almost twenty-minute drive due to the Monday morning traffic, and you ended up just outside the core of downtown in the older part of the city before the driver pulled up in front of a big, old stone building.

“A church?” Eric asked.

“Not a church,” Garrison said as you all piled back out of the car, double-checking you weren’t leaving anything behind as you went. “Welcome to the Old Courthouse. This was the original court building for the city, built in 1856. After a fire in 1873, it was rebuilt that same year, and

then as the city grew it became too small and the spot where the current courthouse is was developed in the 1920s and has been expanded ever since. This building was donated by the city to the local University, and it's been all sorts of things since then but in the last twenty years, it's mostly been a music and arts venue and a lecture hall. There's a lot of history in this building, folks. Men were sentenced to death for crimes like cattle rustling, rape and murder. Civil cases that set the foundations of the modern city around us were argued here, not to mention hosting several important debates and protests around the women's suffrage movement in the US."

"Really just piling it on, huh, sir?" Sabrina deadpanned.

Garrison laughed and shook his head. "Just telling you the facts. Come on, we're a little bit early. Let's get you settled in."

You followed Garrison in the front doors, which really did look like an old Catholic or Anglican church from the outside. Through the big double doors was a wide but shallow lobby with old, stone-tiled floors polished smooth with age and use, and the exposed stonework of the building that raised up towards a vaulted ceiling above continued to make you think of churches. That was where the 'church' feeling ended though. On the right end of the lobby was a three-window kiosk area that must have been a mini box office though it was dark and closed at the moment, and on the left end there was what looked like a booth for merch sales. Two big sets of double doors dominated the wall opposite the entry, a covered sign announcing that the hall was booked for a 'private party' for the next three days. Otherwise, the walls were covered in posters for musical acts, plays and lecture series. No two posters were alike, and there was a sense of wild history just right there in the lobby - just not legal history.

Garrison walked you across the lobby and opened one set of the double doors and you entered into the main hall.

"Wow," you said, and could hear the others echo your thoughts. "This is where we're arguing the case?"

"It is," Garrison said, smirking again.

Chapter 459

The 'courtroom' was already set up on the stage, and you had to guess that there must have been some sort of courtroom drama play that had happened at some point in the past for the venue to have some perfect furniture. Two long, heavy desks were set up near the front for the plaintiffs and defence, while the bench desk was set up near the back of the stage for the judge, along with a court clerk and even a court reporter - though you doubted the firms had gone *that* far.

The rest of the hall was big and dominated the building from side to side, its tall vaulted ceiling matching the one in the lobby. It was slightly angled, leading down towards the stage, and had bench seating in the back half and then movable rows of chairs in the front, presumably for more raucous concerts. The only disruption to this was a bar along the back wall in between the two big double doors and a pair of stairwells that led up to balcony seating that hovered over the back third of the seating area and down both walls.

"Five-hundred and fifty-person capacity," Garrison said as he led you down the aisle towards the stage. "Not that you'll have more than a few of us lawyers here to watch. Why don't you folks get yourselves set up, I'll check on your opposition."

You, Eric, Gemma and Sabrina all headed to the stairs on the side of the stage and walked up onto the platform, your feet feeling like they were extra loud on the wood panelling. Both Gemma and Sabrina were wearing heels, and they were even louder.

"Alright, let's get sorted," Sabrina said, heading for the table on the right. You were representing the Defendants in the case as the insurance company, with the plaintiffs suing because of the refused coverage.

Soon files were hitting the tables and getting organised, and the four of you were arranging things and murmuring to each other. You were pretty much alone in the entire hall, and yet it felt like you were in a library or some other sacred space where you were supposed to be subdued in your volume.

You were just getting the evidentiary files organised on the desk for easy reference when the doors at the back of the hall opened with a soft *thoom* through the space and you all looked back to see Garrison and an older woman, maybe in her late forties or early fifties, entering and talking as they lead a group of younger people.

"The opposition has arrived," Gemma murmured.

Garrison seemed to be giving them the same spiel about the history of the place, and you wondered if maybe he'd worked in the building in his youth or something - or if he'd even performed there in a band or as an amateur stage actor. His passion for the place was palpable.

Then your opponents were directed to the stage to get ready as Garrison and the woman headed towards the back again, talking more quietly.

There were five of them to your four, though you had to admit that if Andy had been part of the team he wouldn't exactly have been adding anything helpful - and possibly even would have hindered you. That reminded you that you needed to ask Eric if he'd ever followed up with the unfortunate stoner, but you were a little busy sizing up the competition.

All five of them looked around your age, so they were likely either about to be college seniors like yourselves or were already graduated and heading to law school. The one in the lead was a blonde guy who looked like he would have fit the mould for 'pompous school quarterback' in a high school drama movie. He even had the little dimple giving him a butt-chin. The second person right behind him was a stacked brunette, maybe a little squatly built but not in a fat way. She was dressed in a pantsuit but there was no hiding the absolutely ginormous tits she was hauling around under her blouse and jacket even with her being buttoned all the way up to her neck. After her was a tall, skinny blonde girl with a bit of a lanky gait and a serious near-sowl as she looked back at you, and then a guy with mousy brown hair, slumped posture and his hands in his pockets. The last person in the line was a shorter, pale girl with curly dark brown hair and a sort of aloof expression, though the thing that stood out about her was her super dark lipstick that would have almost been black if not for the hint of burgundy. She gave you gothy vibes immediately.

Then Sabrina hit you. Not hard, but under the table on your leg, repeatedly.

"What?" you asked, turning to her.

Sabrina's eyes were wide and she leaned in sitting next to you at the table, bringing her lips right to your ear.

"That girl does OnlyFans!" she whispered, barely containing her surprise.

"What?" you asked, dropping your voice to barely even a whisper. You glanced back at the five interns as they were heading to the Plaintiff's table. Both of the brunettes were attractive enough that you could see them doing it, while the blonde seemed more like the 'and the heavens shall open and smite all the sinners' type. "Which one?"

"With the boobs," Sabrina whispered back. "I've seen some of her clips. That's definitely her."

"Well, fuck," you whispered back, glancing one more time. The girl had to be... what letter did they *stop* bra sizes at? You wouldn't have been surprised if half her body weight was in her tits. She also had a cute and pretty face, done up in a pretty but not over-the-top way.

This was, technically, a point of leverage.

“We say nothing, right?” you asked Sabrina.

Sabrina nodded fervently. “I just couldn’t not say something.”

“OK,” you whispered back. If someone tried to leverage Sabrina because they found out about her you would be furious. There was no way you would do that to someone else.

You pushed your chair back and stood up, looking at Gemma on the other side of you and Eric beyond her. “Alright,” you said. “Let’s go introduce ourselves to opposing counsel?”

“Sounds good,” Gemma agreed, standing up with you, followed by the others.

It was time to meet the enemy.

Chapter 460

“Hi, good to meet you,” you said, leading your group as you approached the Plaintiff’s table. “I’m John, this is Gemma, Sabrina, and Eric. I’m hoping we can have some fun with this.”

“Hey, John,” the blonde athletic guy said, stepping forward with the sort of smile that would have made you feel like you were in an entirely different classification of human from this ridiculously attractive person. *Would* have, except you now had two gorgeous girlfriends and that gave you a confidence no one could ever tear down. “I’m Tucker. Good to meet you too.”

“Thomas,” the other guy with the slumped posture said. He pushed his glasses up his nose a bit before shaking your hand, and when he did his grip was flimsy and loose-wristed like you were shaking hands with a noodle.

Tucker was already shaking hands with Gemma, flashing that grin of his and trying to say something flirty, but you could just *feel* your girlfriend giving him a Customer Service smile. You, however, were running into your own problem.

“Samantha,” the tall, lanky blonde said. If Thomas was limp-wristed, Samantha was stiff as a two-by-four and had the grip of a gorilla. “We should talk settlement,” she continued, not letting go of your hand. “Your client has absolutely no recourse to get out of their contractual obligations, but to move this on quickly our client is willing to negotiate in good faith so that this matter doesn’t need to drag on.”

“How about we finish introducing ourselves before we start talking business,” you said, raising an eyebrow and completely letting go of her hand, making it obvious that she was clinging on to you.

“I don’t see why-” Samantha started, but the girl with the immense tits literally grabbed your wrist and hers and forced Samantha to let you go.

“Jesus Christ, Sam,” she said. “He could sue you for battery, you left claw marks on him.”

“I-” Samantha said, frowning as she looked down at your hand where her fingernails had left indentations in the side of your hand. “You should get checked for oedema, that shouldn’t happen.”

“Sorry about her,” the brunette said, stepping between the two of you and taking your hand in both of hers. Even with her blouse completely buttoned up she was difficult to look in the eye and not glance down at her ridiculous bust. She wasn’t fat, though she was built with somewhat broad shoulders. You managed to keep eye contact though. “I’m Amanda. It’s nice to meet you.”

“You, too,” you said. “And I promise not to sue over an, ah, overzealous handshake.”

“Thank you,” she said, flashing you a pretty smile.

Tucker was trying to flirt with Sabrina now somewhere behind you, and she was playing a game that she and Gemma had come up with called, ‘What do you mean by that?’ where when a guy hit on one of them they would take everything he said literally. It was surprising how many flirty comments were insults with another tone, and you could hear Tucker stumbling to try and explain something he’d said wasn’t meant to insult her.

“This is Maeve,” Amanda said, turning and introducing the curly-haired goth girl.

“Nice to meet you,” you said, offering her your hand.

Maeve took your hand but instead of shaking it, she turned it palmed up and traced a finger along the lines of it, frowning and then smirking before looking up at you. “You have a strong heart line,” she said, her voice a surprisingly mellow British accent. “But it’s doing this weird thing at the end where it splits. Are you a cheater?”

You blinked, raising an eyebrow.

“Maeve,” Amanda scoffed, shaking her head.

“No, I’m not a cheater,” you said. “Though I am polyamorous.”

“Oh, *interesting*,” Maeve said, looking at you closer. She was wearing a pair of dark-rimmed glasses and she was that sort of nerdy-hot attractive where she could probably pull off Sexy Librarian just as easily as grungey goth nerd.

“OK, weirdo,” Amanda said, snapping in front of Maeve’s face and breaking her stare. “No trying to mind-read the opposing counsel until after we start the trial.” She turned to you. “I am so sorry.”

“It’s fine,” you said and glanced back to Maeve as you took your hand back from hers. “It was nice to meet you, Maeve.”

“You too,” she said, smirking just a little.

You introduced Amanda and Maeve to Gemma, and then to Sabrina and Eric.

“Alright, *now* we should discuss settlement,” Samantha said pretty much as soon as Eric and Maeve had shaken hands. You could see Maeve glance down at Eric’s palm surreptitiously. “We’re willing to take-”

“We’re willing to hear your first offer,” Tucker cut in, speaking over her. He glanced at Samantha, and she scowled back slightly, and you had a feeling there had been some sort of a disagreement in the past on who was leading their team.

“Well, our offer is that you drop this suit,” Sabrina said. “And we all go about our week. Our client has made it clear that yours has acted in a way that breaches the contract they signed, and we consider the matter fairly cut and dry.”

“You’re not even willing to make an offer?” Samantha asked.

Sabrina gave her a soft look, one of compassion. One that said, ‘Oh, you sweet child, you’re so out of your depth.’ It was masterful and you could immediately tell that Samantha - who you guessed was certainly high-functioning but potentially somewhere on the spectrum - was rattled by it.

“It was nice to meet you all,” Sabrina said. “I’m sure we’ll come to a resolution here. We’ll leave you to it.”

You turned and looked back to Amanda and Maeve. “It’s nice to meet you,” you said.

“You too,” Amanda said with a slightly chagrined smile. She’d obviously been dealing with the oddisms of her fellow interns all summer and was running a little out of patience.

Maeve winked at you as she smiled.

When you got back over to the table, Gemma leaned in and whispered to you, “That cute goth girl wants to fuck you.”

You scoffed lightly and rolled your eyes, and Gemma smiled and shrugged as if to say, ‘Not my fault it’s true.’

Then you sat down and Sabrina sat next to you and leaned in. “Amanda wants to fuck you,” she whispered.

You coughed, covering your mouth to try and hide your reaction. Sometimes Gemma and Sabrina had to be wrong about that kind of thing.

Right?

Chapter 461

“Alright, folks,” Garrison said loudly as he, the female lawyer from the other firm and an older man who looked like he was in his seventies all mounted the stage. “Welcome to court. I’d like to present to you the Honourable Ivan Mathews. Judge Mathews served as a District Judge for seventeen years, and then on the State Supreme Court for another twenty-two, all after a successful career as a criminal prosecutor with a specialty in financial crimes.”

You and all the other interns clapped politely, and you sort of wanted to shake the man’s hand. It was an impressive career and, to be frank with yourself, he sounded like a fucking amazing reference for law school applications. There were also a little under two dozen other folks who had come in; several were Associates and Partners from your firm, and you had a feeling the others would be from the opposing one. They were all clapping as well, and you wondered if the Judge was something of a local legal celebrity.

“Judge Mathews will be presiding over your trial,” Garrison said.

“Let’s keep things fun, and have a good mock trial,” Judge Mathews said. “I don’t want any funny business. What my good friend here didn’t tell you is that I also managed the high school and college-level Mock Trial association in the State for forty years, including when he was competing in college, and have written several large cases including the one you’ll be presenting today.”

“Shiiiiit,” Sabrina hissed softly beside you through her smile.

You glanced at Garrison, who was smirking just a little, and you knew he’d been sitting on *that* one just to put that last little bit of pressure on the four of you.

“Any questions?” Garrison asked all of you.

You shook your head slightly, though you felt like you *should* have had questions. Out of the corner of your eye, you thought you saw Samantha twitch at the other table, but someone must have stopped her.

“Great,” Garrison said. “Then, All Rise for the Honourable Judge Mathews. Sir, you can assume your position.”

The Judge, who used a cane lightly even though he didn’t seem to really need it, headed around to the Bench, climbed a couple of stairs and assumed his seat, rearranging the notepads and other things that had been set back there for him. It lasted for almost three minutes until he looked up, eyeing all of you still standing and waiting.

“Good,” he said. “You may sit.”

You all sat, and you wondered how many kids, or other college students, had fallen for *that* simple little trick.

“Good morning everyone,” Judge Mathews said, gesturing you forward. “I’ll be presiding over your case for the next few days. Could counsel please introduce themselves?” He looked pointedly over to the Plaintiffs.

“Your Honour,” Tucker said, quickly standing up. “Tucker Jackson, representing the Plaintiff, joined by my friends Amanda Garcia, Samantha Van Der Groot, Thomas Malberry, and Maeve Walker.”

The Judge nodded, Tucker sat, and Mathews looked over at you.

“Your Honour,” Sabrina said, standing up just like the four of you had planned. “Sabrina Sodemeyer representing the Defence. I am joined by my colleagues Gemma Anderson, Eric Daniels and John Watkins.” Each of you nodded in respect to the judge in turn, and Sabrina sat.

“Excellent,” Judge Mathews said. “Alright. Do we happen to have a settlement on the table here, folks? I’m not getting paid by the hour, so you won’t hurt my feelings.”

“Your Honour, no settlement has been offered at this time,” Sabrina said, standing up again. “Our client is fully prepared to defend themselves against these frivolous claims.”

“Noted, Miss Sodemeyer,” Judge Mathews nodded, then looked to the Plaintiffs. “Any second guesses on the strength of your claims, Counsel?”

“Not at all, your Honour,” Samantha said, shooting up to her feet before Tucker could.

“Alright then,” Judge Mathews nodded. “If we have no settlement on the tables, let’s see your pre-trial motions. No need to stand on ceremony for this part, folks. This would usually be handled well in advance. Someone just bring up your packages for me to review.”

That was your job for the moment, so you grabbed the thick file of motions, slipped around Sabrina in the 1st Chair position and brought it up to the Judge at the same time that Amanda was doing the same.

“Your Honour,” you murmured, giving Mathews a respectful nod as you handed over your file. There were ten motions, each one helpfully tabbed and labelled. Amanda handed over her file and it looked like they had a few less, but that didn’t mean that your case couldn’t get torpedoed by any one of them. She glanced at you as you both turned to head back to your tables, and you gave her a little nod as well which made her smile slightly before you split up back to your chairs.

Mathews was like a machine, skimming through the motions. You had to assume that, since he was the man who fucking *wrote* the damn case, he knew what sort of hooks and traps and pitfalls he'd woven into it so it wasn't quite as difficult to parse through as a real civil case.

Preliminary motions weren't the usual for Mock Trials, nor was the size or timeline of the case. Usually, a civil Mock Trial only lasted about an hour and was limited to short opening and closing statements, a couple of witnesses per side, and closing arguments. But Mathews had crafted a fucking *beast* of a case that was like a Mock Trial on steroids - you couldn't imagine anyone tackling it in the usual time limits of 'competitive' Mock Trial. Part of the package had been the variation on the usual rules for the trial - preliminary motions would be presented before opening statements and ruled on, and all such motions that would usually come up in discovery were on the table even if discovery, depositions and all of the other formalities were presented in the package.

That meant that, technically, the Trial could end right at that moment if your side had smashed a Motion to Dismiss out of the park and Mathews agreed.

Chapter 462

“Alright, folks,” Judge Mathews said, calling everyone to attention. “Here’s my rulings. First, on the Motion to Dismiss from the Defence, I’m reserving comment or ruling until after the rest of the trial - it’s no fun if I rule in favour, but I’m also not telling you if it wouldn’t have worked. Points will be awarded at the end.”

That dashed your Hail Mary hopes that one big swing could win for your side, but it also made sense. There wasn’t really a point to all of this if you could just get the case dismissed and the Plaintiffs couldn’t even fight it.

With the big one out of the way, however, Mathews started ripping into the rest of the motions of both sides. They were almost all motions for the suppression of evidence by both sides, though Eric had also filed a motion for a change of venue based on the fact that the county jurisdiction seemed to rule in favour of plaintiffs against insurance companies a little over 80% of the time, showing a likelihood of bias.

That one got a smirk and laugh out of Mathews, who denied the motion but told Eric he’d made a decent case for it on the merits.

He tossed out almost all of the motions to suppress from both sides on their merits, which wasn’t too surprising. Motions to Suppress were usually criminal case matters since it was usually related to bad actions on the side of law enforcement. In a civil case, the space for that to actually apply was generally fairly small. Still, both teams had tried, and Judge Mathews narrowed them down to one each from the Defence and the Plaintiffs. He then handed them over to opposing counsel and gave you a maximum of an hour to formulate defences against the motions.

The good news was that the four of you had strategized, trying to figure out what your opponents would try to get tossed. The bad news was that even though you had pre-planned defences, you didn’t have witnesses to call in for this part of the trial. The first responders to the major pileup included police, and it was different testimonies that both sides were trying to get tossed. You were going to need to argue in favour of an officer’s actions to combat the Plaintiff’s motion while accusing another officer at the same time.

“Alright,” Sabrina said after quickly scanning the motion. “The one they got through is on Officer Penholt.”

“He’s the officer who found the bag of pot in the trunk of the plaintiff’s car, right?” Eric asked.

“Exactly,” Sabrina nodded. “They’re arguing it was an unreasonable search without a warrant, and no criminal charges were brought forward, so it should be immaterial to the civil case.”

“Well, we’ve already got that one prepared,” you said. “The pot was in the open, and he saw it while checking for injured people in the pileup.”

“We should split up the problems,” Gemma said. “John and Eric work on the defence, and Sabrina and I work on attacking their defence.”

“Actually,” Eric said. “I’ve been thinking about this. Follow me for a second. Our case doesn’t rely on the pot at all, right?” You all shook your heads. “So what if we just let them have it? We agree it’s immaterial to the civil litigation. We know we can’t prove that the pot in the trunk means the driver was intoxicated. That way we look more agreeable to Mathews and maybe buy some goodwill.”

Sabrina chewed on the inside of her lip in thought and then glanced at Gemma, who shrugged, and then at you.

“I think he might be right,” you said. “Remember what Garrison said about playing to the Judge. If we look like we’re fighting everything tooth and nail, we look desperate and Mathews knows this case inside and out. The pot is probably a red herring in the story, and if we ignore it instead of fighting over it we might look a lot better for it.”

“OK, Sabrina nodded. “We ignore the pot and let them suppress the testimony. There wasn’t anything else in Penholt’s story we needed, right?”

“He was... a tertiary source for a couple of things, but we’ve got them covered anyways,” Gemma said, already having pulled Penholt’s file from our list of witnesses and scanning our notes.

“Perfect,” Sabrina said. “Then we focus on defending our motion. Which one was it?”

“He didn’t say,” you said, shaking your head. “So we either need to ask him, which means we ask to approach the bench and they send someone as well and we give away we’re prepping more defence, or we take best guesses.”

“I vote we take best guesses,” Gemma said. “If they aren’t thinking about further defence, we don’t want to *get* them thinking that way.”

“I agree,” Eric nodded.

Sabrina agreed as well, and you quickly went through your motions - there were eight that Eric had put together outside of the motion to dismiss and motion to change venue, but they weren’t all made equal. Five of them you were able to weed out pretty quickly since you’d always known they were a little flimsy. Next went the one about claiming violation of right to a lawyer - it was technically true, but the guy who’d been briefly in custody and demanded a lawyer wasn’t crucial to the opposition’s case and you already had two lines of defence to weed out his testimony on

the stand if he got called. That left the Chain of Custody issue where the police had misplaced the keys to the plaintiff's vehicle for several days while the wreck was impounded, and the Violation of Miranda Rights on one of the other drivers in the crash.

"It's got to be the Miranda Rights," Gemma whispered. "The missing keys were found in the wrong evidence bag, yeah, and that's bad. But the car was still impounded and it doesn't prove anything. Getting the admission of guilt tossed from the other driver is way bigger and applies more directly."

The other three of you weren't so sure, but Gemma was so sure that you sided with her, and that pulled Sabrina in, and Eric followed. That let you focus all four of your minds on making sure your arguments for your motion were tight and controlled. No splashy outburst, no dramatisation, just the facts.

"Alright folks, that's time," Judge Mathews called. "Let's hear it. Plaintiffs counsel, you first."

Chapter 463

“We are shocked,” Samantha said as she stood up. “That opposing counsel would even consider the fact that a duly appointed member of law enforcement, highly trained and in a position of trust in their community, would fail to perform even their most basic of duties when speaking with a member of the public. Based on the testimonies of both Officer Sanchez and Mr Greg Tribonello, there was no arrest made and therefore Mr Tribonello’s discussion with Officer Sanchez required no declaration of Miranda Rights. If opposing counsel is contending that Officer Sanchez *had* placed Mr Tribonello under arrest, then we would very much like to hear this from the Officer or Mr Tribonello themselves.”

So it was the Miranda Rights case, and Gemma had been right.

For having an hour to formulate their attack, you had kind of been expecting more. During your ‘from the opponent’s point of view’ reviews over the weekend you’d come up with a couple more reasons they could have used - namely that Greg Tribonello had made a voluntary admission of guilt. Officer Sanchez hadn’t been asking him for a confession.

The problem was that Officer Sanchez might have *said* he was only detaining Tribonello, but that wasn’t quite the case.

“Rebuttal?” Judge Mathews asked, looking over at your table, and you stood up.

“Your Honour,” you said. “I believe that my friends have become somewhat zealous in their Defence and have forgotten to manage their expectations in terms of how the rule of law is applied outside of this courtroom. Officer Sanchez’s actions on the day in question very much reached the level of an arrest and therefore required the reading of Miranda Rights prior to any further questioning. Even though the word ‘arrest’ was never used, Officer Sanchez refused to allow Mr Tribonello his freedom of movement for an extended period without engagement, including ordering him to remain near the bumper of his police cruiser and then placing him inside the cruiser despite repeated requests by Mr Tribonello to leave. Two hours after arresting Mr Tribonello, Officer Sanchez then began an express line of questioning while Mr Tribonello was still in the back of the police cruiser, beginning a custodial interrogation by any reasonable reading of the definition. At this point, Mr Tribonello had been arrested, intimidated, and denied his rights. This may be civil and not criminal court, Your Honour, but we believe it is absolutely clear that anything Mr Tribonello said during the subsequent interrogation by Officer Sanchez is tainted beyond belief and should be suppressed.”

Judge Mathews was nodding along with your reasoning, then looked back to Samantha at the defence table. “Anything else to say, counsel?”

Samantha stood again. “Officer Sanchez placed Mr Tribonello in the police cruiser to get him out of the sun, not because he was under arrest. And the discussion Officer Sanchez engaged in had nothing to do with the admission of being at fault for the accident.”

“Not good enough, Miss Van Der Groot,” Judge Mathews said. “Not ‘meaning’ to kidnap someone doesn’t make it any less of a kidnapping when you grab them off the street, throw them in your trunk and drive away. I’m granting the suppression of Mr Tribonello’s testimony and the alleged admission of guilt due to it being taken during a custodial interrogation lacking Miranda warnings. Officer Sanchez is not barred from testimony, but if you try and bring in the testimony I will *not* be happy.”

“Yes, Your Honour,” Samantha said, getting a spiteful look on her face as she sat back down.

“How about you, Mr Watkins?” Judge Mathews turned to look at you. “Thoughts on the Plaintiff’s motion?”

You glanced at Sabrina, who nodded for you to field it. “No, your Honour,” you said. “We have no issues with the findings of Officer Penholt being considered outside the scope of this case.”

“Excellent,” Judge Mathews nodded. “Then I grant the motion, and I’ll give you the same warning - if Officer Penholt hits this witness stand and you try to sneak the details back in, I will not be a happy camper. Understood?”

“Understood, Your Honour,” you nodded.

Judge Mathews nodded again, more definitively, and looked down at his notes as you sat. There wasn’t exactly an uproar coming from the Plaintiff’s table, but you could tell by the quick, harsh whispers that there was some confusion in their ranks as to why you wouldn’t fight them on the discovery of the pot. There really wasn’t a good reason for it to be suppressed, but you’d handed them a ‘win’ and they weren’t sure why. It was all the little wins that could stack up into a proper victory.

But... this wasn’t a competition. Not like the Mock Trials run by a school or a conference. You, Gemma and Sabrina, were applying the lessons you’d learned from the first time Garrison agreed to mentor you - play the game in front of you, not the game you think should be there. Just like working together to finish that practice LSAT, you weren’t looking to score little points - scorecards didn’t matter in court, only the final decision. Judge Mathews was more than capable of keeping those scorecards blindfolded, but you had a feeling he didn’t really care about them. He was a retired Judge, here for the fun of it. He was used to working with professionals, and that’s how you wanted him to see you and your side of the case.

Gemma and Sabrina had both whispered their encouragement when you sat down, and you’d wanted to grab their hands under the table but you knew that just because the Judge might not see you do that, didn’t mean it would be hidden. Garrison and a dozen other lawyers from the firm were watching quietly from behind you. Some of them were working on laptops or their phones, and others were paying more attention to the goings on. No public, or secret, displays of affection were going to fly.

“Alright,” Judge Mathews said after he finished writing down some notes. “Pre-trial motions are now concluded, and we can get on to the case proper. We’re lacking a court clerk, so I’ll fill in the role myself and call this session to order. Counsel, are you prepared to make your case?”

“We are, Your Honour,” Tucker said, standing briefly and nodding.

“Defence is ready, Your Honour,” Sabrina nodded, standing as well.

“Good,” Judge Mathews said, then smirked a little. “I’d be concerned if you suddenly weren’t. Alright, we’ll begin with opening statements.”

Chapter 464

Surprisingly, it wasn't Tucker or Samantha who stood up to give the Opening Statement for the Plaintiffs. The two of them had been dominating and, honestly, a little domineering in how they seemed to act within their group dynamic. If it wasn't them, you would have expected it to be Amanda - the large-breasted woman seemed to be fairly *normal* compared to her compatriots despite her unordinary physical feature.

It wasn't here either though. Thomas, the mousy guy with the bad posture, was the one who stood up and came around their table into the space between the lawyers and the Bench.

"May it please the Court, Your Honour," he said, and then cleared his voice. He was holding some cue cards loosely in one hand. "Our clients, Randy and Felise Jacobs, have been unfairly targeted by the underhanded tactics of the DeLittle Insurance Company, who have refused to meet their contractual obligations in regards to the Jacobs insurance policy. This case has reached your court despite attempts at mediation as DeLittle Insurance has stubbornly maintained their intolerable stance that the Jacob's policy was breached despite no evidence to the contrary."

Thomas wasn't a *bad* speaker, but you could tell that he was already starting to work himself up a bit. His language usage was flowery and accusatory, and he'd already pointed accusingly over at your table a couple of times whenever he name-dropped your 'client.'

"The facts of the case are straightforward, your Honour," Thomas continued. "The evidence will show that Randy and Felise Jacobs, on March 11th, 2014, set about their day as usual in the full belief that their insurance coverage was reasonable and intact, with no fear that they would be left adrift and facing financial ruin by the end of the day. Then, at 3:13 in the afternoon on Highway 17 outside the town of Settlesby, they were embroiled in a seven-car pileup - suffering minor wounds, grievous mental trauma, and leading to their family vehicle, which was fully insured by DeLittle Insurance, to be deemed a total wreck."

Up until that point in his statement, Thomas was fairly on point with the details other than the actual point of contention - that the Jacobss had cheated out on their policy for a lower monthly rate, and that there had been several circumstantial issues with both their vehicle and their actions.

Thomas wasn't done, though. He played up the mental trauma of being in a car wreck and then made it seem like his client's dealings with the Insurance company were belaboured and aggressive from the start. Based on the transcripts of the various calls made between Randy Jacobs and DeLittle that wasn't the case, but it was certainly one way to describe things in their favour. You didn't think it was a winning strategy since Judge Mathews would know whether it was true or not, but it was their case to make.

He went on to identify the witnesses they intended to call, namely the original Insurance Broker who made up the policy for them and processed it, several witnesses from the day of the accident whose depositions claimed the accident couldn't have been the Jacobs' fault, and a former DeLittle employee who was claiming that it was a company policy to deny claims in multi-car accidents whenever possible.

He then spun into his conclusion, his voice raising both in volume and slightly in pitch, as he went into the burden of proof being a preponderance of the evidence - or 51% likely it favoured the Plaintiffs and not the defendants. He then re-stated his theory of the case, which should have been a fairly succinct telling, but he was rolling and didn't seem to be stopping. You were reminded of the old Charlie Chaplin film *The Great Dictator* - you'd gotten to watch and study it in a Political Theory course in your second year at University; in it, Charlie Chaplin got mistaken for the 'definitely not Hitler' fascist leader of a fictional country and put in front of a crowd of 'definitely not Nazis' with the chance to make one speech to inspire them back to the side of humanity. Chaplin's speech was masterful in its delivery, and worth studying because it really did follow the patterns of Hitler (and other famous inspirational orators, good and evil), and even without a backing track of epic music you could *feel* the rising passion behind it.

Thomas was doing that, except... petulantly. You couldn't know for sure if it was on purpose or not, but he was building and building as he ranted about the injustice of modern corporate greed and how it was sucking the lifeblood from the little people it was meant to serve. He reached his fever pitch, accusingly pointing at you again, declaring that you were making a mockery of the law itself by seeking to make the very basis of the legal system, contract law, moot and unenforceable.

"So, by God, Your Honour," he said. "For these reasons, after you have heard all the evidence, at the end of this trial we will ask you to return a verdict in favour of not only Randy and Felise Jacobs but of all the little people who have been churned up and spit out by this machine they have created. A verdict in favour of fairness, and equity, and all that is good in this world!"

He stopped, panting heavily, a fist raised like he'd been giving a battlefield speech. His pose said he was expecting applause, though you couldn't see his face since he was facing the judge.

OK, Gemma wrote on the notepad in front of her, pointing it towards you. *Garrison was right. If I had tried to give that sort of speech I'd look like an idiot.*

"Thank you, Mr Malberry," Judge Mathews said. "For that... impassioned statement."

Thomas dropped his fist, nodding to the Judge, and returned to his seat. His neck and cheeks were red from his effort, and there was sweat on his brow. He'd gone on for about fifteen minutes.

“Alright, I think that brings us close enough to our morning break,” the Judge said. “We’ll kick back off with the Defence’s opening statement in fifteen minutes.” He tapped his gavel lightly, signalling that the session was in recess, and then cleared his throat. “No need for us to go through all the ceremony every time I get up. Garrison, I believe you mentioned there would be refreshments for the break?”

“They should be out in the lobby now, your Honour,” Garrison called from the gallery behind you.

“Excellent,” Judge Mathews said, standing up and coming around from his bench. “Fifteen minutes folks!”

You could hear the lawyers behind you all standing up and talking with each other, and the Judge headed down off the stage, but both your table and the opposition huddled up.

“That was *something*,” Eric said quietly. “I thought he was going to pop a gasket.”

“He overplayed it way too far,” Sabrina whispered. “Unless Mathews is good at hiding the fact that he likes dramatics, I think that whole schtick definitely hurt them. Gemma, just do exactly how we practised it and you’ll make us look like sane, normal, professionals.”

“Absolutely,” Gemma agreed. “I-”

“Excuse us,” Samantha said, interrupting your discussion as she and Thomas came over from their table. Thomas was still red, the flush slowly fading, but at least he’d wiped the sweat from his brow. “Now that you’ve seen the strength of our case, we’re giving you one last chance to submit a settlement offer to our clients.”

All four of you glanced at each other, and you had to suppress the urge to laugh. Sabrina turned back to them. “No, we’re good,” she said.

“Are you kidding me?” Thomas asked, clearly surprised as the proud smirk dropped from his face. “I just took this case and turned it into an indictment of the entire insurance system. We’ll make you defend every gross little detail and manipulation insurance companies use to take advantage of people.”

Sabrina pursed her lips and raised an eyebrow for a moment. “OK,” she said. “You can go ahead and make that case, and we’ll make ours. Good luck.”

Samantha looked like she wanted to say something biting, but clamped her mouth shut and they both turned and stalked back to their table.

Sabrina turned back to you and the others. “They can try all they want to make this about ‘big insurance’ or whatever,” she said. “We keep our eyes on the prize. Our client, our case. That’s all we need for a win.”

Chapter 465

“May it please the Court, Your Honour,” Gemma said, kicking off the Opening Statement for your Defence. “My name is Gemma Anderson, representing the defendant DeLittle Insurance in this matter. The case before you should be a simple misunderstanding of the finer points of contract law. The Plaintiffs have brought this case forward because they do not agree with the terms of the contract they signed with our client DeLittle Insurance, and refute that they broke both the spirit and the letter of those terms.”

Your girlfriend spoke evenly and paced herself, not rushing through her points or making anything sound urgent. It was exactly how you had practised with her, and because she was giving herself space to breathe she also had time to make eye contact with the Judge and keep him engaged.

Gemma went into her overview of the case from the side of the insurance company. A business transaction was arranged to benefit the Jacobs, and due to the price point the Jacobs wanted to pay for the arrangement strict guidelines and fine print were part of the contract. The Jacobs were in an unfortunate accident, made a claim on their policy, and due to the intricate nature of the claim in the multi-vehicle event an investigator was sent to assess the claim. The company investigator found two primary breaches of the contract, one of which was that the Jacobs’ were transporting oversized goods (lengths of two-by-fours) inappropriately with the back of their vehicle open and not properly secured, and the other that they had attached several cosmetic additions to their vehicle, one of which was the cause of the accident.

Moving through her overview took time, and you could feel the energy in the room slow to a crawl. It was the opposite of the Plaintiff’s opening - Gemma didn’t get into great detail, since it wasn’t the time to present evidence, but she hammered the broad strokes in a way that made it feel like they were mountains that the plaintiffs would need to overcome.

“In short, your Honour, the Plaintiff needs to prove that our client has acted in bad faith in their investigation of the event,” Gemma continued. “And that their findings are untrue. Our clients would be happy to honour the contract if this proves to be the case, but we firmly believe in the findings of the investigation.” This pushed into the introduction of witnesses, and what their key testimony would be. We had a list of ten witnesses prepared, each giving a different piece of the puzzle in terms of highlighting the breach of contract on the part of the Jacobs before and during the day of the accident, and that they had been made aware of the terms they had agreed to.

Gemma was winding down, and she’d been speaking for almost half an hour straight when she paused, coming over to the table. You had already poured her a cup of water and she smiled at you with her eyes as she took a long sip. As she set it down Sabrina spun her notepad around where she’d written, *You’re killing it!*

“In conclusion, you Honour,” Gemma said, turning back around and taking a few steps toward the bench before planting her feet solidly. “This is a civil case and the Plaintiffs must prove their

case by a preponderance of the evidence. Based on the information gathered, we believe that the Plaintiff will be unable to do so and that they will attempt to turn this case on its head to try and make it into something it is not. This is a case about breach of contract; nothing more and nothing less. The Plaintiffs may wish to make this into a spectacle - an indictment of the system they wilfully engaged in, or of our client who dealt with them openly and fairly. No one is refuting that there was a legal contract made between the Plaintiff and the Defendant, and therefore for these reasons, after you have heard all the evidence, at the end of their trial we will ask you to return a verdict in favour of DeLittle Insurance. Thank you." Gemma nodded respectfully, and then turned and came back to your table.

You couldn't help raising a hand and patting, and then squeezing, her shoulder in congratulations even if a couple dozen lawyers were watching from behind you.

"Perfectly executed," you murmured to her.

"Thanks," she smiled, just a little, to you. Eric whispered something to her from her other side and she turned, thanking him as well.

"Alright," Judge Mathews said. "That wraps up opening statements. Plaintiffs, it's your floor to make your case."

There was a brief exchange of words over at the Plaintiff's table, and for a moment you wondered if you were really *that lucky* that they hadn't come up with a plan of who would present what parts of their case. Unfortunately, it seemed more like it was just finding the right notes, and Tucker stood up. "May it please the Court, Your Honour, the Plaintiff calls Mr Fred Garland to the stand."

You frowned and raised your eyebrows, surprised that they were starting with the Insurance Broker. It made sense if they were going to make a linear timeline of events as the core of their case, but you couldn't see how that would serve them the best in making their case - if anything, it leaned more into your version of events because it was a much more factual way of tackling the issues. Unless, of course, they had put together the same issues that you had found on the weekend in regards to the Insurance Broker - that Fred Garland was the brother-in-law to the Plaintiff, Randy.

One of the lawyers from the other firm, a younger guy so you had a feeling he was an Associate and not one of their Partners, came up onto the stage and made his way to the witness box. He was carrying several papers which would be the script he was supposed to work from when playing his role - depending on the Mock Trial format the competition provided witness actors, or sometimes the competitors had to find them if they wanted to bring them to the stand. In this case, you had to assume most of the witnesses would be Paralegals, Associates, or even Junior Partners, volunteering or getting pressed into it if they were free.

The monetary investment by the firms into what was essentially a game, hiring out the hall and giving folks time off of their regular duties, kept growing and you had to wonder how it was worth it. Maybe Garrison and some of the other Partners had laid out a bet or something? Which, of course, was just even *more* pressure.

The Associate was 'sworn in' and then Tucker was free to begin his questioning. It started reasonably enough - entering anything into evidence for the case required it to come in through a witness. That meant that the Insurance Contract that the Jacobs had signed had to be entered in and validated, so that was the first order of business. 'Fred' did so, checking over the document and agreeing that it was the right contract. Then he confirmed a record of the Jacobs' policy, that until the incident in question, they had never missed a payment or made a claim against the policy.

And then Tucker showed their hand. "Now, Mr Garland," the tall, athletic blond said with a smarmy smile. "Would you consider the policy you set up for the Jacobs to be of a typical type for the vehicle type and make, and their driving records? Or did it lean more towards an... atypical, modified policy?"

He'd found the familial connection.

Chapter 466

"I wouldn't say it was typical, no," 'Fred' said. The associate playing the Insurance Broker definitely wasn't a skilled actor, but he at least didn't seem to need to check his role notes very often.

"And why would you say that, Mr Garland?" Tucker asked.

"Well, it's my job to get a policy in front of my clients that matches up with their needs. In the case of Randy and Felise, they were asking for a lower monthly payment without raising their deductible. It took some work to find a policy that would fit that."

"Is that something you would usually do for a client, Mr Garland?" Tucker followed up.

"I mean, that's my job," 'Fred' said.

"Let me be more specific," Tucker said. "It's sensible to assume most Insurance Companies have standard best practices that most of the industry follows; did the policy that you matched up with the Jacobs follow those best practices or fall outside of them?"

Tucker was doing a decent job of laying the path towards where you knew he was going. That last question you might have been able to object to, but it would just be a delaying tactic to force Tucker to confirm there were Best Practices. Sabrina grabbed her notepad and started scribbling something on it, then showed it to you flat on the table. It was a stick figure falling into a hole, a big 'T' on his face. She smirked just a little at you, and you smiled and nodded.

"Well, I'd say it was more... on the fringes of best practices," 'Fred' said.

"I'm sure no insurance company simply *gives away* more favourable terms than their standard rates. What else needed to change in the policy to make those rates possible?"

"Several things," 'Fred' said. "There were heavy guidelines based on keeping the vehicle current on maintenance schedules and safe driving practices - any sort of speeding ticket would have bounced the premium way up."

"Anything else?" Tucker asked.

'Fred' pursed his lips in thought, and then looked down to check his notes. "Yes," he said. "No after-market modifications to the vehicle, functional or decorative. No driving it internationally."

"So four significant variances?"

"Generally," 'Fred' nodded.

“Those don’t sound too onerous,” Tucker said. “But would you say it took an average amount of work, or higher than average, to get that deal done for the Jacobs?”

“Above average.”

“And is there a personal reason that you would have to go above and beyond for the Jacobs as your clients?”

‘Fred’ frowned, actually doing a little bit of acting. “I go above and beyond for all my clients.”

“Have you ever gotten a deal like this done before?” Tucker asked.

“A few times,” ‘Fred’ answered.

“More than five?”

Fred shook his head. “No.”

“Are there any similarities in the clients you’ve struck those deals for?”

“I... make them work for friends and relatives who come asking,” ‘Fred’ admitted.

“So a sort of ‘friends and family’ discount?”

“It’s not a discount, it’s a policy I’m allowed to negotiate on their behalf,” ‘Fred’ said.

“Certainly understandable,” Tucker said. “But, when you present these modified policies to them, do you go over the changes and the extra-strict guidelines?”

“Of course I do.”

“On the day that Randy and Felise Jacobs signed the contract for their new policy, do you remember if you went over the new guidelines with them?”

“I do,” ‘Fred’ said. “I always go over every policy with every client.”

“Did they understand the policy?”

“Objection,” you said, standing up to address the court. “Calls for speculation, Your Honor.”

Judge Mathews looked to Tucker.

“It speaks to whether Mr Garland fulfilled his duties as a Broker,” Tucker said.

“Objection sustained. Try and find another way around it, Mr Jackson,” the Judge said.

“Thank you, Your Honour,” you and Tucker both said. The minutiae of the proper procedure, especially in Mock Trial, was a little dizzying at times and a good rule of thumb was ‘Always be extra polite to the Judge and the Court.’

Tucker nodded, and you sat down. The blond ‘lawyer’ tapped his fingers on the front of his suit jacket for a moment. “Did the Jacobs’ read the policy in its entirety before signing?”

“I can’t say that I remember that or not,” ‘Fred’ said.

“So, to confirm, you allowed them to sign a policy, with different-than-normal conditions, without having studied the terms?” Tucker asked.

“Objection,” you called again, standing up. “The question is both Leading and Argumentative.”

“Sustained. Find some secure footing, Mr Jackson,” Judge Mathews said.

“Thank you, Your Honour,” you both said.

“Apologies,” Tucker said and nodded to the Judge, then refocused on ‘Fred.’ “Would you say that the Jacobs’ trusted you, Mr Garland?”

“Objection,” you said, standing once again. “Calls for Speculation.”

“Apologies again, your Honour,” Tucker said quickly, holding up his hands innocently. “I see where I went wrong on that.”

Judge Mathews was giving him a strong look that said, ‘*Keep trying me, son.*’ “Objection sustained,” he said instead.

“Thank you, Your Honour,” you both said.

“Mr Garland, do you consider yourself to have a good familial relationship with the Jacobs?” Tucker asked.

“I would,” ‘Fred’ answered.

“Did the Jacobs’ give you a reason as to why they came to you when they were looking for a new insurance policy on their vehicle?”

“They didn’t really need to,” ‘Fred’ said. “I’d let them know whenever they needed work done, I’d be happy to do it.”

“Had they used you to find previous Insurance policies?” Tucker asked.

“No.”

“And you married Felise Jacobs’ sister six months prior to the date that the Jacobs’ came to you for a new policy?”

“About that,” ‘Fred’ nodded.

“Were you looking to impress your new sister and brother-in-law by getting them a great deal?”

“I... can’t say that it wasn’t on my mind.”

“Could you answer that without a double-negative please, Mr Garland?” Tucker asked.

“Yes,” ‘Fred’ said. “I knew getting them a great deal would help impress them.”

“And did you tell them during the signing that, quote, ‘This should be an easy policy to follow, just don’t do anything stupid?’”

“I can’t recall saying that specifically,” ‘Fred’ said. “But it sounds like something I would say.”

“Is ‘just don’t do anything stupid’ a specific detail of the policy?” Tucker asked.

“No, obviously not,” Fred said.

“Is it the sort of thing you would say to a client you are not specifically related to or friends with?”

“No, I wouldn’t,” Fred said.

“Did the Jacobs’ ever have the full policy in their possession to review prior to the meeting when they signed it in your presence?” Tucker asked.

“No, I showed it to them at that meeting,” ‘Fred’ said.

“Did they read through the entire policy themselves in your presence without your guidance?”

“No,” ‘Fred’ said.

“Did they review any part of the policy without your commentary or guidance?”

“No,” ‘Fred’ said again.

“Did they take a copy of the policy home with them?” Tucker asked.

“They did, and they were mailed a copy as well,” ‘Fred’ said.

“Did they ever ask you questions about the policy after the fact?”

“No,” ‘Fred’ answered.

“To the best of your knowledge, did the Jacobs’ ever seek outside counsel beyond your say-so about the details of the policy they were signing?”

“No,” ‘Fred’ said.

It was starting to get repetitive, but you knew that Tucker was trying to find his hammer blow moment where ‘Fred’ admitted that the Jacobs’ just trusted him and signed the policy, but he hadn’t gotten a big sound-byte-worthy admission. He *had* it already, but he was trying to get that big visible win.

“Did you ever offer them the chance to take the policy home to review it, or to seek outside counsel?” Tucker asked.

“That isn’t a standard practice,” ‘Fred’ said. “Clients come to me because they trust I’m working on their behalf.”

“Did the Jacobs’ trust you?”

“Objection,” you said. “Speculation again, Your Honour.”

“Sustained. Mr Jackson, find another line of questioning. I think we’ve wrung this one out.”

“Thank you, Your Honour,” you both said again.

“That is all the questions I have at this time, please answer any questions the defence may have for you,” Tucker said, nodding respectfully to ‘Fred’ and then the Judge before heading back to the Plaintiff’s table. It was another one of those phrases that Mock Trial loved to ingrain into you even if real lawyers could get away with tightening up the phrases.

“Cross for the Defence,” Judge Mathews said, looking at your table as he prompted you.

It was time to go to work.

Chapter 467

It was Eric's turn to shine - once you'd identified all the likely witnesses the plaintiffs might call, you had both put in work on the lines of questioning that could counteract them and then split them up to finalise. Even though you had been the one to identify the potential issue of Fred Garland being the brother-in-law of the Jacobs, he'd ended up on Eric's list so it was on him to lay things out.

"Hello, Mr Garland," Eric said after giving his 'May it please the court' and asking to approach the witness, walking over to stand calmly. "I'm sure it isn't a fun experience having your professionalism questioned. Do you need some water before we start cleaning some details up?"

"No, thank you," 'Fred' said. "I'd rather get this over with."

You narrowed your eyes slightly - that was a little combative. It was hard to know if that was how the Associate was supposed to play the character or if he was injecting a little something extra in there because he was secretly rooting for the Plaintiffs. But then, *any* witness in any trial would likely be leaning one way or the other, so was it really that different from real life?

"Sure," Eric said. "Well. First, how many clients have you served, roughly, in the last five years as an Insurance Broker?"

"Probably... somewhere between thirteen and fourteen thousand," 'Fred' said after briefly glancing at his script.

"That's an impressive number of clients," Eric said. "Are you considered a top earner in your brokerage?"

"Top three the last few years," 'Fred' nodded.

"And how many times have you been brought to court based on one of your policies?" Eric asked.

"None," 'Fred' said.

"Ever get any formal complaints?"

"Nothing that could be taken seriously," 'Fred' said.

"What are the nature of the 'unserious' ones?" Eric asked.

"I wouldn't take unreasonable demands, usually," 'Fred' said. "Or racism, bigotry, misogyny. Usually when someone has such an awful record that they can't get anything except extremely pricey coverage."

"Mmm," Eric hummed and nodded. You were honestly a little impressed at how he was handling the witness. He still had that little bit of odd, buddy-buddy confidence but all of the silly shit about him had dropped away. "Have you ever had a client get their policy cancelled on them?"

"It happens," 'Fred' said. "More often than you would think, but usually it doesn't happen after an accident."

"Have you ever had a policy cancelled in a case similar to the Jacobs?" Eric asked.

"Never," 'Fred' said.

"Interesting. Even on these low-cost, high-guideline policies, you work out for friends and family?"

"Hasn't happened before, or since," 'Fred' shook his head.

"That's good to know, thank you," Eric said. "Now, earlier you identified the contract and policy you put together for the Jacobs, and which they signed. I was interested in two clauses in particular." He pulled out a copy of the policy you had prepared, which the Plaintiffs had already entered as Exhibit #1. "I've flagged two specific passages. Could you please read the first one?"

"Policy Holder shall refrain modifying, replacing or adding any functional or cosmetic parts, systems or adornments of the vehicle. All repairs shall be conducted by a licensed professional at a dealership lot of the vehicles' make," 'Fred' read out.

"Interesting. What would constitute a 'cosmetic part?'" Eric asked.

"Objection," Samantha half-shouted, standing up. "Improper lay witness opinion. Mr Garland is not an auto mechanic or engineer."

"Your Honour, Mr Garland would clearly require the professional knowledge to identify and provide insurance for aftermarket parts on the vehicles he is negotiating a policy for, let alone giving a broad definition of what might cause a breach of those same policies."

"Overruled," Judge Mathews nodded, and Samantha sat down with a sour look on her face. "Mr Garland, you may answer the question."

"Yes, sir. Technically that could be anything from a bumper sticker up to a cosmetic aftermarket spoiler, underglow lighting or a front grill replacement," 'Fred' said.

“Thank you for clarifying that,” Eric said. “Could you read out the second flagged section?”

“If the Policy Holder is found to be operating the vehicle without following all legal motor vehicle laws of their county and State, the Policy Holder will be found at fault.”

“Interesting,” Eric said. “What happens when the policyholder is found to be ‘At Fault?’”

“Depending on the infraction, the Insurance Company can raise the monthly rate permanently following a schedule in the attached Appendix,” ‘Fred’ said. “Or they can cancel the policy altogether.”

You could tell Eric was wrapping up, but you’d realised something important - something you felt stupid for not having thought of ahead of time. Fred Garland had more information that you could squeak out of him now as opposed to later from a different witness.

Fred Garland was the brother-in-law of the Jacobs, which meant he knew them. And he knew their vehicle.

You quickly rifled through the files, both Sabrina and Gemma looking at you in surprise for a moment until you found the right file and flipped through *that* until you found the proper picture. Once you found it you coughed and cleared your throat - quiet enough not to be disruptive, but enough to get Eric’s attention. He glanced back and saw you tapping a paper on the table.

“Just one more thing, Mr Garland,” Eric said, heading back towards you. He picked up the paper raised his eyebrows and glanced at you, then rolled his eyes as he realised what you’d both missed as well.

Chapter 468

“Mr Garland, would you say that you could recognize the vehicle driven by the Jacobs by sight?” Eric asked, heading back towards the witness stand.

“Objection,” Samantha said again, “No foundation, Your honour.”

“I’m laying the foundation now, your Honour,” Eric said.

“Overruled,” Judge Mathews said. “But pick up the pace a little bit, Mr Daniels.”

“Thank you, your Honour,” Samantha and Eric both said.

“Of course, your Honour,” Eric nodded, following up, and then turned back to ‘Fred.’ “So, Mr Garland, would you recognise the Jacobs’ vehicle if you saw it?”

“I would,” ‘Fred’ said.

Eric set the first printout on the photo in front of him. “Would you say that this is a fair and accurate representation of the Jacobs family vehicle?”

‘Fred’ took a look at it, then looked down and shuffled the papers of his script, then back up. “I would,” he said.

“Your Honour, at this time the defence would offer Exhibit 2 into evidence, its authenticity has previously been stipulated to,” Eric said, using the correct phrasing. He handed a copy of the photograph to the Judge, and then another to Tucker at the Plaintiff’s table.

“Any objections?” Judge Mathews asked.

Tucker turned and whispered for a moment with the rest of his team, though you did notice that Maeve at the far end of the table didn’t even bother looking down at him. The blond ‘lead’ of their team turned back to the Judge. “No, your Honour.”

“You have your exhibit, counsel,” Judge Mathews nodded to Eric.

“So, Mr Garland,” Eric picked back up, placing the photograph in front of ‘Fred.’ “Is this the Jacobs’ family vehicle?”

“It is,” ‘Fred’ said.

“And this is the same vehicle that is covered by the policy we’ve been speaking of, correct?”

“It is,” ‘Fred’ nodded again.

“Does a Toyota Sienna come with an American Flag hood wrap like that standard or as an official add-on?” Eric asked.

“It doesn’t,” ‘Fred’ said.

“Would you consider the fabric hood wrap a ‘cosmetic addition’ to the vehicle?”

‘Fred’ nodded. “It’s definitely not a functional one,” he said.

“Just for clarity, sir, could you give us a yes or no?”

“Yes,” ‘Fred’ said, “It’s a commercial add-on.”

“And what about the rather large window sticker on the rearview window?” Eric asked.

“Another cosmetic add-on.”

“If you were asked by a client about adding either of these cosmetic additions to their vehicle under a policy like the one the Jacobs had, what would you tell them?”

“I’d tell them not to,” ‘Fred’ said. “It’s a bad idea.”

“Did you say that to the Jacobs?”

“I did when they put the sticker on,” ‘Fred’ said. “Randy told me to mind my business.”

You could practically *feel* Samantha wanting to find a way to object to the line of questioning, but ‘Fred’ was testifying to something that had been said to him, not something that he’d heard had been said.

“Did you say the same thing with the fabric hood cover?” Eric asked.

“No,” ‘Fred’ said.

“Why not?” Eric asked.

“Randy spent a month nagging me about being whipped by my job,” ‘Fred’ said. “So I knew the hood cover was another shot at me and decided not to warn him anymore.”

“Were you required to warn him, either by company policy or legally?”

“No,” ‘Fred’ said.

“Was there any expectation for you to report the infraction?”

“That’s definitely not my job,” ‘Fred’ said. “So no.”

“It must be difficult, testifying against your brother and sister-in-law,” Eric said. “Is there a reason that you seem so willing to do so?”

“Objection,” Samantha said, shooting up to her feet. “Irrelevant, your Honour?”

Judge Mathews raised his eyebrows and looked at Eric.

“I am simply asking if there have been any issues between Mr Garland and the Plaintiffs following the fallout of their policy, your Honour,” Eric said.

“Objection sustained,” the Judge said. “Witnesses are here because they are called, Mr Daniels, unless you have evidence otherwise. Let’s not go on fishing expeditions.”

“Thank you, your Honour,” Samantha and Eric both said.

Eric nodded. “I have no further questions for you at this time, Mr Garland. Thank you.”

“Any re-examination by the plaintiffs?” Judge Mathews asked.

The other table had been passing back and forth a notepad, furiously setting up whatever they could to combat Eric’s cross. When Eric came back down you and Gemma both turned and patted him on the shoulder for the good work he’d done.

Tucker stood up, not wanting to keep the Judge waiting. “May it please the court, your Honour,” he said, then came forward, grabbing the notepad from Amanda and referencing it quickly. “Mr Garland, you previously testified that it was ‘not your job’ to report a breach of a policy stipulation, and also that you weren’t required to warn a client if they were in breach. Are you contending that you have no duties to the policy beyond the signing and filing?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying,” ‘Fred’ said.

“And if a client were to call you because they have an issue with their policy?” Tucker asked.

“I would help them,” ‘Fred’ said. “But there is only so much I can do. The Insurance Company handles claims, not the broker.”

“Did you consider it an act of revenge, not giving my clients a proper warning?” Tucker asked.

“Objection, your Honour,” you said, standing up. “The question is irrelevant based on the previous testimony, and also argumentative.”

“Sustained,” Judge Mathews agreed, turning back to Tucker. “You can’t have it both ways, Mr Jackson. They don’t get to go fishing, and neither do you.”

“Thank you, Your Honour,” you and Tucker both said, and you sat down.

Tucker hovered for about ten seconds, formulating his thoughts, then shook his head. “No further questions for this witness Your Honour, I would ask that the witness be excused.”

“You’re excused, Mr Garland,” the Judge said, then looked at his watch. “Alright, folks. Let’s take lunch now, we’re running right up against the usual time.” He tapped his gavel, then stood up and stretched. “Alright, Garrison,” he called, a little more boisterously. “What’s on the menu?”

Chapter 469

Lunch was scheduled for an hour, so you and the rest of the interns on both sides of the case filed down from the stage along with all the other lawyers in the building and headed out into the lobby. Someone had set up a long table with assorted sandwiches from a fancy deli, along with snack bags of chips, muffins and a variety of drinks.

You, Gemma, Sabrina and Eric were all finishing up filling your disposable plates when Amanda, the intern with the considerable chest, came over to you and tapped your arm politely. "Hi," she said. "I was wondering if we could have a quick settlement conference over lunch?"

"Oh," you said, glancing at the others. "I didn't think we were at that point yet, but we can take a minute to do that."

"Oh, I didn't mean the whole team," she said. "Just a quick check-in, one-on-one, then we can report back."

You raised an eyebrow and slowly looked back at your girlfriends and Eric. All three of them were giving you raised eyebrow, fast-nodding smiles, and for once you were pretty sure it was for the same reason.

"Alright," you said. "Have a spot in mind?"

"Let's go up to the balcony?" she suggested. The lawyers who weren't eating standing up in the lobby were heading back into the hall to grab seats.

"Sure," you said. "I'll meet you up there in a minute, let me just grab my drink."

She smiled and nodded, heading back into the hall towards the balcony stairs.

"Why the hell are you guys looking at me like that?" you asked in a whisper once Amanda was gone.

"Because she's cute," Gemma said.

"Because she likes you," Sabrina said.

"Because she has gigantic, massive... eyes," Eric started, and then switched gears when both Gemma and Sabrina looked at him. "Wait, why are *you two* encouraging him?"

"She asked for a settlement conference," you said. "Not to sneak off and canoodle."

"*I'd* sneak off and canoodle with her," Sabrina snorted.

"Ditto," Eric said.

"Just go see what she wants, love," Gemma said quietly, smirking at the other two. "If she has an offer, great. If she wants your number, give it to her."

"Alright," you sighed, shaking your head. "I'll see what she wants. And maybe try and figure out where they're going next with their case. Just make sure you guys adjust our witness lineup before we're back now that we have Garland's piece already sorted."

"We will," Sabrina said. "Just go, don't keep her waiting."

As you were walking away, shaking your head to yourself, you just barely heard Eric. "So... *why* are you two both OK with him getting flirted with?"

The stairs up to the balcony were a little old and tight, and they creaked on pretty much each step as you climbed them quickly. The main section of the balcony was slightly slanted just like the floor below, allowing for bench seating in mild tiers, while the wings that followed along the side walls were flat and had some tables and chairs. Amanda had picked one of those tables looking out over the hall, so you went to join her.

"I wish I knew if this place was having a concert before I leave the city," you said, making conversation. "It seems like a great venue."

"It is," Amanda said. "I've seen a few here."

"You go here?" you asked.

She shook her head and smirked a little. "Grew up in the city," she said. "I was sneaking into College concerts from my sophomore year though."

You had a feeling you knew what assets she used to get by bouncers or distract doormen, but you didn't say anything. She told you about a few of the bands she'd seen in the venue, and you traded a couple of light stories about bands that came through your University.

"So," you said once that topic of small talk wound down. "Settlement conference?"

"Oh, yeah, no," Amanda said. "That was just to get you up here to eat lunch with. Seriously, I've been stuck in an office with those four for *too long*. Maeve is awesome, but the other three are... ugh. Thomas is a brown-nosing know-it-all, Samantha thinks everything is a cutthroat competition so she's a bundle of raw nerves, and Tucker is, well... Tucker."

"Exactly how many times has he asked you out without asking you out because his ego got bruised the first time you said no?" you asked.

Amanda snorted and smirked. "Do you want the total, or the daily average?"

"Point taken," you chuckled. "So, why me, then?"

"Because you seem normal, and nice," Amanda said. "I mean, the two girls on your team don't seem weird or mean but are kind of... scary pretty. And the other guy gives me whiffs of Tucker."

"Just whiffs," you said. "But you're not wrong. Gemma and Sabrina are both really great, though."

"Well, maybe I'll have lunch with one of them tomorrow," Amanda smirked. Her overall cute face was served well by the expression. "But are you seriously telling me the worst you've got is a 'whiffs of Tucker' guy in your office."

"Oh," you laughed. "Yeah, no. We had this guy named Andy - nice enough, but a complete stoner and nepotism hire. Deadweight from day one, and he ended up getting canned."

"Alright," Amanda said. "Not the worst, but definitely getting there."

You sighed, shaking your head. "Look," you said. "I don't mean to be a One-Upper here, but I'm warning you now, if you make me talk about Joy you will be One-Upped."

"Samantha went to HR to try and get Maeve and me fired by saying she could smell that we were on our periods and were refusing to do anything about the odour," Amanda said.

"Did it end in a lawsuit?" you countered.

"No," Amanda said, then realised what you were implying. "No," she repeated.

You sighed again, trying to decide what you would and wouldn't tell her - you weren't going to give away anything that would hurt the Firm, but you were more than happy to do some light gossiping. "So, the first thing you need to know about Joy is that she was the daughter of a Senior Partner..."

Chapter 470

You were so invested in the conversation with Amanda, keeping her laughing as you told her about all the petty little shit from Joy and how she'd been trying to make you her summer sex slave, that you were legitimately startled when Maeve pulled out a chair and sat down on it heavily. Amanda had a sort of light, tinkling laugh but she tended to snort while she was laughing, and the look on her face when she did that and covered her mouth was cute as hell. You could only imagine how cute *and* sexy it would be if she was wearing something a little more revealing than her tightly buttoned-up blouse and suit jacket.

After a surprised cough and clearing your throat when Maeve sat down, you smiled at her questioningly. "Hello," you said.

"Hello," she replied, then looked at Amanda. "You're flirting with him."

Amanda blushed. "We're having a conversation, Maeve. That's all."

"No, you're flirting with him," Maeve said. "The same way you flirt with me."

"Maeve," Amanda said, her eyes going a little wider, and you realised that Maeve was spot on.

"I'm sorry," you said. "I didn't realise that you two were together."

"Oh, we're not *together* together," Maeve said. "We're just having a summer fling."

"*Maeve*," Amanda said, hissing it quietly this time and checking to make sure no one was around paying attention to the three of you.

"Oh, what would anyone do about it now?" Maeve sighed, shaking her head. Her British accent made her sound more eloquent than the words she was using. "We've got two and a half weeks left to go, they aren't going to fire us for being involved."

"Still," Amanda said. "We agreed we were going to keep it quiet."

"Well, I figured if you were flirting with him you liked him," Maeve said bluntly. "And I'm interested in him as well. So we might as well have some *real* fun and make it a thing."

Amanda was blushing furiously now, and you could feel your own cheeks heating up just a little at the blunt way Maeve was approaching things. Sure, you'd started to have the feeling that Amanda was flirting and not just getting away from her teammates, and maybe Sabrina and Gemma were right again, but having it sort of just dropped on the table was a lot different than discovering it naturally.

“Of course,” Maeve continued. “We’ll need to get the permission of his girlfriend. I’m not sure which one it is, though. Are you dating the blonde or the brunette on your intern team?”

“I-” you said, blinking. You were sure the three of you had kept everything professional all morning.

“OK, let’s get this out of the way,” Maeve said, holding up a hand. “I have Asperger’s Syndrome, or ASD. It’s mild autism, without any language or intellectual impairment. I’m weird, I know it, but I’m still a woman with all the emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual wants and needs that come with it. Part of my weirdness is that I have a hard time regulating social niceties and pointless small talk.”

“Alright,” you said, slowly nodding. “That sounds... I don’t think tough is the right word.”

“It isn’t,” Maeve nodded succinctly. “I’m just me. It isn’t any more tough than you being you, most of the time.”

“Maeve is at the top of her class at University College London,” Amanda said. “Which is a big deal.”

“Sorry,” you said. “I didn’t mean to imply anything or insult you.”

“You didn’t,” Maeve said. “This is what I mean about social niceties though. Just take anything I say at face value, don’t try to read into it. So when I say that I’d like to have a threesome with you and Amanda, that’s what I mean.”

Amanda was still blushing and looked a little mortified. “You do know that there *is* a level of compassion you can have for the rest of us, Maeve,” she said.

Maeve smirked a little, adjusting her black-rimmed glasses slightly. “I know,” she said. “But I like the way you look when you’re blushing like that.”

Amanda scoffed and gave Maeve a little shove, then looked at you. “I’m sorry if this is weird,” she said.

You gestured vaguely, trying to find the right words, and then sighed and shook your head. “I mean, sure, it is. But I also learned a lot this summer about how being blunt can lead to good things. The more open I am about things, the better they seem to go, so...” You looked directly at Maeve. “I think you’re attractive and quirky in a fun way. Sex with you would probably be a lot of fun.” Then you looked at Amanda. “I think you’re cute as hell, and talking with you is already a lot of fun. Seeing more of you would be great.”

Amanda was smiling and still blushing but looked over at Maeve. “You know, he hasn’t glanced down at my tits once?”

“He must be dating the blonde then,” Maeve said. “She isn’t as big as you, but that would explain not being sucked in by your tits gravitational pull.”

Amanda snorted again and covered her mouth, looking at you with big eyes, and you had to try and choke back your chuckle as you covered your face with your hand for a moment. “Um, well,” you said. “If we’re being blunt, and talking about... threesomes. I’m actually dating both of them. Gemma, Sabrina and I are in a polyamorous throuple.”

“Oh, that’s interesting,” Maeve said. “I hadn’t accounted for polyamory when I was trying to figure out which one we needed to approach, it’s still fairly rare.”

“This sounds like a story,” Amanda said.

“We’re... trying to keep it on the down-low,” you said. “At least until the end of the summer. So please don’t share that around. And it’s definitely a story. Maybe the five of us should hang out after the trial is over, get some drinks or something?”

“That sounds fun,” Amanda agreed.

“I’ve never been with that many partners before, but I think I could handle it,” Maeve said.

“I- I actually did mean just drinks. Face value,” you said.

“Oh,” Maeve said and frowned curiously. “So... not a fivesome?”

“Well...” you said. “I, ah, didn’t say *that*.”

Chapter 471

“OK,” you mumbled to Sabrina and Gemma as you met back up with them. Everyone had finished lunch and most of the lawyers were either shooting the shit with each other or working on laptops and phones before the Trial started back up. Eric had slipped away to the washroom, and Amanda and Maeve had gone off to connect with their team for the Trial, giving you a few minutes ‘alone’ with the girls. “You guys were right.”

“Did she ask you out?” Gemma asked quietly, smirking a little.

“I bet she gave you her number,” Sabrina said.

“Not exactly,” you said. “Um, Maeve, the Brit, crashed our conversation. She’s - well, there’s a lot about her that I’ll explain later, but let’s just say she’s super blunt for now. And she offered a threesome with me and Amanda.”

Sabrina let out a long snort, covering her mouth as she suppressed her laugh, and Gemma rolled her eyes and shook her head. “Jesus, John,” she said. “For real?”

“Yeah,” you said. “Just straight up like that. I got a bit more background - they’ve been hooking up as a summer fling, but don’t seem like they intend to continue beyond the summer. Maeve also figured out I was dating one of you, and wanted to know who she needed to ask permission from for the threesome. Since they revealed their stuff, I sort of let the cat out of the bag about us three.”

“That’s fair, I guess,” Gemma sighed.

“No hint that they know who I am?” Sabrina asked. “Or what Amanda does?”

You shook your head. “I didn’t bring it up. I don’t know if she’s told Maeve that, and I didn’t want to make it weird.”

“Except you *did* ask me about it to ‘not make it weird,’” Sabrina smirked.

“We’re working together every day. If I hadn’t, I’d have been staring at you like an insane person all the time with that burning in my head,” you said. “This is a little different.”

“I know, I’m just giving you shit,” Sabrina chuckled. “Don Juan.”

“Hey, maybe it’s all the confidence I’ve gotten from you two,” you pointed out.

“And the slight style changes,” Gemma said, grinning as she adjusted the collar of your suit jacket and then winked. “But mostly the confidence. You were already cute, smart and funny.”

“So what’s the arrangement then?” Sabrina asked. “Did you set a date? Are we all getting together?”

“I suggested we get drinks first,” you said. “After the trial so it doesn’t get weird. We only have a small window though if we’re doing it before you leave, Gemma.”

“We have the weekend fully booked,” Gemma said. “And Wednesday, and there’s no way I’m spending the last few nights I have with you two with two other random ladies, even if they are attractive. So it’ll need to be Thursday or Friday.”

“We’ll figure it out,” you said. “And if it doesn’t happen, then it doesn’t happen. We’re not shoehorning it in somewhere that needs to be for us.”

“I wouldn’t mind being shoehorned in between those titties,” Sabrina mumbled, making you and Gemma both roll your eyes and smile.

Judge Mathews, who had been talking with Garrison and a few other lawyers, stood up from his seat and that seemed to be the sign everyone was waiting for. You and the girls headed up to the stage, followed by the Plaintiff team, and then Eric as he came back from the washroom. Once everyone was settled, Judge Mathews came up on stage and headed for his bench, taking his time to sit down and settle himself before tapping his gavel lightly. “I call the session back to order,” he said after clearing his throat. “Counsel, call your next witness.”

You weren’t sure if the opposition had decided to change their plan or not, but the next few witnesses they called were low on the importance scale. Maybe you had put a spook in them or something after you brought the heat on what they had thought would be a stellar kick-off. Their first two witnesses that afternoon were eyewitnesses to the aftermath of the accident and really amounted to more character witnesses than anything. They told their stories of seeing the Jacobs helping other folks out of cars even though their own vehicle had been totalled.

You countered fairly easily by confirming that the witnesses hadn’t seen the actual accident as it happened, only the aftermath.

Amanda took over examining the next witness, Samantha and Thomas having done the previous two, and you were a little... distracted. Now that sex wasn’t just an idle daydream and was instead on the table, you couldn’t help but let your eyes linger a bit more on her. She was thicker than Gemma but also a little shorter - not fat, but her body shape definitely facilitated how heavy she was in the bust. And yet, her face didn’t look like it was really holding any baby fat like you might have expected for someone with her curves. She was bright-eyed and cute, with well-manicured eyebrows and her brown hair nicely arranged in soft, natural waves. She didn’t have a butt to match her bust, but she wasn’t flat back there either.

Sabrina hadn't mentioned how successful Amanda's alleged OnlyFans account was, but you could certainly see why it *would* be successful if she put her personality into whatever she filmed.

Amanda's witness was another softball, the mechanic who had officially written off the vehicle as a total loss. He confirmed that there were no after-market parts on the vehicle that he had seen, and he was one of the appropriately licensed mechanics at a proper dealership just like the policy required. She handled it well, hitting all the right phrases for Mock Trial, and developing a strong narrative with the witness that the vehicle showed no signs of issues prior to the accident, and should have been an easy write-off and replace. She ended her questioning, handing him off to your side, and shot a glance in your direction as she headed back to her table.

You had handled the previous two witnesses, and this one was on Eric's list, so you didn't have to be the one to tackle squashing Amanda's work, thankfully. Eric got up, addressed the court, and then got into it with the mechanic. The only matter that really mattered to your defence from him were the cosmetic additions. The decal, which he confirmed was still on the back window even though it had broken in the accident, was large enough to be holding the glass together still. Eric doubled down on that win by also asking the mechanic if it would have caused a significant blindspot out of the rear of the vehicle, which Samantha objected to immediately as being out of the scope of a mechanic's professional purview. Eric argued that if not a mechanic, then who would have the knowledge of that specific decal on that specific vehicle?

Eric got the objection overruled, and got his answer - it was big enough to create visibility issues out of the back, though not enough to block all visibility.

Then he asked about the cloth hood wrap at the front of the car.

Chapter 472

“What do you mean?” the ‘Mechanic’ asked. He was being played by one of the associates from the firm - you were pretty sure his name was Chuck... something.

“A previous witness has identified the plaintiff’s vehicle as being adorned with a fabric hood cover depicting the American flag,” Eric said. “When you were examining the vehicle, did you see any signs of that?”

“Oh,” the ‘Mechanic’ said. “Huh. Was that what those fabric scraps and the twine were?”

Eric raised his eyebrows. “Could you expand on what you *did* see in that area?”

“Um, yeah,” he said. “The front end had some damage to the front bumper on both sides, but the actual hood and engine block were - most of the damage was on the sides and rear of the minivan. When it got to me the hood had a piece of twine looping around it near the back of it closest to the windshield, and that had scraps of fabric stuck to it. That *could* have been what you’re describing if it had been-”

“Objection,” Samantha said quickly. “Witness is speculating, Your Honour.”

“Sustained,” Judge Mathews nodded, turning to the ‘mechanic.’ “Please keep your answers to only what you actually saw.”

“Yes, Your Honour,” the ‘mechanic’ agreed.

“Thank you, Your Honour,” both Eric and Samantha said.

“You said you found twine looped around the hood,” Eric continued his questioning. “Is this something you’ve ever come across before?”

“Not that I can remember,” the ‘Mechanic’ answered.

“But your report didn’t include it,” Eric said. “Why was that?”

“Well, it didn’t look like it was some sort of repair job because it wasn’t actually attached to anything,” he answered. “And it didn’t look like damage, necessarily. At least not to the body of the vehicle.”

“In your expert opinion,” Eric said. “Would you consider the loop of twine and the fabric to have likely gotten to the position you found it during the accident, or would it have needed to be placed there deliberately?”

Samantha clearly wanted to object again, but you could tell she wasn't sure for what. The plaintiffs had introduced the Mechanic as an expert witness on the vehicle, they couldn't call him into question now.

"It would have needed to be placed there deliberately," the 'mechanic' answered.

"Thank you so much for your time, sir," Eric said. "No further questions for this witness, Your Honour."

Again, Eric and your team had managed to divert what seemed to be a key witness for the plaintiffs into one for your defence. The insurance policy was airtight unless they managed to find something utterly wild to challenge it, and now you had double confirmation that the Jacobs' had modified their vehicle with cosmetic additions. Meanwhile, the plaintiffs had managed to paint the Jacobs in a decent light in terms of their character at the scene of the accident, and confirmed that the vehicle was a write-off and should have been replaced if their policy was valid. They'd also brought into question, possibly, that the Jacobs had signed the policy without knowing the details but you had already submitted case law in your opening motions that should have negated that issue, not that the plaintiffs were necessarily aware of that.

Amanda didn't redirect the witness, so the Mechanic was excused and you could see Judge Mathews checking his watch. "Alright, we're reaching the end of day," he said. "We'll pick up again tomorrow at 9:30 AM. Court is now adjourned." He tapped his gavel and stood up, straightening his suit jacket and sighing.

It felt a little early to have wrapped it up for the day, but you guessed that as a retired Judge he either had other things going on in the evening... or he just wanted to enjoy being retired. You, Eric and the girls quickly started packing away your folders and notes and the Plaintiff team was doing the same. Just as you were finishing up Garrison came up on stage and over to you all.

"Interesting work today," he said with a slight smirk, not wanting to give you any encouragement or correction one way or the other. "You've still got... about an hour left in your regular work day, but don't worry about coming to the office. I assume you'll be reviewing and revising your case this evening?" You all nodded - things had gone well, but there were still plenty of pitfalls left to go. "Alright. Then take the rest of the afternoon for that, and be here bright and early tomorrow. No special rental rides now that you know where we're meeting."

"The space really is interesting, sir," you said. "But you talk about it with a sort of nostalgia - did you used to work here or something?"

Garrison's easy smirk got a bit bigger. "Something like that," he said. "But those are stories for when you aren't my interns. Just remember that you're making your case on a historical stage."

He left the four of you, but you didn't even have a chance to discuss anything before Tucker and Samantha were crossing over from their table.

“So,” Tucker said with an easy smile. “Hard first day for you folks, but that’s how Trials go.”

That one had you blinking in mild confusion. Had he been paying attention all day?

“Now that you’ve seen just the basics of our case, we thought it would be fair to open up for another settlement offer,” Samantha said self-righteously. “We can bring this whole thing to a close without embarrassing your client any further.”

“I’m sorry,” Gemma said. “What part of today was embarrassing for our client?”

“They’re the big bad wolf taking out their greed on our clients,” Tucker said. “It’s an old story, and I’m sure the Judge is seeing right through it. But we’ve already shown that your client negotiated in bad faith through familial connections to the Jacobs, misrepresented the policy, and you haven’t done a thing to *prove* that the Jacobs’ deserved to have their policy revoked.”

“We’d be willing to waive damages,” Samantha said. “Just fulfil the policy and pay the legal fees, and our clients can walk away whole.”

Sabrina stood up and leaned forward, planting her hands on the table as she looked at the two of them. “If you bring another ridiculous demand for a settlement again, we’ll bring it up to the Judge,” she said. “We have made it clear that our client is not interested in settling when we are certain that your clients are in breach of contract. If you believe that today went well for you, and would like to continue billing hours to your client whom we are most certain will be paying for them in the end, then I suggest you wait to make comments about our case until after we have actually made it. Now please, allow us to move on about our day.”

Tucker, who’d been at least fronting a cocky smirk, started scowling. “You have to at least present the offer to your client.”

“Sure,” Sabrina said. “Let me call them.” She pulled her phone out of her purse, tapped her finger on the blank screen while making ‘boop-boop’ noises, and then held it up to her ear. “Yes, DeLittle insurance? It’s your lawyers. We’ve been offered a settlement where we pay a bunch of money to someone who you’re sure is in the wrong. Would you like to take it? No? OK, I’ll let them know.” She lowered the phone. “I don’t think they’re going to take it.”

“You don’t need to make a mockery of this mock trial,” Samantha scoffed.

Gemma raised a hand, looking like she wanted to say something, but just sighed and shook her head.

Chapter 473

You ended up deciding that you all should walk back over towards your place - one of the reasons you'd been able to find the sublease with Mosche was because he lived about fifteen minutes from the main University campus, so you cut through there instead of ordering up a ride or grabbing a bus right as rush hour was about to start.

Many of the lawyers had made a fast escape, trying to avoid the same delays in getting wherever they were going, but you did see a few sticking around to talk to Judge Mathews. You were a little tempted to try and hobnob with him a little, maybe try to make a more personal impression, but decided that might not look good since he would be ruling on the mock trial - you'd keep that for after the ruling was made.

The four of you had made it outside, the summer sky clear and sunny, when you were stopped by Maeve appearing next to you and making you do a double take because it felt like she'd just apparated out of thin air. "Did you ask them?" she asked bluntly.

"Ask us what?" Eric asked.

Maeve thankfully ignored him. "I did," you said. "We can make plans tomorrow."

"Good," she nodded, then turned to Gemma and Sabrina. "It's nice to meet you." Then she shifted her satchel strap on her shoulder and started walking down the sidewalk.

"What was that about?" Eric asked, obviously confused as he watched Maeve walk away. She might not have been as curvy and endowed as Amanda, but she was still attractive.

"Oh, she wants to change sides," Gemma said, starting to smirk a little. "She thinks we'll win, and she's willing to trade sexual favours to join our team."

"Wait, really?" Eric asked, then saw the look on Gemma's face and rolled his eyes.

"Eric, don't you have a girlfriend who would care about you *accepting* sexual favours?" you asked.

"I mean... Yeah, I guess," Eric said. You had all started walking in the direction you needed to go. "But she *did* say I should have breakup sex with Lucy, so she might say go for it."

"Here's a question for you," Sabrina said. "Does that go the same for her? If she was just getting out of a relationship, toxic or not, would you be OK with her banging it out for closure?"

"Well, no," Eric said. "But that's different."

“Why’s it different?” Gemma asked, and you suppressed the urge to groan because you knew there was no way Eric was coming out on top of this one.

“Because sex is different for guys and girls,” Eric said. “It’s about partner bonding, right? Like, it’s easier for guys to have sex without getting emotionally attached, but for 90% of females sex creates partner bonding and hurts their ability to connect with future partners.”

“There is so much to unpack there,” Sabrina sighed, shaking her head.

“Are you telling me that I have a harder time ‘partner bonding’ with John because I was in a committed relationship before?” Gemma asked.

“Well, I mean, unless you’re in that 10%,” Eric said, his expression shifting slightly as he realised what he’d already stepped in. “It’s just evolutionary biology though, it’s not *me* saying it. It’s science.”

“And what about the fact that John and I developed emotional bonds even if we started out just hooking up?” Sabrina asked. “Or the fact that John’s emotionality is what made Gemma and I both fall in love with him, like, *super* fast?”

“I... don’t know,” Eric said. “I’m not the guy who came up with this stuff.”

“Eric,” you said. “Maybe you need to consider vetting the dating advice you’re getting from podcasts. Just because someone says it and it sounds good doesn’t mean it’s valid.”

“It’s real science,” Eric said. “Seriously, it’s like, there’s whole books on it. Written by academic professors.”

“Are they single?” Sabrina snorted. “Because that might explain some of these theories.”

“The real question is if the science is being appropriately quoted,” Gemma said. “People misquote statistics and studies *all the time*, let alone when the academics manipulate their own data. I’d bet that these guys you’re listening to are only partially quoting the actual science, or cherry-picking the findings, Eric. Have you actually read the books or studies of the actual academics?”

“I don’t have time for *that*,” Eric said. “I have a life to live.”

“How many hours of the podcasts have you listened to?” Sabrina asked.

“Well...” Eric hesitated.

“Check and mate,” Sabrina said, giving him a pat on the shoulder. “Now are you going to listen to me and Gemma about dating, two attractive, smart women who know you and care about you

enough to want to see you happy, or some dudes on the internet who make money off of guys' desperation?"

Eric blew out a long breath. "Both?" he hedged.

"What?" Sabrina asked. "Why?"

"Well, you two *did* hook me up with Lucy," Eric pointed out. "And the sex was pretty alright, but I mean, she was crazy."

"That's what you want to hear," you muttered. "The sex was 'pretty alright.'"

"I hate that you have a point there," Gemma grunted, smirking a little as she glanced at you after your comment. "So maybe we got overzealous with you and Lucy. We knew she was looking for a boyfriend, and you were looking for at least a summer girlfriend, but we didn't do enough homework on how you would actually interact. That's our bad."

"Hey, I'm not looking for an apology," Eric said. "I *did* get a bunch of sex out of it."

"Oh, Eric," you sighed, clapping both your hands on his shoulders since you were walking behind him at the moment. "Relationships are about so much more than sex."

Chapter 474

“Relationships are about so much more than sex?” Sabrina said around her mouthful of cake. “I was almost offended.”

You snorted, and Gemma rolled her eyes as she smirked.

You’d handed off your keys to Gemma once you were a block away from your place, sending them on ahead since you knew you’d need to grab a few things from the nearby grocery store to host all four of you. You’d hesitated a moment before picking up the little cake but decided to go for it so you could celebrate Gemma’s awesome job with the Opening Statement, and Eric handily managing the two big cross-examinations so far.

The girls and Eric had been appreciative of the cake, and the other snacks you brought back. Mosche hadn’t been home when they got there so there thankfully hadn’t been any weird discoveries, and the four of you had settled in quickly and reviewed how the day had gone. You were all happy with the progress, and both girls heaped some extra praise onto Eric for his cross-examinations, and you’d caught some of that praise as well even though yours had been a lot easier to handle.

Then had come the critiques, and they were light. There wasn’t any adjusting you could do to the opening, though you discussed whether the ‘even steven’ approach was working with Judge Mathews or not, and if you should keep it up. Eric thought the old guy was looking for a bit more splash in the events, especially since he’d been an actual judge *and* heavily involved in mock trials. The other three of you cautioned Eric that the Judge seemed to be attentive throughout the day without getting bored so it was a bigger risk to pivot tactics without a firm reason.

The last part of the afternoon was the longest - review, and guessing what the opposition would do next. Now that you had a feel for who you were dealing with - namely Tucker, Samantha and Thomas - you could try and refine your strategies for the different witnesses still to come from their witness lists. Eric knew you’d had lunch with Amanda, so you gave your read on her as a person; smart, funny and totally out-of-sync with the rest of her team. She didn’t seem to care very much about the Mock Trial less because it wasn’t something she wanted to be doing and more because of who she was doing it with. And Maeve was another animal altogether, having not participated at all.

Tucker was overconfident. Samantha was a ball of anxiety underneath a front of aggressive fierceness. Thomas was... well, he came across as the nerd with a chip on his shoulder. The guy who didn’t have many friends in high school and claimed it was by his own choice, but it was really because he was hard as hell to get along with due to his particular blend of ego and entitlement. And they all seemed to lack a skill for nuance.

The four of you had already put in so much time and effort on the case, building on each other’s work, that there really wasn’t that much in terms of changes to be made. You were able to

downgrade several of your witness files in priority since the opposition hadn't put them on their witness list. Unlike television legal dramas there weren't going to be any 'sudden discoveries' that would give them the ability to add them to the lists last minute. The fictional timeline of the case had the trial occurring over three years after the date of the accident, which was an unfortunately realistic, or even short, time compared to real Insurance Claim cases in the courts.

The real work was in figuring out where they might go next. They'd started with Fred Garland, swapped to character witnesses, and then pivoted to the Mechanic. It didn't make any *sense* if they had an actual strategy or were trying to create a narrative.

In the end, you all had come up with a few different routes they could try to take to build their defence which really seemed to be coming down to, 'The plaintiffs didn't deserve this treatment.' None of them were definite, and you none of them would affect when you made your case.

"You know what?" Eric said before he left. "I'm going to write another Motion to Dismiss that we can file when they finish. Seriously, we've practically made our case *already* just on cross-examination."

He was right, but you thought it was a long shot that the Judge would accept it. The fact that he'd openly stated that one of the teams had delivered a successful Motion to Dismiss made it unlikely he'd cut things off halfway through.

By the time Eric left there hadn't been any discussion of making a settlement offer. There didn't seem to be a point.

Now you, Gemma and Sabrina had retreated to your bedroom, each with a slice of cake and a glass of milk.

"Sabrina," Gemma scoffed softly at Sabrina's joke. "You know the sex is only as good as it is because of everything else."

Sabrina snorted and chuckled a little, running her finger through the frosting on her plate and then touching the tip of Gemma's nose, leaving a little smear. "I know," she smirked. "But you gotta admit, the sex is definitely *wow*."

Gemma laughed and sat up, leaning over to you on the bed and rubbing her nose against yours, getting the icing onto you as well. "It is," she said, grinning as she looked into your eyes and then winked. Then she looked back at Sabrina. "It really is."

"And, speaking of *wow* sex..." Sabrina said, then scooped her spoon across her plate to grab up the last of her cake and ate it before setting her plate aside. "We're already planning a fivesome with Becks and Tash on Wednesday. Are we really going to repeat it on Thursday? Because I know / have that kind of energy, but you two..."

Sabrina laughed as you hit her with a pillow.

“Sounds like we should make sure you’re worn out on Wednesday so you don’t scare the poor girls on Thursday,” Gemma chuckled. “But seriously. Amanda’s tits look like they might be fucking *double* the size of mine or Mallory’s. They’re kind of intimidating.”

“Honestly, I’m less intimidated by Amanda’s bust size than I am Maeve in general,” you said. “I feel like she’ll be correcting how I do everything to be more optimal in my penetration or something.”

“She’s definitely an odd duck,” Sabrina said, swinging up from her butt to her knees and knee-walking up the bed to Gemma and starting to undo the buttons on the blonde’s shirt. “But she’s still cute, and her accent is sexy.”

“What are you doing, baby?” Gemma asked Sabrina with a smirk.

“Getting ready to give you your other celebratory gift for doing an amazing job today,” Sabrina smirked, still undoing buttons.

“Would that happen to be *wow sex*?” Gemma asked.

“Maybe. After John and I eat you out and finger your butt,” Sabrina grinned. “How many orgasms do you think she deserves like that, baby?”

“Oh,” you said. “At least... seven.”

“Seven!” Gemma said. “Without any actual dick?”

“Guess we better get started then,” Sabrina laughed. “We’ve got another big day in the morning, so we can’t go to bed *too* late.”

Chapter 475

“Alright, folks. Let’s get this show on the road,” Judge Mathews said, then tapped his gavel, calling the court to order. “Mr Jackson, please call your next witness.”

Your evening with Gemma and Sabrina really hadn’t been that long. Fun, as always, but you hadn’t been able to collapse into bed together. Gemma didn’t have another work outfit at your place that she or Sabrina deemed worthy of Mock Court, and Sabrina’s place was closer where she *did* have an outfit, so they left together rather than Gemma going halfway across the city by herself after midnight.

You’d been surprised when the girls showed back up at your door a little before eight with breakfast in tow not just for you but for Mosche as well. You’d touched base with him the night before after saying goodbye to the girls - he’d spent the afternoon with Iris, and then the evening at the smaller comedy club open mic where he tested out new jokes. He hadn’t been awake in the morning - not surprising considering you were pretty sure he’d gone back to his room to play video games with Iris - but Sabrina had written him a note with his breakfast sandwich and homefries and left them on the kitchen table for him.

You’d arrived with plenty of time to spare at the Old Courthouse venue, just a couple of the Associates from the firm there before you, and they both smirked at you when you asked how they thought the case was going so far. Garrison had clearly spread the word not to offer any advice. The opposition had come trickling in, first Samantha, then Tucker and Thomas together. Eric had arrived after that, grinning as he handed off his new Motion to Dismiss for the three of you to read, and then Amanda and Maeve had come in together. *That* was a bit of a distraction, wondering if they’d spent the night together.

The Senior Partners of the firms who were interested, and not busy with cases, showed up right before the start time along with Judge Mathews, and after about fifteen minutes of socialising between the lawyers and the Judge that pushed everything back a bit, he’d mounted the stage.

“May it please the court, Plaintiff calls Doctor Vivian Brookes to the stand,” Tucker said.

You frowned, raising your eyebrows a little. This was another big swing to open the day, and you had to wonder if it was their plan all along or if they had decided to try and switch tactics.

Barbara, one of the senior associates from the Firm whom you’d spoken with a couple of times - and a former mentee of Garrison back from the previous time he’d been in charge of the Interns who spoke highly of him - stood up from the gallery and made her way to the front after pulling out a stethoscope from her purse and looping it over her shoulders. The prop was a little silly, but it still made everyone in the room chuckle slightly. Properly adorned, she strutted her way up to the stage and the witness stand with her script notes in hand and was ‘sworn in’ by the judge.

“Your Honour, may I approach the witness?” Tucker asked.

Judge Mathews nodded, and Tucker thanked him properly before coming to stand closer to 'the Doctor' and flashing her his winning smile. "Thank you for being here this morning, Doctor Brookes," he said. "I don't think your testimony should take too long at all, as it seems fairly cut and dry. During the multi-vehicle accident on the date in question, were you on the road that day?"

"I was," 'the Doctor' answered. "I was one vehicle ahead of the accident."

"What was the weather like that day?"

"Slightly overcast, but no precipitation," she answered. "A little warm, if I'm remembering correctly."

"Prior to the accident, were you paying attention to the other vehicles and drivers around you?" Tucker asked.

"I was," she answered. "I'm not much of a 'look at the scenery' kind of person, so I'm always attentive to the other vehicles on the road."

"Any other reasons you might be extra attentive?" Tucker asked, which confused you a little.

"I was in a nasty accident as a child," 'the Doctor' said. "I may still have some mild anxiety over that."

You frowned, raising an eyebrow as you glanced at Gemma next to you, and then opened the Dr Brookes file. You hadn't seen anything about that in the depositions or biography. Tucker continued asking questions as you quickly scanned the documents.

There was nothing about an accident. You double-checked that you weren't missing a page or anything, but nothing there either. That meant that Tucker and the Plaintiffs had different information than you. It hadn't come up yet, but...

You looked up in alarm glancing at Sabrina, and then up at Tucker, Barbara on the witness stand, and Judge Mathews.

Judge Mathews wasn't looking at the witness, or the lawyer. He was looking at you and smirking. Just a little.

They got different Bios than we did, you quickly wrote out on the notepad the four of you used to communicate during court.

What!? Gemma wrote back.

The depositions have to be the same, but the Bios are what we would have found on research, you wrote. They might have some information we don't.

Sabrina looked at it and grimaced just slightly, mostly with her eyes, before reaching over. *Then we have info they don't, too.*

You looked at her and felt just a little of the panic in your chest subside, and nodded. That was true. They might have little gems that would help them, or hinder you, but you would have to have the same. Probably.

Tucker, meanwhile, had been laying the foundation work building up to his big question for the Doctor. "Just prior to the accident occurring, Doctor, did you observe any erratic driving from any of the vehicles behind you?"

"I did not," 'the Doctor' answered firmly.

"Did you see what *did* cause the accident?" Tucker asked.

"No," she said. "One moment the traffic seemed to be moving fine, and the next there were crashes and honking behind us."

Us.

She hadn't said that before.

Chapter 476

“That is all the questions I have at this time,” Tucker finished off his questioning. “Please answer any questions the defence may have for you.”

It was your turn. Tucker headed back to his table, and you were the member of the team with Dr Brookes on your rebuttal list. And now you had a decision to make - try and counter her now, to her face, or wait until you could call her ex Garret Smith.

The more dramatic, splashy thing to do would be to call Mr Smith while you were mounting your defence and poke holes in Dr Brookes’ story - and that probably would have been the right option for a Jury Trial where you really did want to put on a show for the Jury, and also use the fact that you presented after the Plaintiffs to leave the most recent impression about a witness or event. To be fair, that could be risky because whoever set the initial record could bias the Jury to a later rebuttal from another witness, but in this case, it didn’t feel like Dr Brookes would need defending if you just took the deposition, and her answers now, as gospel.

And who questioned the word of a Doctor, especially when there didn’t seem to be anything in it for them. Lying during sworn testimony, when she had nothing personal on the line, was a stupid risk to take.

You stood, clearing your throat as you stepped around Sabrina’s chair. “May it please the Court,” you said, performing the proper ritual before addressing the room. You stepped up to the small podium and set your notepad on it with your previous notes on how to handle Dr Brookes laid out in bullet points. Tucker, and Eric, both used a more ‘Hey, I’m your buddy’ kind of style, asking to approach the witness, speaking a little more casually. It worked for some things and not for others.

In this case, you didn’t think that your questions were going to ingratiate you to ‘Dr Brookes’ and based on the fact that Barbara had donned a prop for her role as the doctor, she was doing more acting than most of the other witnesses called so far.

“Dr Brookes,” you said. “Thank you for coming in today, I just have a few questions for you. On the day in question, were you driving the vehicle that you were in at the time of the accident?”

Barbara, as Dr Brookes, scowled slightly. “No, I wasn’t,” she said.

You could hear a heavy, pregnant beat before papers started shuffling behind you at the Plaintiff’s table.

“Earlier, in response to opposing counsel’s question about whether you observed erratic driving in the other vehicles prior to the accident, you answered, ‘One moment the traffic seemed to be moving fine, and the next there were crashes and honking behind us,’” you said, reading your quick annotation. “Who else was driving the vehicle you were in?”

'The Doctor' scowled a little more. "Garret Smith," she said.

You were walking a thin line, trying to make it seem like you had legitimately stumbled across this information based on her testimony and hadn't had it prepared ahead of time. You had only just realised that the information packages had been different for the Plaintiff and the Defense teams, and if you could keep the opposition from figuring that out for longer then that just served you even more.

"Garret Smith," you said, pausing to make it look like you were connecting some dots. "What was the nature of your relationship with Mr Smith?"

"We were married at the time," 'the Doctor' grunted. "And are divorced now."

"I see," you said. "Following the accident occurring, you said that you pulled over to the side of the highway and called for emergency services. What did Mr Smith do?"

"He got out of the car and went to check on the other drivers," 'Dr Brookes' said. Barbara was doing a good job of looking agitated, and her pauses before answering came across as measured and calculated as she tried to figure out how to say as little as possible. You knew what her character script probably said, though. Something along the lines of 'Spiteful against ex-husband.'

"Is Mr Smith a trained medical professional?" you asked.

"No," she grunted.

"But you *are* a medical Doctor, correct?"

"I'm an OB/GYN," she said. "Fully licensed to practise in the State."

"Was there a reason that your husband, at the time, went to check on the victims of the accident while you remained in your vehicle on the phone with emergency services?" you asked.

"I don't know," she said noncommittally.

"Did he say anything to you before leaving the car?"

"I don't know," she said again.

"Objection, Your Honour," Thomas said behind you. "Asked and Answered, he's badgering the witness."

"The witness is being non-responsive, Your Honour," you said.

“Objection overruled,” Judge Mathews said, then looked right at ‘the Doctor.’ “Please answer the questions presented to you, Dr Brookes. And I remind you that you are under oath.”

“Thank you, Your Honour,” you said, though you didn’t hear Thomas say it behind you.

“Did Mr Smith say anything to you, Dr Brookes, before he got out of the car or immediately after?” you asked.

Barbara did a good impression of a piece of metal getting heated up by a fire, starting to flush red. You wondered if she’d been into drama club or something prior to becoming a lawyer. “He asked me why I wasn’t coming to help,” she said.

“Did you offer him a reply?” you asked.

“I told him it wasn’t our business,” she said.

“So you did not provide any medical or first aid assistance at the scene of the accident, Doctor Brookes?” you asked, emphasising ‘Doctor’ just a little.

“No,” she grunted.

“Did Mr Smith provide first aid to victims prior to emergency services arriving?”

“... Yes,” she answered.

You nodded. “In the moments before the accident occurred, were you and Mr Smith having a heated, even argumentative, exchange of a personal nature?”

‘The Doctor’ grit her teeth and then sharply nodded. “We were arguing,” she said.

“Would you say you were paying more attention to Mr Smith or the vehicles around you during said argument?” you asked.

The Doctor sneered, and you were almost shocked by the vitriol Barbara managed to put into it. “Mr Smith,” she admitted.

“Thank you,” you said. “That is all the questions I have for you at this time.”

Chapter 477

It *felt* like a big win, taking apart the Dr Brookes' testimony, but the reality of the situation for the Trial was that it would only count as one point on a Mock Trial scorecard, and if it were a real trial all you'd accomplished was to negate her testimony that there wasn't any erratic driving. The psychological impact was a little larger though - if it were a Jury trial, you would have made the opposition look silly presenting her as a witness, though that would be a diminished effect for a Judge. The real psychological gold was in frustrating, consternating and otherwise aggravating the opposing counsel.

When you returned to your table, Tucker looked... Well, he looked like he'd seen a ghost. He was a little pale, and his eyebrows were raised while her mouth was doing a sort of pained smile expression. Samantha was furiously flipping through notes, not even glancing up. Thomas was downright scowling and looked like he wanted to curse you out.

They were on tilt. Now you had to figure out a way to keep them that way for the rest of the day.

Amanda, on the other hand, made eye contact with you and gave you a slight nod in a 'nicely done' sort of way. Maeve seemed like she wasn't paying attention at all and was idly scrolling on her phone.

Thomas ended up calling their next witness, yet another of the drivers that had been involved in the accident, and went on a tear of strange questions that had Sabrina standing up constantly to voice new objections. Judge Mathews ended up scolding Thomas and suggested the 'young man' should remind himself of the rules of witness examination. All they ended up getting for their trouble was a confused witness on the stand while leaving you an opening.

After the proper pleasantries, you got straight to the point. "Mr Redikoff, on the day of the incident, you were one lane over and approximately one car removed from the Plaintiff's vehicle, correct?"

"That's correct," answered the Senior Associate who was playing the driver. You were pretty sure his actual name started with a W, but you only knew him by his daily coffee order of Tall Black, Oat Milk.

"Did you happen to take particular notice of the plaintiff's vehicle prior to the incident?" you asked.

"I did," he nodded.

"Why was that?"

"Well," he said. "They were hauling some sort of wood, but it was too long for their trunk and was hanging out the back a pretty long distance."

“Objection, Your Honour,” Samantha said. “He’s speculating.”

“I don’t see how, Your Honour,” you said. “The witness is reporting what he saw.”

“The witness can’t know the depth of my client’s trunk space,” she said quickly. “Or how long the allegedly overhanging wood was.”

“Objection overruled,” Jude Mathews said. “Ms Van Der Groot, you are well aware that you’re reaching with that description of ‘speculation.’”

“Thank you, Your Honour,” you and Samantha both said, her’s a little harsher than yours.

“So, Mr Radikoff,” you said. “Did you notice if the trunk was secured in any way?”

“It looked like they’d tried to close it, and then tied it with something, but it was bouncing because there was too much slack.”

“And was there any sort of caution flag on the wood hanging out the back of the vehicle?”

“Not that I could see,” he said.

“Those are all my questions for this witness, Your Honour,” you said, nodding respectfully, and then backing away. Thomas got back up and tried to use their redirect to minimise the whole wood thing, but other than admissions that Radikoff couldn’t say exactly how long the wood was, how exactly how far it was hanging out the trunk, he couldn’t kill it all.

Two more witnesses were brought up before the morning break, one last character witness followed by Officer Penholt. The character witness was another easy squash for Eric to handle, pointing out the lack of relevance of their testimony to the contract matter. Officer Penholt, who you had always marked as a potential witness for the Defence, was apparently the opposition’s pivot since you’d agreed to allow the suppression of the baggy of marijuana he had found in the Jacobs’ trunk post-accident. You had to assume they wanted to get Law Enforcement on record to note that the Jacobs weren’t charged for causing the multi-car pileup, and since you’d already successfully gotten the ‘confession’ of Greg Tribonello to Officer Sanchez suppressed, they must have thought Penholt was the better option.

The actual examination, conducted by Tucker again, was fairly brief. Tucker had Penholt, played by an associate from the other firm, confirm the official police report and then Tucker entered it into evidence. He then had Penholt relay his findings. You were paying particular attention to anything that could open up the Drugs line of questioning again - even though it was suppressed if the plaintiffs made it relevant again you could dig down on it.

Unfortunately, either Tucker was smart enough to skirt around the issue or the Associate was smart enough to do it for him. There just weren't any openings to bring it up again, but that wasn't a big loss.

Tucker finished his questioning and handed off the witness to you, and you stood up and did the requisite thanking of the court, and approached the podium with your notes. The nice thing was that, even with the drugs suppressed, you could still get the one thing you needed from any of the Law Enforcement officers who had been on the scene.

"Good morning, officer," you said. "I'll just have a few clarifying questions for you, so we should be able to get you out of here shortly. May I approach the witness, Your Honour?" Judge Mathews nodded, and you thanked him and approached the 'Officer' with a printout. "I am presenting the witness with Exhibit 2. Was this vehicle, previously identified as belonging to the Jacobs', one of the ones involved in the accident?"

The 'Officer' looked at the photo and then nodded. "It was," he said.

"What was the state of the vehicle when you first observed it?"

"Both sides had been heavily damaged," the 'Officer' said. "The right side from an impact and the left from scraping along the highway raised median barrier. The rear end had collapsed in due to being struck from behind."

"Was the trunk of the vehicle open, or closed?"

"Objection, Your Honour!" Samantha shot up from her seat.

Chapter 478

“Opposing counsel is venturing into areas discussed during pre-trial motions,” Samantha said. “This is entirely unacceptable, Your Honour.”

Judge Mathews looked down at you with a raised eyebrow.

“Your Honour, I promise this will have nothing to do with the topic discussed in pre-trial,” you said.

“Objective overruled for now,” the Judge said, giving you a stern look. “If you’re trying to find a way to wiggle into that information, Counsel, you will not like my response at all.”

“Absolutely understood, Your Honour,” you said, and he nodded. “Thank you, Your Honour,” you followed up as per protocol and heard Samantha mutter it behind you. “Well,” you said, turning back to the ‘Officer.’ “Was the trunk of the vehicle open or closed, Officer Penholt?”

The ‘officer’ checked his role script for a moment. “It was standing open,” he replied.

“Would that be the expected position for the trunk of a vehicle of its type after being rear-ended?”

Another check of the script, flipping to another page. “No, it wouldn’t,” he finally answered.

“What would be the expected position, based on your experience as a Police Officer?”

“The trunk would be buckled inward along with the bumper,” he said.

“What conclusion would you draw from the fact that the door was standing open?”

“Since it wasn’t damaged, it must have been opened prior to the vehicle being rear-ended,” the ‘Officer’ said.

“You went to examine the vehicle in detail, correct?”

“Objection!” Samantha said, standing up again, but Judge Mathews held up a hand to stop her.

“I will deal with Mr Watkins if he crosses the line, Ms Van Der Groot,” the Judge said. “Unless you have another objection?”

“No, Your Honour,” she grunted.

“Thank you, Your Honour,” you said, not sure if an interrupted Objection was really a ruling you needed to thank him for, but the rule of thumb in court was to always be polite so you went with it. You turned back to the ‘Officer.’ “Did you give the vehicle a closer examination?”

“I did,” he said.

“Did you look in the trunk?”

“I did,” he said.

“When you looked inside the trunk, did you see any long pieces of wood, such as two-by-fours?”

“I did not,” he said.

Point, you thought to yourself.

“Did you see anything that looked like it might have been binding a pile of long pieces of wood together, but had broken?”

“I did not,” he said.

“Did you see anything that looked like it had been securing the trunk partially closed?”

He checked his script, knowing that you were putting the screws to his ‘home team’ interns, but shook his head. “I did not,” he said.

“Were you at the site of the accident until the cleanup of the vehicles?” you asked.

“I... was,” he said, flipping to the last page of his notes.

“Did you witness wooden two-by-fours scattered across the road?”

“We did,” he said.

“Would you be surprised to hear other witnesses have testified that the Jacobs’ vehicle was hauling long lengths of two-by-fours hanging out the back of their trunk?”

“I’m not,” he said. “It came up during the investigation and they were deemed not at fault for the accident.”

“I understand that Officer Penholt, and am not questioning the findings of the police report,” you said, biting the bullet there so you could get to where you needed to go. It was offering the plaintiffs a win for the ability to score a victory. “My question is whether you would consider the attested lack of proper secure bindings, lack of properly securing the trunk, and the fact that

other witnesses have testified to the overhanging wooden load to not have been properly safety flagged, to be in or out of compliance with the State legal regulations on transporting a load that overhangs the back of the vehicle?”

The Associate checked his notes again, grimacing as he scanned the pages. Finally, he looked up. “I can’t say,” he said. “I don’t have the exact regulations on hand.”

“That’s more than fine,” you said. “Allow me to provide you with a copy of the regulation, which I note for the court has not been changed or modified since 1984.” You quickly went back to your table, and Sabrina already had the printouts ready. Having the ‘officer’ read from the State law was a weird place to be, but you couldn’t expect someone who wasn’t a traffic cop/highway cop to necessarily know it off-hand. You handed one copy over to Tucker at the plaintiff’s table (quickly grabbed from him by Samantha), and passed one to Judge Mathews before setting the final copy in front of ‘Officer Penholt.’

“If you could read the flagged section, Officer Penholt?” you asked.

The officer quickly rattled off the fairly long traffic code regarding the allowance and limits of oversized loads and loads hanging off the back of a vehicle.

Properly loaded to prevent its contents from dropping, sifting, leaking or otherwise escaping. *Check.*

A red flag secured to the end of a load that extends more than four feet beyond the bed or body of the vehicle. *Check.*

“Thank you, Officer Penholt,” you said when he was finished. “Now that you are refreshed on the details of the Department of Transportation legal requirements, would you consider the wooden load being hauled by the Jacobs’ to be out of compliance with traffic laws?”

The Associate was frowning but nodded. “With the conditions I’ve described, I have to say yes.”

You turned to the Judge. “That is all the questions I have at this time,” you said and nodded.

Sabrina, Gemma and Eric were all grinning widely as you walked back to the table, your notes in hand. You may not have refuted anything that the ‘Officer’ had testified to for the Defence, but you hadn’t needed to. You just won the game, because it didn’t matter who was at fault for the accident. It didn’t matter whether the Jacobs were nice, or helpful, at the scene.

They’d broken the requirements of their policy contract not once, but three times.

Now all you had to do was fend off the last attack the Plaintiffs had on the contract itself.

Chapter 479

Judge Mathews called for the morning break, and you were able to relax for a moment.

“Nice job, John,” Eric said, reaching past Gemma to pat you on the back. “Seriously.”

“Thanks,” you said with a smile. “I’m still trying to figure out where their overall strategy is here though. I feel like they are just throwing shit at the wall and hoping it sticks.”

“Maybe they weren’t given as much time as we were?” Gemma guessed.

“Or they only worked on it during regular hours,” Sabrina said. “Most of our best work was done on our own time.”

“I think it’s both,” Eric said. “As well as a leadership issue. You did a really good job, Sabrina.”

Sabrina’s smile was big and broad, and you knew that hearing that from someone other than you or Gemma meant a lot to her. For how Eric had come off at the start of the summer to where you all were now, you couldn’t have imagined how well you all worked together and were friends. Part of you wondered if you would stay in contact with him afterwards - realistically it would probably just be through mutually following social media, but you also thought about those stories of someone knowing someone from college and that connection being helpful ten or fifteen years down the line. Who knew what Eric would become in the future, and how having a friendship from your interning days would connect you.

“Hey, you guys,” Amanda said, interrupting the conversation as she approached with a half-smile.

“Morning, Amanda,” you said.

“You’re looking cute today,” Sabrina said. “I love that dress and jacket combo.”

“Thanks,” Amanda said, her smile growing. She was wearing a simple dress that only showed a bit of her collarbone and hugged her curves without looking tight, and it paired with a jacket made of the same material that gave it a business feel. There was no hiding her bust, but it definitely helped minimise how *apparent* it was. “So, I’ve been sent over with a settlement offer,” she said, smirking just a little. “Apparently the others think they’ve pushed too hard and you’re not receptive to them. I couldn’t imagine why.” She rolled her eyes.

“Well, they’re right,” Sabrina snorted softly. “And we’re definitely more receptive to you.”

“What’s the offer?” Gemma asked.

“Three-quarters of the full policy payout, and cover our clients’ legal expenses,” Amanda said. “We’ll waive all rights for damages, and no apology from either side.”

Sabrina sighed and shook her head. “Three quarters is still a million and a half on a two million dollar policy,” she said. “Our counter is a replacement vehicle of equal value to the one that was covered by the policy, no damages, no legal fees.”

It was a little harsh, but you all knew that you had the plaintiff’s over a barrel.

“I’ll take it to my team,” Amanda said, shaking her head slightly. “But I doubt they will take it. They think this last witness will be the nail in the coffin.”

“Alright,” Sabrina nodded. “Let us know.”

Amanda smiled a little sadly to all of you, shrugged a little and then winked at you before heading back over to her team.

“Did she just wink at you?” Eric asked. “God, it’s ridiculous. You have all the luck.”

“We talked about this, Eric,” Gemma said. “Be more open to people. Hell, be more open with your girl Casey. I think you’ll be surprised.”

“Whatever,” Eric sighed. “Maybe. OK, I’m hitting the washroom before I run out of time.”

You and Gemma were about to follow him, wanting drinks and snacks from the refreshments being served out in the lobby, but Sabrina held you back. “I was chatting with Nelli this morning,” she said. “She says good luck and sent this.”

Sabrina handed over her phone, and you tapped the screen to play the video on it. It was FitNelli, her brightly dyed hair and cute, energetic expression immediately recognizable. It was short, maybe five seconds, and consisted of her just shooting air kisses around the camera cutely before ending with an emphatic kiss right at the lens, and then turning away and smacking her bare buttcheek as she was only wearing a long tank top. There wasn’t any sound, so you were able to watch it without giving anything away to anyone around.

You chuckled softly, but Gemma reached over and paused it. “You told her about the mock trial?” she asked Sabrina.

“No, well, not specifically,” Sabrina said. “I just told her we had a big presentation today at work, and she said she was rooting for us and good luck. I think she’s just... I dunno. She’s the kind of person who is just really invested in the people she’s interacting with in a really earnest way.”

“OK,” Gemma sighed, reassured. “Then it’s super cute, and you should tell her we say thank you and send kisses back.”

“Really?” you asked Gemma.

Your blonde girlfriend rolled her eyes softly and shrugged. “She’s cute, she’s being a friendly acquaintance, and she’s a good contact for your guys' side gig.”

“I know, but isn’t responding in kind sort of opening a door?” you asked.

Gemma shook her head, smiling almost like Amanda had before she left. “Whether it’s her or someone else, we know that you’ll need to work with someone else once in a while for the side gig. And the ‘all of us or none of us’ doesn’t work when I’m gone in a week. I can accept that, as long as we talk about it. So open the door.” She looked at Sabrina. “Or let her open the door. I’m OK with it.”

“God, I want to kiss you right now,” Sabrina said under her breath, beaming a smile and big eyes at Gemma.

“I know,” Gemma replied, then stood up. “Come on, let’s get out there before the vultures have picked over all the good snacks. We’ve got a case to smash.”

You wanted to kiss Gemma as well, and you wanted to talk more about her decision. Now just wasn’t the time, even if you knew how big a step it was to open ‘that door’ more and more when she was going to be away. She was right, though. You could talk soon enough when it was personal and safe, and you weren’t going to be distracted.