

DEFENSELESS

written by  
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FADE IN:

INT. MANHATTAN U.S. DISTRICT COURT - COURTROOM - DAY

GIL SANDS (40s) addresses the jury. With that suit and silver hair, he could just as easily be delivering the State of the Union.

GIL  
Justice. The prosecutor demands it. The victims' families clamor for it. My client begs for it. Everyone wants justice--from you.

The JURORS eat up Gil's every word. But one pays particular attention, and wears a business suit, like she's on a job interview: LUCIDA BRIGHT (20s). Gil approaches the jury box, like he's got a secret to share:

GIL  
Tall order. Fortunately, you're not here to dispense "justice." You're here to follow the law. And all the law requires is that you determine whether the Government has proved its claims beyond all reasonable doubt.

The JUDGE and a platoon of FEDERAL MARSHALS give Gil a sideways glance, but still hang on his every word. Gil steps back, around a flip-chart stand and toward the defense table.

GIL  
And have they proved that a well-known, reputable nightclub owner and promoter is secretly pushing the latest "party drug" at "underground rave parties" throughout the city?

At the defense table, barely hiding his smirk, sits MR. ROCKWELL (40s), a slick kingpin obviously guilty of whatever he's charged with.

GIL  
Of course not. All they've proven is that six women--all with a history of drug abuse--died after overdosing on this illegal drug.

In the gallery, teary-eyed VICTIMS' PARENTS agitate like hockey players waiting to brawl. Lapel buttons bear their dead daughters' faces. Wearing his own button sits stone-cold COOPER BLACK (50s), the Second Coming of Charles Bronson.

GIL

Where's the evidence? A few criminals who got lighter sentences in exchange for testifying? The deceased girls' friends, all admitted "social" drug users themselves? Where are the wiretaps? The videotapes?

The U.S. ATTORNEY fumes as he scribbles his comebacks. In the gallery behind him, FBI SPECIAL AGENT MONACO, a linebacker in a cheap blazer, stares daggers at Gil.

GIL

You want to blame someone for these girls' deaths. It's natural. But don't blame an innocent man, simply because he's the target of this administration's morals crusade.

Rumbles and growls from the parents. But Cooper shows no emotion as he keeps his eye on Gil.

GIL

Blame the friends who encouraged this behavior. Blame the girls for voluntarily engaging in this lifestyle.

The parents are about to boil over. But Gil focuses totally on his real audience: the jury.

GIL

Blame the parents who didn't know where their daughters were or what they were doing, and evidently didn't care enough to find out.

The parents explode, jumping from their seats and charging the rail that separates them from the parties.

The Marshals rush forward, but they can't stem the tide. A pitched brawl breaks out. The jurors jump from their seats, but they're trapped in the jury box.

Parents claw like zombies to get at Gil and his client. The Marshals do their best to subdue the crowd. Amazingly, that flip-chart still stands.

Rockwell scrambles away from the rail and hides behind Gil, who's frozen where he stood.

Gil eyes the mob for whoever might break through first. But then he notices something odd: Cooper Black, easily the strongest of the parents, stays in his seat, his gaze boring deep into Gil's eyes.

More MARSHALS burst through the Courtroom doors. They grab the first rioters that they reach and drag them kicking and screaming from the Courtroom.

The Marshals at the front lines rip canisters from their belts and mace the parents into submission. But every Marshal who subdues a parent leaves a hole that another parent rushes to in hopes of getting their hands on Gil.

Gil backs up with Rockwell to the Judge's bar. Gil looks up, sees the Judge standing with a pistol in his hand.

Even more MARSHALS rush in, soon outnumbering the parents. They double-team the rioters, dragging them out one by one.

The tide starts to turn, as the Marshals now push the remaining parents toward the doors. Other Marshals return to grab the remaining few.

The Judge holsters his pistol, sits down. A Marshal directs the frightened jurors back to their seats.

Rockwell smoothes his hair as Gil escorts him back to the defense table. But Gil freezes when he sees that Cooper still hasn't moved, and still focuses on Gil like a laser.

JUDGE

(re: the riot)

The jury will disregard that statement.

(to Gil)

Counsel, continue.

Gil returns to the lectern, but what do you say after a scene like that?

GIL

(to the jury)

Thank you.

Gil sits down before his legs give out. The U.S. Attorney marches right up and arranges his notes on the lectern.

U.S ATTORNEY

I can answer each of Mr. Sands' points--

On the flip-chart stand he places a poster-board family tree of some criminal organization. The whole contraption collapses.

EXT. MANHATTAN U.S. DISTRICT COURT - DAY

Gil stands before a bouquet of microphones. Behind him, ROCKWELL celebrates with his Head Bodyguard, the man-mountain MEMPHIS; and two lieutenants, baby-fat ONYX and rail-thin GADGET.

GIL

"Technicalities?" I can assure you, if you ever find yourself charged with a crime, you'll call them by their proper name: "rights."

High-fives behind Gil. He tries to ignore them and keep his composure.

GIL

Am I "pro-criminal?" That's irrelevant here; the jury found that Mr. Rockwell isn't a criminal. But I cannot let the Government subvert the law in the name of "justice."

Rockwell and the boys laugh at something. Gil turns to discreetly silence them. It doesn't really work. Gil turns front again, hearing an inaudible question:

GIL

Of course we sympathize with the parents. I have a daughter myself. But I'm not going to let emotion hinder my defense--

ROCKWELL

'Cause nothing hinders Gil Sands, the best attorney money can buy.

Cheers behind Gil. He lowers his head in shame, then curtly waves farewell to the reporters and steps away. Rockwell immediately takes his place.

ROCKWELL

You're all invited to Manhattan's hottest nightspot, Club Palatino, for a all-night victory celebration. And it's Ladies' Night.

Gil grabs Rockwell's arm, pulls him away.

ROCKWELL

Free at last! Free at last!

Gil leads Rockwell and his posse to a waiting limo. As the DRIVER holds the door open, Gil shows Rockwell inside.

ROCKWELL  
After you, Consigliere.

GIL  
Don't call me that. I'm going home.

ROCKWELL  
You're not gonna let me show my appreciation?

GIL  
Save it for when you get my bill.

Gil all but throws Rockwell inside and heads down the sidewalk. He doesn't see Rockwell reemerge to keep the media swarm around him.

Gil doesn't make it a few yards before he bumps into the U.S. Attorney and Monaco. The lawyers ignore each other. But Monaco can't resist.

MONACO  
Hey Sands. How much a jury cost these days?

Gil stops, meets Monaco's stare. U.S. Attorney tries to pull Monaco along.

GIL  
You screw up the papers for the search warrant. You illegally wiretap for a week. You have a press conference before the trial announcing this great evidence you got against this "drug kingpin." And when the Judge questions you about the warrant, you can't even admit your mistakes. And you think I had to buy the jury?

Gil walks off. U.S. Attorney holds back a raging Monaco.

MONACO  
Everybody wants justice, huh, Sands? How about you?

Gil ignores Monaco. He takes out his cell phone, dials.

EXT. GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT - NIGHT

Gil roars through the dusk in next year's Bentley, listed at \$300,000 and flaunting every penny.

Gil still dials his cell phone as he negotiates the curves.

EXT. GIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Gates open to welcome the Bentley to an estate straight out of The Great Gatsby.

A beat-up Jeep squats in the driveway. Gil pulls up alongside it--the driveway's that big. His daughter's BOYFRIEND belatedly hears the Bentley over the Jeep's sound system, and nods like nothing's out of the ordinary.

Gil gets out to ask this guy who the hell he is when BAILEY SANDS (17) marches down from the portico. Gil intercepts her on the lawn.

GIL  
Thought we'd go out to dinner.

BAILEY  
We ate in. An hour ago.

Bailey blows right past him.

GIL  
I won a very big case today.

BAILEY  
We know. Everybody knows.

She opens the Jeep's door. Gil grabs her arm.

GIL  
I am not going to be ignored.

BAILEY  
Talk to Mom lately?

GIL  
Why?

BAILEY  
Knew you'd say that.

Bailey yanks her arm free. Gil doesn't fight her. She slams the Jeep's door.

The Jeep makes a U-turn in the driveway--it's that big--and heads for the gates.

Gil watches the Jeep leave, then turns to the house.

INT. GIL'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

CHARLOTTE SANDS (40s) drinks deep from a wine glass as she stares out the windows into the darkness. Gil enters the doorway, sees her, and freezes.

GIL  
Where's Bailey going?

CHARLOTTE  
You didn't ask her?

GIL  
She wasn't in the mood to talk.

CHARLOTTE  
You didn't stop her?

GIL  
She's seventeen.

CHARLOTTE  
Don't even know who she left with,  
do you?

GIL  
Boyfriend. Right?

Charlotte takes her time to turn and confront Gil.

CHARLOTTE  
So your daughter, your one and only  
child, disappears into the night  
with a boy you don't know and you  
don't do a thing to stop her.

GIL  
I don't appreciate being cross-  
examined.

CHARLOTTE  
No one does.

Charlotte takes a sip.

CHARLOTTE  
She announced her plans at dinner.  
Where were you?

GIL  
I was winning one of the biggest  
cases of my life.

CHARLOTTE  
You must be very proud of yourself.

GIL  
Rockwell's no angel, but he  
deserved to win.

CHARLOTTE  
Not like the court assigned you the  
case, like when you were starting  
out.

GIL

You liked the good old days of studio apartments and Chinese take-out?

Charlotte takes another sip.

GIL

You don't like my clients, that's fine. I don't like them. You want me to take more pro bono cases, I can do that now. I can change my practice.

CHARLOTTE

I know you can. You've been telling me for ten years. I bet you know where Mr. Rockwell is right now.

GIL

(re: Bailey)

So I was never home for ballet or soccer. The law is a jealous mistress.

CHARLOTTE

Funny. I was the one feeling like the mistress.

Gil looks around his home like someone's stolen all his furniture. He drops his head, leaves the way he came.

INT. COOPER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The TV shows artist's sketches of the courtroom scene.

TALKING HEAD (V.O.)

Defense attorney Gil Sands' closing argument certainly was persuasive. It persuaded the victim's families to riot.

Cooper aims at the sketch of Gil a comically huge Colt Anaconda revolver.

Seated on the couch, Cooper sights down the top of the Colt, taking aim. He brings the gun down, flips open the barrel. He methodically loads the barrel with six rounds, then closes the revolver.

TALKING HEAD (V.O.)

But Sands survived, and his client, Mr. Rockwell, escaped a lifetime in prison for the drug-related deaths of six teenage girls.

Cooper lays the revolver down on the coffee table. Rows of ammunition boxes lay beside a Colt Double Eagle automatic pistol and an M16 assault rifle.

Cooper picks up a hockey-puck-sized speedloader and fills it with a full complement of bullets.

TALKING HEAD (V.O.)

For the jurors, it was a simple case of insufficient evidence.

Cooper stands, walks to the couch.

Tacked to the wall are maps of Manhattan and Greenwich, surrounded by pictures of Gil, Rockwell, the jurors, their houses, and the club Palatino. Magic-marker lines connect each to an address on the maps.

On TV, Lucida gives an interview:

LUCIDA (V.O.)

It's the prosecution's burden, and they didn't meet it.

TALKING HEAD (V.O.)

So you didn't think Mr. Rockwell caused these girls' deaths?

LUCIDA (V.O.)

Like Mr. Sands said, where's the evidence?

Cooper picks from the couch a three-ring binder, like you might use in school.

TALKING HEAD (V.O.)

Innocent or not, after the verdict was announced, Rockwell couldn't contain his glee.

He flips through the pages, chock full of addresses, phone numbers, building plans. Cooper nods: everything's set.

INT. COOPER'S APARTMENT - LATER

The TV shows Gil at the press conference on the courthouse steps:

GIL

Of course we sympathize with the parents. I have a daughter myself. But I'm not going to let emotion hinder my defense--

ROCKWELL

'Cause nothing hinders Gil Sands,  
the best attorney money can buy.

Cheers behind Gil. He lowers his head in shame.

The TV blinks off. Cooper drops the remote.

He wears a drab Army jacket stuffed with arms and ammo.  
He sets down the remote and picks up two long cloth rifle  
cases. He heads for the door, but stops.

Two framed photos on the wall: A much younger Cooper,  
with his wife and daughter at six years old. Then a more  
recent picture of Cooper with his daughter at eighteen in  
a graduation gown.

He nods as he exits, closing the door behind him.

EXT. PALATINO - NIGHT

Gil's Bentley rolls past the long line of PARTYGOERS  
waiting to get in. He pulls right up to the front doors.

Gil drops the keys with the VALET. He walks right up to  
MEMPHIS, a gigantic Bodyguard who commands the front-door  
security detail.

MEMPHIS

Not on the list, Mr. Sands.

GIL

I'm here on business, Memphis.

MEMPHIS

Ain't business hours.

GIL

Not your call, is it?

For a moment, a stand-off. Then Memphis turns, enters  
the club. Gil catches the doors, follows.

INT. PALATINO - DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

The place is jumping like it's New Year's Eve. But a  
banner above the crowd says it all: NOT GUILTY!

Memphis cuts like an icebreaker through the sea of  
dancing Partygoers. Gil trails behind, craning his neck  
like a tourist to take in the spectacle of this  
nightclub.

Looking up, he never sees Lucida--business suit replaced  
with skin-tight club wear--as they pass in the crowd.  
But she sure as hell sees him.