

Emma's Game

"NO! NO! NO!" wails a child's voice directly outside the courtroom door. The sound, and the clearly evident distress echoes throughout the room. "I want to play my game!" she shrieks.

The Judge stops in mid-sentence and stares at me. "Is that your client, Counselor?" she asks. "Yes, Your Honor, that is Emma. I spoke with her before court. If you will allow me a moment, I will try to find out what's wrong."

The lady seated at the counsel table states: "I'm Emma's mom. I'm sorry for the disturbance but Emma is autistic. One of the social workers took her video game away from her." With an expression that I recognize well, the Judge abruptly leaves the bench and starts for the door. Her confused deputy trails behind her. I follow as well but I know exactly where she is going. She steps into the crowded waiting room and a hush instantly falls-except for Emma, of course, who is still howling in outrage.

The Judge kneels in front of the screaming child. "Emma," she said "my name is Judge Carter. Can you tell me what's wrong?" Emma raises her tear-stained face, stuttering through her sobs. "That lady took my game away from me and I want it back!" Her voice rises to a shriek that only a hysterical child can make. I have been the children's attorney in Judge Carter's courtroom for several years. When she lifts an eyebrow, I suddenly feel sorry for the person who caused this disaster. In a deceptively soft voice, yet with unmistakable steel underneath, she asks: "Who took Emma's game from her?"

There is complete silence and for a moment I wonder if anyone will respond. Finally, a lady stood nervously to her feet. "I did" she stammers. "I thought she was making too much noise." The Judge's look was piercing as she said: "Give it back to her!"

Emma instantly quietens as she reaches for her game. She holds out her hand to the Judge and shyly asks: "Do you want to play with me? My mama never has time to play with me."

Judge Carter whispers to me as she passes: "Tell the bailiff that we are in recess for ten minutes." Then she turns to Emma with the air of someone who has no pressing matters to attend to of any kind. "Of course," she says, "What level are you on?"