

The Grandmother
By Elizabeth Brown

"Please, Judge," whispers the wizened old woman with the nut-brown eyes. "I need to be with my grandchildren. I have been the only stable person in their lives, all their lives."

I think of the five young children who were extraordinarily bonded to each other and their grandmother. The problem is the grandmother's husband - who by all accounts takes excellent care of his wife and the grandchildren. Unfortunately, he had committed a crime twenty years ago that make him ineligible to have foster children in his home. It occurs to me that if these children are separated, they will likely be adopted by five different families. The course of their lives will be altered forever.

"Your Honor," I said, "may we approach?" He nods and covers the microphone with his hand to keep us from being overheard: "Elizabeth, what do you think?"

"The home study looks great. The only reason the State can't approve it is because of the grandfather's conviction of twenty years ago. The children were actually in the home with the grandparents and thriving when the State took custody from the mother. Now they are in five different foster homes. You could give guardianship to the grandparents and remove them from the State's custody altogether," I said hopefully.

The Judge turns to the District Attorney and asks his position. "I see Elizabeth's point," he said with true regret in his voice "but I can't agree to it."

"Okay-step back" instructs the Judge.

"Ma'am," he states to the grandmother, who is still standing, "it is undisputed that you and your husband love these children and have taken excellent care of them. However, in Louisiana, there are certain crimes that prevent a person from fostering a child. That is the issue we have before us today. But we had a conference at the bench and Mrs. Brown suggested that you be given guardianship." He pauses and I hold my breath.

I truly have no idea how he is going to rule. "After much deliberation, he continues, "I am immediately granting guardianship of all five children to the maternal grandmother."

I feel a smile tug at my lips as I watch the grandmother's reaction. She is now openly sobbing and trying to hug all five children at once. Suddenly she wraps her arms around me, whispering in my ear "Thank you so much!" Some days, I have the absolute best job on the planet!

Please note that names have been changed to protect the identity of clients.