

Amoe: Embodiment
an original screenplay
by Steve Sherman

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FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY, YEARS AGO

WES Rendleman is a skinny, bright 10-year old boy. RENET is a woman driver in her 20s, wearing too much makeup and a wild hairstyle, impatiently standing by Wes, looking into a small mirror as she applies more lipstick.

RENET

Time to go. Chop, chop.

WES

Just a minute.

Wes holds up a school report card for the man on the bed.

WES

So, Dad, I got an A in science and an A in math, just like you said I could. Someday, I'm going to be a biologist or maybe an electrical engineer, something with computers.

Wes carefully positions the grade card in his father's hands as his father lies on the bed.

WES

Oh, and today Toad said he's got a girlfriend. But, I don't believe him. I think he has a girlfriend and she has a stalker. I told him, "Toad, she thinks you're a stalker." And, he's like, "No way dude, she's into me."

Wes's father is silent, his eyes closed.

WES

So, dad, when are we going to have a talk about the birds and the bees? I'm old enough now, wink, wink. Oh, and I got you these.

Wes carefully takes the report card back and replaces it with a small sack of peanuts, carefully placing his father's fingers around it.

WES

Don't tell anyone I gave them to you. I ...

The heart display goes flat and the machine alarms.

MARY Supple is an older nurse, kindly with little makeup and graying hair in a simple ponytail.

Within seconds, Mary and others race into the room, shouting and moving to save the patient.

Another nurse arrives with a cart of equipment.

With one powerful thrust, Mary throws the blanket off the bed, scattering the bag of peanuts.

Mary turns toward Renet and Wes.

MARY

Out of the way! Go sit!

Mary returns to administering emergency care with the other nurses.

Wes obediently sits on a hard stool in the corner, staring at his father like a wounded puppy.

Renet looks at Wes, looks at her watch, then quietly leaves the room, unnoticed.

Doctors struggle to save Wes's father as Wes watches silently.

Wes shudders with each violent thud of the heart massage.

INT. NURSE'S STATION - LATER

NURSE

It's a good thing, I suppose. He was a vegetable for several years. Wonder how much that cost?

MARY

You can't put a price on human life.

NURSE

That boy has been visiting him after school every day all this time.

MARY

I'm glad his mother was nearby.

NURSE

Mother? No, that was probably Renet, his ride.

MARY

Even luckier, I guess. That woman was a walking, talking, real-life WHORE movie.

NURSE

Yeah, she's pretty scary.

MARY

So, where is his mother?

NURSE

Died years ago.

(concerned)

You know, Renet is a little flighty

...

MARY

Oh my word, where did the boy go?

Is he still in there?

Both nurses hurry back to the hospital room.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mary gently leans into the room with the empty bed as the other nurse watches from the hallway.

Mary sees Wes still sitting quietly on the stool, motionless and silent, staring at the floor, his hands clenching his report card in a tight fist.

MARY

May I come in?

Gently, Mary enters and picks up the peanut bag from the floor.

Mary quietly and deliberately walks about the room collecting the peanuts, gradually moving toward Wes.

Mary pauses as she stands before Wes.

Wes continues to look down, now blankly gazing at her shoes.

MARY

Are these yours, honey?

Mary slowly extends the bag of peanuts toward Wes.

Wes silently looks up and meets her gentle gaze with tearful eyes.

MARY

Sweetheart, I'm so sorry.

Tearfully, Mary surrounds Wes in a warm hug, burying his head in her chest and covering him as Wes quietly sobs.

EXT. PRISON PARKING LOT - PRESENT, EVENING

LINDA Woodham is a glamorous blonde in her 30s skilled in the use of makeup and dress, expert in appearing professional before the camera. ELLIE Jones is a cute, brunette camerawoman filming the story and signaling with her fingers.

The parking lot is full of people, gathered near a television van.

Some carry signs and chant.

Many gather near Linda who smiles, poses for photographs and signs her autograph.

Linda preens, prepares and flirts with onlookers while Ellie sets up.

Finally, the crowd hushes as Linda and Ellie start the broadcast.

LINDA

In 3, 2 ... With the passage of a new state law last year, criminals can now legally go free. It's called, "Prison by Proxy." But, is it really working?

INT. MIKE'S OFFICE - EARLIER, DAY

MIKE Wells is an aspiring politician in his 30s, brunette and sometimes called upon to comment as an expert on general law.

LINDA

We are speaking with our local legal expert and aspiring politician, Mike Wells. So, Mike, tell us about Prison by Proxy.

MIKE

Prison by Proxy has greatly reduced court costs, streamlined sentencing and reduced average time for jury duty by about 30 percent. Some call it a definite improvement.

LINDA

Sounds great. How does it work?

MIKE

If a client facing prison time can arrange for a willing proxy, then the client can go free. For the duration of the client's sentence, the proxy enjoys the benefits of prison life.

LINDA

What about life sentences?

MIKE

Life sentences are, of course, ineligible for the program for the first 10 years, 15 years for life without parole.

LINDA
And, death penalty?

MIKE
Lawmakers are currently undecided about how the program will be extended to those serving death penalty sentences.

INT. WOMAN1'S PRISON CELL - DAY

WOMAN1
I used to just sit in my room all day watching TV and eating chips. In prison, I'm doing the same thing, but I'm actually doing something with my life.

INT. MAN1'S PRISON CELL - DAY

MAN1
When my retirement savings evaporated, I was worried. I thought I'd have to rob a bank to retire. It's great that someone else already did that for me.

INT. MAN2'S PRISON CELL - DAY

LINDA (V.O.)
They say it's good for everyone, but are there risks?

MAN2
Serving time is okay. Sometimes, I miss life on the street. But, you can't beat 3 free hots and a cot.

INT. PRISON VISITING ROOM - DAY

LINDA (V.O.)
Of course, there are no guarantees about the actual duration of the sentence.

LAWYER1
I'm sorry. Your client's automatic appeal was accepted.

Man3 slumps dejectedly.

LAWYER1
I'm afraid that per the new ruling you'll be out in a week.

MAN3
What about my dental?

INT. PRISON CAFETERIA - EARLIER, DAY

LINDA (V.O.)
Prison life itself may also include
some hardship.

WOMAN1
Prison food? Sometimes it's as bad
as hospital food.

INT. PRISON VISITING ROOM - DAY

LINDA (V.O.)
Serving as a proxy also requires
preparing for the unexpected. After
all, who can predict, let alone
control, what a client might do on
the outside?

Lawyer meets with Man4 (dressed in prison clothes) and his
wife (dressed in street clothes) who appear anxious and are
clutching hands.

LAWYER2
The news is, your client has
reoffended.

After a slight pause, Man4 and his wife break into smiles
and hug each other, almost tearfully.

MAN4
Did you hear that, honey? I can
complete my PhD.

INT. WARDEN'S OFFICE - DAY

WARDEN
I'd say the morale has improved.
There are fewer fights and
infractions. Most of our prisoners
have been able to move to more cost-
effective facilities.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

LINDA (V.O.)
But, is there a dark side to Prison
by Proxy?

OLSEN is a middle-aged, formidable but quiet-spoken guard.

OLSEN
They're talking layoffs for the
guards. Frankly, it was more exciting
before. But, I hear things are
picking up in the private sector.

EXT. STREET - DAY

A man carries a sign that says, "Will do time for food."

LINDA (V.O.)

It's getting harder for American citizens to participate in Prison by Proxy. Yes, even prison time is being outsourced.

INT. PRISON VISITING ROOM - DAY

MAN5

What do you mean they're letting me out? My client is doing life.

LAWYER3

Unfortunately, they're transferring your contract to Mexico.

MAN5

You can't do that. It's un-American.

LAWYER3

They can get three there for the cost of one here. Sorry.

EXT. PRISON ENTRANCE - DAY

MAN6

They say outsourcing allows foreigners to serve the time we don't want to serve. But, that's just an excuse. It's not fair. These are our prisons, not theirs.

INT. PRISON VISITING AREA - DUSK

LINDA

Does Prison by Proxy really work? Let's ask. So, how many innocent people do we have here?

All hands go up.

LINDA

And how many of you are in prison by proxy?

Half the hands go up.

EXT. PRISON ENTRANCE - PRESENT, EVENING

Wes Rendleman is now an average-looking man in his 30s, with geeky hair and not dressed well but with a nice butt. Wes notices the crowd but doesn't notice Linda as he walks up to MARGARET.

Margaret is a middle aged woman with long brown hair, wire-rim glasses, jeans, T-shirt and flip flops. She is holding a large sign that says, "Animals are People, Too!"

WES

What's going on?

MARGARET

(Excitedly)

That's Linda Woodham.

WES

Who?

MARGARET

(Angrily)

Sh. She's going live.

Margaret rudely shoves Wes back with her large sign as some in the crowd turn to angrily shush Wes.

Annoyed and unable to see Linda, Wes turns away and quietly walks off as Linda resumes her live broadcast.

LINDA

So, is Prison by Proxy right for you? During these hard economic times, more and more people are saying, "lock me up." Reporting live, this is Linda Woodham. Back to you.

ELLIE

And, cut.

The small crowd applauds. Some hold small signs for various causes such as "We Love You, Linda", "Yes on Prop 42", "World Peace", "Our Rights Now" and "Animals are People, too!".

Linda bows and thanks the crowd.

The adoring crowd gathers around Linda as she signs autographs.

Ellie's cell phone rings and she answers.

ELLIE

Yes? Who? I'll check.

(To Linda)

Linda, it's your boyfriend du jour, Steve.

LINDA

Which Steve? The one whose voice sounds like god?

ELLIE

Yes.

LINDA

(Matter of factly)

Hang up.

Ellie hangs up.

Mike approaches Ellie as she packs up equipment.

MIKE

Ellie, can I speak with you a moment?

ELLIE

Mike, it's over between us.

MIKE

No, I mean about a candidate interview with Linda.

ELLIE

Mike, you are unelectable.

MIKE

Says who?

Ellie points to the crowd surrounding Linda.

ELLIE

Says them.

MIKE

Look, I've got a great idea for my campaign. I'll be the "Law Eraser." What do you think?

LINDA

Ellie, shouldn't you be packing stuff and stuff?

Ellie sighs as she returns to her work, turning away from Mike.

MIKE

Please, Ellie?

ELLIE

Gotta go.

Frustrated, Ellie hauls off her gear, leaving Mike flustered and alone.

The crowd chants and shouts, proudly thrusting their signs as Linda cheers along with them.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

SPENCER is a kindly security guard at the entrance. Wes enters, carrying a briefcase.

SPENCER
Good morning, sir.

WES
I'll agree that it's morning.

SPENCER
Sorry to hear that, sir.

WES
Not your fault.

Wes passes the security desk and enters the hallway toward the lab.

INT. LAB ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Wes spots a new sign near the stairwell that says, "In case of emergency, use stairs."

Wes pulls the sign off the wall and drops it in a trash can in the hallway.

He goes to the lab door, waves his keycard at the lock. It clicks and he goes in.

INT. LAB - CONTINUOUS

The lab is a curious assortment of tubes, bottles, wires and electronics. It features a massive computer system spread around half the room along with tubes and wires leading to a pod with a microscope nearby. A sign says, "No food or drink." Just below it is a large sack of peanuts.

JEAN Sherman is a lab scientist, in her 40s with shoulder length, brunette hair and dressed modestly, in a lab coat. She sits at a lab bench, hovered over her work.

Wes draws nearer and sees she is intensely using a scalpel to slice tiny bits of a chocolate bar.

Wes puts his briefcase down on a desk.

He stands silently, watching Jean.

Jean speaks without looking up.

JEAN
This bar has 210 calories and it's
not on the diet.
(MORE)

JEAN (CONT'D)

But, if I cut it into 421 pieces,
then each piece has less than half a
calorie. That's approximately zero
calories for each piece.

WES

That's what you're going to tell
yourself?

JEAN

That's what I'm going to tell Greg.

WES

(Confused)

Uh ...

JEAN

He doesn't want to go on a diet.
But if I'm going on a diet, so is
he.

Wes settles in at the bench and looks through the microscope.

He scowls with disappointment into the microscope.

JEAN

Yup, another dud. But, I'm applying
your adjustments to the paramecium
slurry. The next sample will be up
in a few minutes. It just entered
cystic state.

WES

We're close. There are only a few
bad bonds.

DON is serious, fairly short, middle-aged, tense and has
trouble with his hearing aid.

DON (O.S.)

Hey, where did my sign go?

The door to the lab clicks and Don storms in, marching
straight to Wes.

Wes does not look up but continues to focus on the microscope.

WES

What sign?

Posing as though burning Wes with laser vision, Don scowls
silently at Wes. Wes ignores the scowling.

WES

"Stairs" was misspelled.

Don becomes distracted with adjusting his hearing aid.

DON

What was that? That sign is required by law, you know.

WES

It had S-T-A-R-E-S, not S-T-A-I-R-S.

Equipment beeps and Jean gets up to retrieve the new sample.

DON

I want it that way. It fits my management style, staring during an emergency.

Don again scowls silently at Wes. Wes again ignores the scowling.

WES

So, what's the emergency?

DON

The board is disappointed by the rejection of your last technical paper.

Wes sighs with disappointment.

WES

If I had included more of our results ...

DON

Not until we patent it.

WES

So, let's file patents.

DON

Not in the budget. Look, I pay you too much to have to put up with this. Can't you just write a new paper?

WES

I'm not certain you understand how much work that entails.

Overhearing, Jean chokes a little as she works with the new sample.

JEAN

(Whispering to herself)
Entails?

DON

Then just rewrite it, spice it up a little.

WES

I could add a few new diaphragms.

Jean scowls at Wes.

DON

And, could you do that soon?

WES

One rubber nose.

Jean chokes again and turns away as Don now scowls at Wes.

DON

Very good, then. I'll report that as a "yes" to the board.

WES

Cherry wood.

Don proudly marches out of the lab, passing by Jean as she examines the sample under a microscope.

DON

(To Jean)

Keep up the good work. Don't let him get under your skin.

JEAN

Yes, sir.

Jean and Wes silently watch as Don leaves the lab.

Jean coughs a laugh as she puts the new sample in the microscope.

JEAN

You can't keep doing that. One of these days he's going to notice what you're actually ...

Jean is suddenly quiet as she peers into the microscope.

WES

What? It's just self-defecating humor.

Jean motions for Wes to come over.

JEAN

Take a look.

In anticipation, Wes walks over to the microscope as Jean has a mini-celebration eating a tiny sliver of chocolate.

Wes examines under the microscope as Jean excitedly watches.

WES

The genome base pair bonds look good so far. They all look good.

Jean records the data in a lab book.

JEAN

We've finally got one, sample number 61760.

WES

No, she is not a number. She has a name.

JEAN

She? Please, it's just an amoeba.

WES

No, she's special. I'm naming her ... Amy. You know, A-M-O-E, Amy.

JEAN

Amoe it is.

Wes stares intently into the microscope as Jean updates her notes.

WES

Hello, girl. Welcome home, Amoe.

JEAN

That's so cute. Congratulations, dad. I sense plenty of patents and publishing opportunities.

WES

I know. It's just that ... There's just never enough time in the schedule. Not even for a decent lunch break.

Jean munches a sliver of chocolate as she returns to her work.

Wes celebrates by grabbing a peanut, tossing it into the air and catching it in his mouth.