

Juvenile Court

In her chambers on the second floor –
leather sofa, fishbowl, a jar of candy
from three Christmases ago –
she watches the Shopping Channel
on a small TV, buying nothing,
mesmerized by the distractive drone
that releases her mind from truants
delinquents and shoplifters.

The unwieldy tomes of her trade
crowd bookshelves. In a corner closet
are clues to the part of life she deems
real: leather chaps and biker's helmet;
the hemp necklace her daughter made.
Each day beneath her robes she wears
an orange dress to remind her
that real life lies beyond dull dockets
of lawyers pleading with all the rote
mechanics of mumbled liturgies.

At home and off the Harley, other
reality hits her: a bed-ridden mother
shouting her name, a husband in a stained
shirt banging pots on the stove,
the clack of an aluminum beer can tab
slapping her eardrums. From a recliner
she will fill him in on the histrionics
of the law's best backsliders, sobbing
parents, and lawyers who tempt her wrath.

Her husband will say, 'time to quit honey,'
but she'll only proffer a rueful smile;
each day passing one more verdict
on the future of petty thieves, weighing
each shiny alibi that leaps from their mouths.

-Jeffery C. Alfier