*A little girl is given a new sweater-- an ugly new sweater, which she hates. She takes the sweater, puts it on the floor, takes a nap, and when she wakes up, her sweater's been chewed to shreds. She, of course, could not be happier, but her mother's very upset, cries a little. The girl blames the dog. The dog. A little spaniel named Kathleen.*

***Kathleen The Spaniel***

*I demand a fair hearing. I won't take the blame.*

***Ira Glass***

*Kathleen the spaniel then stood to proclaim.*

***Kathleen The Spaniel***

*I didn't do nothing. I'm just not the sort. I'll see you in hell first, or animal court.*

***Ira Glass***

*David Sedaris has written a play for our program. This play is an original radio play entirely in rhymed couplets. In this play, the animals do lots of things that humans do. For example, they talk. And they hold court out in the forest. But in this play, also, every now and then, unlike most fairy tales and like most movies about animals or stories about animals, these animals reassert their animal-ness.*

*Our play begins as Kathleen the Spaniel heads out into the forest, and our narrator-- the little girl who owns her-- follows behind.*

***Narrator***

*I waited til late and crept out. It was dark. I was deep in the forest when I heard a bark. It was Kathleen, my spaniel, kneeling before an old dog-- a judge. And this elder, he wore a dark, floor-length robe. I think it was silk. He paused then and lapped from a bowl of skim milk.*

***Judge***

*This court is in session. Oh, Jesus. I ought to lay off the scraps when they serve enchiladas.*

***Narrator***

*He patted his chest with potato-sized paws, then pounded his gavel and laid down the law.*

***Judge***

*There'll be no witnesses leading, no swearing or shedding, no tampering, cat calls, or evidence shredding. I call on the state now to start prosecution. Defense will then counter to prove absolution.*

***Narrator***

*The clearing was silent. A cat took the floor, a smooth-talking tom with a high pompadour.*

***Cat***

*Your honor, destruction's no small misdemeanor. The accused here is vicious. We should quarantine her. Now I plan to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Kathleen the spaniel engaged in a bout of senseless destruction. She's got no remorse, a fact that I'm hoping to prove in due course. I call to the stand now one eyewitness worm. She was there on the scene. Her memory's firm.*

***Narrator***

*It seemed like a lifetime. The worm took forever to inch to the stand and begin her endeavor.*

***Worm***

*Yes, I'm a worm, true. I live in the soil. Only in rain do I earthwards unfoil. On this day in question, we had a fierce shower. So using my well-known abdominal power, I lifted myself from the earth's muddy ground. I crawled and I climbed and eventually found myself on a window ledge-- me, just a worm, a fact I would now like to briefly confirm. My eyesight is faultless. I know what I'd seen.*

*The defendant herself, the spaniel Kathleen, engaged in destruction against the same sweater. She used it as a sort of appetite whetter. She gnawed at the fabric and tugged at the collar. And knowing no way I could stop her or stall her, I stood, a mute witness. I watched in disgust. I think it's appalling. I find it unjust. That dog's no puppy.*

*She should've known better than to lie on a mattress digesting a sweater. If you want my opinion, I think you ought to put her away. She's a heinous marauder.*

***Narrator***

*The worm had concluded. She'd finished her say, and reached for a thimble of cold consomme.*

***Cat***

*Your witness.*

***Narrator***

*The cat said. I watched as a wren hopped to the floor where the cat once had been.*

***Wren***

*Your honor, it's clear that this worm is deceptive. I'm wondering now if she might be receptive to proving her eyesight is all that she claims. I'd like her to read from this short list of names.*

***Narrator***

*The bird took a book written in Lebanese and carried it out past the pond to the trees.*

***Wren***

*Can you read this name here. It's first on the list.*

***Worm***

*That's too far away,*

***Narrator***

*The angry worm hissed.*

***Worm***

*I can't read that far, not even in day. You might as well post it in Rome or Pompeii.*

***Wren***

*So your sight--*

***Narrator***

*Said the bird, keen on proving a point.*

***Wren***

*--is something you boast upon when you anoint this court with your presence, the all-seeing worm. Your sight is on par with an old pachyderm. You're small and deceitful. You crawled to no ledge. You witnessed no crime like the one you allege.*

***Worm***

*Stop talking to me in your harsh legalese. I know what I saw. I can't read Lebanese. Still, though, I saw it. I've seen lots of things. I've noticed you poach and take off on your wings. I know all about you. My word is my honor.*

***Narrator***

*She looked at the bird then, a certified goner. The wren whispered softly, as if to confirm, and then she lunged forward, beheading the worm.*

***Cat***

*Objection!*

***Narrator***

*The cat yelled.*

***Cat***

*She's eating my witness!*

***Narrator***

*The bird, in a grand show of physical fitness, finished the worm and returned to her perch, the lowest-hung branch of a young, silver birch.*

*The cat called a witness, a chubby, black cricket I'd seen once or twice in my room eat a ticket to movies or plays. This thing, it ate paper. Its body was small, just the size of a caper.*

***Cricket***

*I'm a cricket, I am. And to hell with your court.*

***Narrator***

*Said the cricket, her vocal cords fierce in retort.*

***Cricket***

*I've no use for your system. It's false and oppressive. The lawyer's behavior is passive-aggressive. You're saying you want me to be more specific? I tell you, I find your whole species horrific. We live day to day, us and grasshoppers too. You bark and you chirp, you low or you mew, then head to your nest for a night's hibernation while we're out there fighting for true liberation. You rise from your beds and meet in this clearing to practice your justice. It's all profiteering.*

*Your system's disgusting. It's rotten and stinky. And if you think I'll raise my right hand or my pinkie in honor to you, then you are quite mistaken. I saw something, true. But no statement I'm making. I won't say a word til you promise protection.*

***Wren***

*Contempt!*

***Narrator***

*Cried the bird. The cat yelled,*

***Cat***

*Objection!*

***Cricket***

*This justice you claim, it's all based on species. I'd rather kneel down on the ground and eat feces than kowtow to you and your justice achieving. I'm no friend of yours. Do you hear me? I'm leaving.*

***Narrator***

*The court was in chaos. The cricket hopped off. She flew through the air just like Baryshnikov. The bird then, she followed it into the thicket, and returned having eaten that hot-tempered cricket. There was no objection, no cry of foul play. The judge and the lawyers gave a silent OK.*

***Judge***

*Next witness.*

***Narrator***

*The judge barked.*

***Judge***

*Allow me to mention we're holding this court with the sole good intention of seeking the truth, of meriting justice. It helps when you call up a witness who will trust us.*

***Wren***

*Your honor--*

***Narrator***

*The bird said.*

***Wren***

*--I now call a squirrel, a trustworthy witness, a very nice girl. Hardworking and thrifty, she lives in that elm. I'm hoping my colleague will not overwhelm or badger my witness. She's timid and shy.*

***Narrator***

*The judge took an aspirin and shouted out--*

***Judge***

*Why don't you bring on this witness. Enough of your chatter. Let's hope that this squirrel can finish the matter. I'm tired and hungry, so please let's proceed.*

***Narrator***

*The cat took a watch from his pocket.*

***Cat***

*Indeed, you're stalling this court with your warbling and rambling. I'm thinking, your honor, defense is just gambling. She's playing for time. It's a transparent tactic. Some call it clever. I call it didactic.*

***Wren***

*Your honor, forgive me. I call your attention to my leading witness, that squirrel I mentioned.*

***Narrator***

*There was no need to prompt her, no need to coerce the squirrel into talking. She set down her purse, and crossing her legs-- ladylike, at the shin-- the squirrel eyewitness began to weigh in.*

***Squirrel***

*I saw it, I did. The whole thing. And it reeks. I was sitting there calmly with nuts in my cheeks. I gather them daily. These nuts are my diet. An acorn, a pecan, you name it, I'll try it. Sometimes I'll hide them. I'll dig them a grave for some later time when we have a cold wave. It ain't easy digging through thick ice and snow.*

***Cat***

*Objection.*

***Narrator***

*The cat cried.*

***Cat***

*I think we all know that winter is frosty, it's chilly, and tough. In terms of her hardship, we've all heard enough.*

***Judge***

*Get on with your story. Enough of your woes.*

***Squirrel***

*Yes, sir,*

***Narrator***

*Said the squirrel.*

***Squirrel***

*Well, the rest of it goes, I was searching for food then, was out on my rounds. My sister remarked that I gained a few pounds in my hips and my shoulders. She thought it looked smashing. I respect her opinion, and so I was dashing to something I saw. It resembled a kernel of corn, so I thought. But it seems the infernal nugget in question turned out to be gum. It was chewed in a wad just the size of a crumb. I was out of my mind then. I wanted a snack.*

***Cat***

*Objection, your honor. She's getting off track,*

***Narrator***

*The cat lawyer cried.*

***Cat***

*Let's get on with the crime.*

***Wren***

*Your honor--*

***Narrator***

*The bird said.*

***Wren***

*--my witness needs time to set up her scene of emotional stress. She's said to have suffered from mental duress.*

***Squirrel***

*So anyway, right, if my memory serves, I was searching the ground for some type of hors d'oeurve when I heard in the distance the sound of a voice. It sounded quite angry, so I made the choice. I peeked through the window and sat on my haunches, and then I became, for a brief while, unconscious.*

*It happens, sometimes. I have these brief spells. I can't say for certain, but something compels my brain to relax, causing me to black out. I was hit in the head with a large brussels sprout last summer. I think it was early July. I think that's the reason. I'm not certain why.*

***Cat***

*I'm sorry--*

***Narrator***

*The cat said.*

***Cat***

*--your mind is so frail. I'm wondering, though, if your story entails the fact of this case? Is there any connection between the accused and your brain imperfection?*

***Squirrel***

*Technically, yes,*

***Narrator***

*The squirrel said, beaming.*

***Squirrel***

*My body was there, but my mind was dreaming. I was there at the scene. That I know for a fact. I was hoping by speaking I might could extract some details, something I maybe could mention to justify all of this lavish attention. I find it exciting, dramatic, suspense. It all suits me perfect because, in a sense, I enjoy public speaking. I love center stage.*

***Narrator***

*The bird then approached, feathers standing in rage.*

***Wren***

*You said you had seen things, that you were compliant, and had information concerning my client.*

***Squirrel***

*I might have, you know, but I can't say for certain. I know what I told you, but now I'm revertin'. Is this microphone on? Hello? Do you mind if I sing?*

***Narrator***

*The bird slapped the stand with the tip of her wing and spat in disgust.*

***Wren***

*Your witness.*

***Narrator***

*She said. The cat flexed his paws, and then used them to shred that squirrel to ribbons. He tore it to bits and ate everything but her eyes and armpits. And then he pounced forward and firmly procured between his firm jaws that lawyering bird.*

***Wren***

*Objection, your honor. I feel I'm being eaten. I don't like the way my colleague is treatin' the legal profession, especially me. I'm soon to become a full-fledged amputee.*

***Narrator***

*That was all that I heard. The rest was too muffled. I watched for a while as the two of them scuffled. The cat took the bird right down to the beak. The judge rose, then asking if now he might speak.*

***Judge***

*To the cat in my chambers, a brief legal chat.*

***Narrator***

*The judge then walked off and I watched as the cat foolishly followed that judge past a stump to a field of tires once used as a dump. I heard the cat hiss, then. I heard him yell, "No." I can't say for certain who struck the first blow. But I can say who won. I know that the judge stepped out of his chambers unable to budge. He belched and he sagged, both lips heavy with fur, and looked out at the courtroom where others once were.*

***Judge***

*I find you not guilty.*

***Narrator***

*He said to my spaniel.*

***Judge***

*But if I ever hear so much as a granule of trouble from you, then I'll put you away.*

***Kathleen The Spaniel***

*Thank you, your honor.*

***Narrator***

*I heard Kathleen say.*

***Judge***

*Go on now, get out of here. Hurry along. Get back to your home, back to where you belong.*

***Narrator***

*I waited for Kathleen beside a small creek. She passed me, despondent, refusing to speak. And me, I returned to my comfortable bed thinking of how, by some fluke, I'd been led to animal court, that harsh, hostile scene, that by chance, thought to spare my companion, Kathleen.*

***Ira Glass***

*The Pinetree Gang. Amy Sedaris, David Rakoff, Toby Wherry, Stacy Goldstein, Jackie Hoffman, [? Nora Ladonnie, ?] [? Sara Tyre, ?] and Richard Zaragoza. Story by David Sedaris.*