

Does Mary Louise Have a Custody Case Against Celeste on Big Little Lies?

VULTURE [vulture.com/2019/06/big-little-lies-mary-louise-celeste-kids-custody.html](https://www.vulture.com/2019/06/big-little-lies-mary-louise-celeste-kids-custody.html)

By Jackson McHenry @McHenryJD June 30, 2019



That face when you've been plotting with Denis O'Hare. Photo: HBO

Mary Louise has come a long way from vaguely threatening Madeline Martha Mackenzie [with her necklace](#) and [bearing her creepy fake teeth](#). On Sunday night's episode of *Big Little Lies*, Meryl's character meets with an attorney (played by the great Denis O'Hare) and announces that she's going to try to claim custody over Celeste's children.

In the world of *Big Little Lies*, Mary Louise's actions are treated as a credible threat. Celeste has been taking sleeping pills and driving while under the influence of them, potentially putting her twins at risk. She sleeps with a random hot and tatted-up bartender. Plus, of course, she's lied to the police about the circumstances of her late husband Perry's death. But in the real world, would Mary Louise actually have a case?

"The chances of a family law attorney taking that case and actually prevailing are pretty low," Laura Wasser, a California [family-law attorney](#) who has represented Angelina Jolie, Britney Spears, Johnny Depp, and Jennifer Garner in [high-profile divorce cases](#), told Vulture. "Grandparents do not have very many rights in the state of California. Biological parents have far more rights."

According to Wasser, who is a fan of the show, Mary Louise would have to prove that Celeste is unable to act as parent in order to get custody of the kids. Yes, Celeste has been spinning out after Perry's death, but she'd have to be incarcerated, institutionalized, or something on the level of "drug abuse or some kind of physical or sexual abuse to the kids" in order for Mary Louise's case to stick.

"Think about what you've seen some of the celebrities that you and I know and love doing — and yet they still have custody of their children," Wasser said. "You'd have to do more than pop a couple of Ambien and sleep with a guy to get it taken away." Even then, Wasser added, Mary Louise has only come into the twins' lives recently, so if anything were to happen, someone else in Celeste's family might be more likely to get custody than she. (The same would happen if, for whatever reason, Mary Louise tried to get custody of Ziggy from Jane.)

But even if this is a case that Mary Louise can't win, there could be a reason why she wants to sue anyway. "Sometimes people do stuff like that just to make a point," Wasser said, and this would be a good way for Mary Louise to get people on the record about Perry's death.

Get unlimited access to Vulture and everything else *New York*.
[Learn More »](#)

In that case, Robin Weigert's therapist's not-so-great business practices may come under scrutiny. Yes, as Dr. Reisman promises Celeste in the episode, their conversations are usually privileged as part of the therapist's contract with a patient. But if a therapist has worked with two clients on either side of a case — such as both Perry and Celeste, who initially meet with Dr. Reisman together — the therapist arguably has a duty to both clients. "Because the therapist had done couples counseling," Wasser said, "that is something they might get into."

Big Little Lies has gotten one key aspect of a custody battle right so far: the process of "conflicting out" other attorneys in order to prevent the person on the other side from working with them. On the show, Mary Louise's lawyer tells her to meet with several other lawyers and discuss her case so they're precluded from working with Celeste. The term "started gaining leverage after an episode of *The Sopranos* when Tony was going to get divorced from his wife," Wasser said, and it does happen quite a bit in family law.

And what about Renata telling Madeline that "California law is very tricky," seemingly upping the stakes of Celeste's case? Are we to believe that detail too? "No, in fact, California law may have stronger bonds to the biological parents than other states," Wasser said. "That's just a line for Laura Dern."