

## Chapter 1

Attorney Sabre Orin Brown hurried through the crowd at San Diego Juvenile Court toward the clerk's office. She thought about the newspaper article that reported child abuse was down. Where were they getting their statistics? The halls were so crowded she had to squeeze through. The construction in the lobby didn't help, either. The powers that be had decided it would be a good time to move the information desk from the middle of the room up against the wall. It wouldn't provide any more space and it didn't really look any better, but it might make it a little easier for the clerks to go from the work room to the desk. She was on calendar for detentions this morning and she was running late. It was the first morning she could remember that she hadn't arrived at court an hour early.

"You okay, Sobs?" Bob, Sabre's best friend, asked. Sobs had become her juvenile court nickname. S.O.B. were Sabre Orin Brown's initials and her colleagues were quick to tease her about the nickname. At first it was only Bob that called her Sobs, but the name had caught on and some of the other attorneys used it as well. Bob had nicknames for a lot of his co-workers, most not as lovingly applied as hers. "I can't believe I beat you to court."

"I just had a little trouble getting rolling this morning, but I'm fine now." Sabre gave a half smile. "How many detentions are on calendar?"

"We have three. And there's just you and me on detentions. There's an out-of-control teenager, a drug baby, and . . ." Bob stood there in his gray suit and Marshall-bought Florsheims, shuffling through the blue petitions. A quirky smile came over his face.

"What is it?"

"Heh, heh," Bob made a strange sound with his throat. "I'm not sure, but it looks like one of those ritual cases."

"Another one? There was one last week and I'm pretty sure Wagner had one last month. Why are they filing this stuff? Most of it is just ludicrous. I wonder how many more there are that we don't know about."

"It's about time we got something interesting. I'm bored with broken arms, tox babies, and creepy guys who molest little children." Bob picked up the social worker's report and started to read through it.

Sabre shook her head. She knew Bob cared as much about the children as she did. She watched his expression turn from grin to grimace as he read through the report. Although he was in his early thirties, his full head of hair had already started to gray. She figured hers would too if she continued in this line of work. "So what is it?"

Bob leaned in closer to her and in a deep, creepy voice said, "Goat blood and chicken feet."

"No." Sabre said in disbelief, grabbing the report out of his hand. "Give me that."

Bob laughed as he picked up another copy from the box on the desk.

"Ewww. It does say goat blood and chicken feet were found in the home."

"You take the kids." Bob said "I want the mom on this one. I can win this. It'll be another win for the king." He threw his fist in the air.

"You're sick, but you are the king of juvenile court. You have more jurisdictional wins than anyone." Sabre separated the other petitions, glancing at the potential appointments. "Do you want the tox baby or the teenager?"

Bob tilted his head down and looked over his glasses. "You can have the teenager. I hate working with teenagers. For that matter, you can have the tox baby, too, if you want."

"No, that's fine. I'll take mom. If they all go to trial, you'll have too much prep to do. Not that there's that much to do on the drug baby cases, but still . . ."

"Fine. You have the kids on Johnson and Lecy and I have the baby on Hernandez. There's no appointments for the fathers, right?"

"Nobody in the picture on any of these cases right now." Sabre picked up her files, her petitions, and the reports. "Let's go find our clients."

They walked out of the closet the county called an attorney's lounge. It was originally a storage room, but space was so tight now they needed every nook and cranny to use as a courtroom. A lounge for the attorneys was the least concern to the county. Bob watched a large breasted woman with a low-cut blouse walk across the hallway.

Sabre flicked his arm. "Hey, you're a married man."

"I'm married, not dead." He grinned at her. "Nice tie, by the way," Bob said as he sauntered away.

Sabre received her first Jerry Garcia tie as a present from her brother, Ron, when she entered law school. He teased her about holding her own in a male-dominated profession, but if she was going to do it, she should have the Grateful Dead by her side. Sabre wasn't sure if he ever meant her to wear the tie, but as a tribute to her brother it became the first of a large collection.

Sabre walked across the floor where the information desk used to be, catching her three-inch heel in a rough spot on the floor and almost turning her ankle. Another wardrobe staple, the heels stretched her to a full 5'7". She reported the spot on the floor to the desk and they quickly placed a caution sign on it to avoid further incident.

Sabre stopped in the restroom. The stalls were full and she turned toward the mirror while she waited, taking a rare moment to just breathe. She looked slim, well-dressed, not unattractive. It seemed she needed to reassure herself these days. She smoothed the jacket on her suit, took her sunglasses off, and ran a brush through her shoulder-length, brown hair. She pushed her sunglasses back on her head, using them as a barrette to hold her hair off her face.

Moments later, Sabre was back in the crowd. The room was filled with people, some trying to get their lives in order, others just fighting the system. She saw a couple leaning against the wall entwined in each others arms. The woman was dressed like a hooker and was obviously high. The man wasn't in much better shape. His hair looked like it hadn't been combed in weeks and he was in serious need of a haircut and shave. Sabre smiled to herself. *There seems to be someone for everyone if they look in the right places.* For a brief moment she wondered if she'd find someone again. Her thirtieth birthday was fast approaching and she was still happily single . . . most of the time. She didn't want to be married, and as much as she loved them, she didn't plan on having children. She was satisfied with her work and passionate about the people she worked to help. But occasionally she wanted a relationship. Then she'd think of the last time she was involved and change her mind.

Sabre walked through the lobby until she found her client, Maria Hernandez, on the drug baby case. She was young. It was her first baby and her drug activity seemed to be fairly new. Maria agreed to enroll in all the programs and Maria's mother was willing to help out with the baby. The social worker recommended detention with the grandmother as soon as the baby was released from the hospital and was willing to let Maria stay there as long as she was active in her court-ordered programs. Sabre saw Bob talking with grandma and knew he'd be okay with the recommendations if he was comfortable that grandma could protect the baby. When everyone worked toward what was best for the child, the cases were easy. Sabre believed this was one of those cases.

The two of them left the courtroom just in time to witness an arrest at the metal detector. A twenty-nine-year old woman emptied her pockets into the tray and walked through the machine. The sheriff picked up the contents of the tray, opened a vial containing cocaine, and placed the handcuffs on Karen Lecy.

"Uh oh," Bob chuckled and shook his head. "Stupid woman."

"What is it?" Sabre followed Bob toward the arresting officer.

"That's the mom on the detention. The one with the out-of-control teenager."

“Gee, that might explain some of the kid’s problems.”

“Excuse me, Jerry,” Bob said to the sheriff. “That’s my client. Can I talk to her?”

“I’ll put her in an interview room after we book her.”

Bob turned to Karen Lecy. “Don’t say anything until we talk.”

Sabre stared at the woman being taken away. “She’s the mom?” Sabre asked, not really expecting an answer. “She looks like a teenager herself. She’s so young.”

The crowd in the room had stopped buzzing as they stood around and watched the arrest. Some were probably feeling bad for her; others appeared glad to have the attention off themselves, even for a moment, but everyone was gawking as the woman was taken back to the holding tank.

“You ready on the Johnson detention?” Sabre asked.

“Yeah, mom’s denying everything. She swears she doesn’t know anything about any rituals, satanic or otherwise.”

“And how does she explain the goat blood and chicken feet?”

“She can’t explain the goat blood, but she has a very plausible explanation for the chicken feet.”

“I can’t wait to hear this.”

“It’s simple really. They eat them,” Bob said with a straight face.

“Ewww . . . what’s to eat on a chicken foot? There’s no meat on them—just dirty, scaly-looking skin that’s been walking around in chicken feces.”

“Really, Sabre.” His voice serious. “I think she may be telling the truth. She’s having a tough time making ends meet and she can get chicken feet free. She said her mother used to make them when they were kids.”

“And you’re buying this?” Sabre looked at Bob, her face quenched in disbelief.

“Leanne Johnson is either a really good liar or she’s just trying to feed her kids. The part that got to me was that even though she’s devastated about losing her children, she knows they’ll have food.” Bob shrugged. “I don’t know. See what the kids say.”

“I will. I’ll go to Polinsky this afternoon and see them. I have to see the Lecy girl, too. Now that her mother has been arrested, we have another issue to deal with on that case.”