

## Prologue

Attorney Sabre Orin Brown leaned against the wall outside of Judge Lawrence Mitchell's chambers as she waited for him. Although she was thirty-one years old, she always felt like a schoolgirl in trouble whenever a judge requested her presence. And this was Scary Larry. Who knew what he might say or do? He was known to shout at attorneys when they did something he didn't like.

Sabre recalled a few times as a child when she had sat outside the principal's office with the same sick ache in her stomach. But then she usually knew what she had done wrong. It was always the same thing: She just couldn't keep her mouth shut in class and loved to argue. Once she told a teacher his statement about inner cities was not only stupid, but racist. She knew the second she said it, she shouldn't have. The teacher yanked her out of her seat and marched her past the other sixth grade students and down the hall to the principal's office.

Pulling her back to the present, Judge Mitchell said, "Thank you for coming, Sabre."

"Of course," she said.

Judge Mitchell opened the door to his chambers, removed his robe from his tall, lanky body, and hung it on a clothes tree in the corner of his office. "Have a seat," he said.

Sabre took a seat without responding. She watched the judge, in his early sixties, as he sat down behind his massive oak desk. He picked up a photograph of a younger self, three small children, and a woman whom Sabre knew to be his first wife, among many. Admiration covered

his face, but as he set the photo down and turned to Sabre his brow wrinkled and his smile disappeared.

“I may as well get right to the point, Sabre, since there’s no easy way to say this.” He paused just briefly. “We have a problem on a case.”

“You mean a conflict?”

“No. It has to do with a party on one of our cases. Something of which I’ve recently become aware.”

“Your Honor, shouldn’t we have the other attorneys here? County Counsel at least?”

“No one else can know this. I wouldn’t be telling you except....”

“Your Honor,” she interrupted him again, “I mean no disrespect, but I’m really not comfortable with this interchange without the other attorneys on the case present.” She felt her hands quiver a little. No matter how many years she had lived or how many letters she had after her name, authority figures still made her nervous. But she had several cases right now that were very touchy and she didn’t want to risk an appellate issue on any of them because of an ex parte hearing with a judge.

She expected him to rebuke her, but he didn’t. He calmly said, “Sabre, I know this can jeopardize your case and it can get me thrown off the bench, but it has to be said.” Voices filled the hallway from a courtroom that had emptied. “Please shut the door,” the judge said.

His comments made her even more wary. Sabre stood up, took one step toward the door, and looked out. She spotted Dave Cosby, a deputy County Counsel, walking with a bailiff.

“Dave,” she called. “Can you come here a second?”

She turned back to the judge. His face was red with anger and for a second Sabre thought she saw fear in his face. “We need a County Counsel in here, Your Honor. I’m just not comfortable with this.”

“There’s no need for County Counsel,” he said louder.

“So, should I get the DA? Is it a delinquency case?”

Scary Larry jumped up from his big leather chair and flung his arms out, making a dismissal gesture just as Casey stepped inside. “Get out! Both of you. Just get out. You’re on your own,” he bellowed.