

The Advocate's Nightmare

Chapter 1

Monday morning

San Diego Attorney Sabre Brown took a seat at the table in the courtroom between two men dressed in suits. When the clerk read the allegations, the defendant, a cold-eyed man, smiled slightly. Sabre's client seated next to her went nuts, lunging over her, knocking her down, chair and all. The file she was holding sailed across the room. The two men hit the ground at the bailiff's feet, who by then was standing over them. The judge exited the courtroom through the back door as other marshals poured in from every entrance.

Bob Clark, Sabre's best friend and colleague, was seated in Department One of the juvenile dependency courtroom behind Sabre. When the commotion started, he jumped up to help Sabre, but one of the marshals stretched out his arm, palm open, to stop him. "Stay, I've got this." He helped Sabre up as the others broke up the fight and escorted the men out the back door. Sabre's client was still shouting as they were escorted out.

Sabre straightened her slim-fitting skirt, ran her hand through her light brown hair, and picked up her file.

"Are you okay?" the marshal asked.

"I'm fine. Just a little shook up."

"Did you hit your head?"

“No. I went over sideways, so I didn’t hit the bar.” Sabre rotated her right arm to test it. “I’m a little sore, but I don’t think anything is broken. Thanks.” She walked through the gate to where Bob was standing.

He put his arm around her. “Are you sure you’re okay, Sobs?” That was his nickname for her because of her initials—S.O.B.

“Really, I’m fine.” She rolled her shoulder again, then took a seat in the back of the courtroom.

Bob sat next to her. “What the heck was that all about?”

“The guy who flew across the table, Grady Harn, is my client. His eight-year-old daughter was molested by the stepfather, Ritchie Stadler, the guy he attacked. I’m not sure what set Grady off. Of course, he’s furious at the guy, but he seemed to be handling it pretty well up until now. Maybe hearing the allegations out loud was too much for him.”

“It was more than that,” Bob said. “The jerk, Stadler, couldn’t hide his creepy thoughts about the girl. He smiled when the clerk read them. I saw it, so I’m guessing your client did too.”

Sabre sighed. “I caught that too. I wondered if that was what did it.”

“I don’t blame the guy. I’d kill anyone who hurt my kid.” Bob grinned. “And half the time, I don’t even like him that much.”

“You talk so big. You would be devastated if anything happened to CJ.”

“You’re right.” Bob looked up and nodded toward the woman who had been sitting next to the defendant. “Is that the mother?”

“Yes.”

“I’m guessing, since she was seated next to her husband, she chose to believe him over her daughter?”

“That’s right. She’s still with him, although the child seems to be pretty clear about what happened.”

“Stupid people,” Bob said. “There’s the judge.”

“Stay where you are,” Judge Thomas said. “This will only take a minute.” The tall, gray-haired, robed man sat down. “We’re back on the record. This case will be continued until the afternoon. Ms. Brown and Mr. Blake, please talk to your clients prior to returning to this courtroom. You should have ample time. That concludes this hearing.”

“Who’s the attorney for the creep?” Bob asked.

“He’s retained, and his name is Bob Blake. He’s from Orange County.”

“Have you been yanking his chain?”

“Not yet, but I will.”

Chapter 2

Monday morning

“Isn’t that Crazy Carla?” Bob asked, as he and Sabre walked out of Department One.

“It can’t be. What would she be doing here?” Sabre smiled. “And don’t call her that. It’s disrespectful.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Bob picked up his pace to get closer to the dark-haired woman leaning against the wall at the end of the hallway. “That’s her, isn’t it?”

“Yes. But how did you recognize her? You only saw her a couple of times and that was years ago.”

“I never forget a face, especially the crazies. Besides, she’s a very attractive woman. I don’t forget those either.”

“My brother always dated pretty women, but Carla was exceptional.” Sabre thought about the time when Ron was dating Carla. She was crazy about him, and for a while Sabre thought Carla might become her sister-in-law. When Ron moved to Texas, Carla had a breakdown. Sabre visited her a lot in the facility and became the only one who could keep her calm.

“Why would she be here? Did she have a kid?”

“Not that I’m aware of.”

Just then Richard Wagner, another attorney, approached them. "Can one of you take over a case for me? I'm on detentions, but I have a conflict."

"I'm sorry," Sabre said. "I have to see a delinquency client before his case this morning and reprimand a client who just went ballistic in court. Besides, I just picked up three new cases and they will all be intense," Sabre said.

"This one might be better suited for Bob anyway," Wagner said. "The petition is against the mother and she has some mental illness problems."

Bob looked over at Carla. "Is that her?"

"Yeah. How did you know?"

"Just a hunch." Bob reached out for the paperwork Wagner was holding. "I got this."

When Wagner walked away, Sabre said, "Look at the petition and see how old the child is."

"Are you afraid it might be your brother's?"

"No. Ron hasn't seen her in probably eight years."

Bob glanced at the petition. "Isn't Ron's middle name Adrian?"

"Yes." Sabre hesitated. "Why?"

"The child is a boy named Ronald Adrian Brown, Junior."

No! Sabre's mouth dropped open. She reached for the paperwork. "Are you serious?"

"No." Bob jerked the file back and laughed. "I'm pulling your leg. It's a four-year-old girl named Liberty."

"You're mean. Having someone in my family in the juvenile court system is my worst nightmare."

"That's your worst nightmare? Of all the things we see every day, *that's* your worst nightmare?"

"I have a hard-enough time staying detached from my cases. I don't think I could do it if I was dealing with family."

Bob shook his head. "I think having your family in this court would be kind of funny."

"You wouldn't if it was *your* family."

"I'd find that hilarious."

"Go talk to your client," Sabre said. "I have to see a client in the custodial interview room." But first she walked over to Carla and hugged her. They chatted for a few minutes about the past few years and about her daughter, then Sabre left.

~~~

Bob read through the detention report, then approached Carla. He explained that he was her court-appointed attorney and discussed confidentiality.

"I want my daughter back," Carla said. "She should be with me. Can you help me?"

"I'll do my best, but we have some hurdles to get over."

"I'm a good parent."

"Yes, it appears you are," Bob said. He tried to be diplomatic but didn't pull it off too well. "However, according to the report, your mental health issues go way back."

"I know. But I've been getting treatment and doing well, until..." She stopped and looked down at her feet.

Bob waited. When she didn't continue, he asked, "Were you trying to end your life when you took the pills?"

"I don't know." Carla hesitated. "I guess. I just felt like I wanted to go to sleep and never wake up again."

"You understand that puts your daughter at risk?"

"I know, but I'll get the help I need. I just have to make the monsters go away. I don't want them to get Liberty either."

*Oh boy.* "What do you mean by monsters?"

"They're big furry things, and they come mostly at night."

"What do they do?" Bob didn't know if she was serious, so he watched her facial expressions carefully.

"They hover over my bed and tell me I can't escape."

"So, they talk to you?"

"Sometimes. Mostly, they just hang around. I try to get away, but I can't."

"Do they physically stop you?"

"It's like they form a wall and I'm afraid to go through them." Without changing her expression, she said, "But that's not why we're here. What happens today?"

Bob explained the court procedure to her, then said, "I see that Liberty is in foster care. Do you have any family who could take your daughter until we can get her back?"

"I have an older sister who I know would take her, but she's in Africa on a safari right now."

"No other family, parents, grandparents?"

"My father died of a heart attack when I was seven. My grandparents and my little sister were killed in a car accident years ago."

“Is that when you were hospitalized before?”

“Yes. I had a breakdown. I was in twice. Three times, counting the most recent one.”

“Where is Liberty’s father?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you *know* who the father is?”

Carla whipped her head around with a look of indignation. “Of course, I do.”

“I didn’t mean to offend you. But according to the report, the birth certificate reads *Unknown* for the father.”

“I didn’t want him involved. He loved me, but then he was gone, and I didn’t want to force him back. And I didn’t want him to take her from me.”

“Do you think he would do that?”

“He might. Don’t get me wrong. He’s a really good guy, and he’d make a great father.”

She looked Bob directly in the eyes for the first time. “Can they force me to say who the father is?”

“No. But if they think you know, they’ll keep asking. Depending on how your case goes, you may decide that Liberty is better with her father than in a foster home. That is, until we can get her back to you. This case could take some time.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Carla, have you been given any meds for the monsters?”

“Yeah. But they won’t take them.”

It sounded like a joke, but she looked serious, so Bob kept a straight face.