

The waiting room where the MPD had stowed me wasn't a room so much as an offshoot of a long linoleum hallway. A couple of wobbly chairs had been placed around the corner and out of the main flow of traffic.

Vincent had been escorted deeper in the bowels of the MPD building. I knew where he was, knew how to get to him, but I was relegated to the waiting room.

The waiting cubby hole.

I slouched in my chair and tried my best to relax into the posture. It wasn't working, but I tried. Mark's freedom—and possibly his life—was on the line, and I was stuck in a hallway, twiddling my thumbs and feeling utterly useless.

The sound of high heels tapping briskly down the hallway drew my attention. The clack of heels stopped abruptly, and a female voice echoed along the expanse of linoleum. "What in the name of all that is holy was that?"

I sat bolt upright, all hope of attaining Zen-like calm vanishing as the woman's chilly tone sliced through my bones.

I knew who it was without having to peek around the corner: Kay Lanyon, prosecuting attorney. She was a dirty, dirty, dirty public official and the woman who had been out to get me ever since my evidence theft came to light. Yes, back in the day, I'd stolen a small scrap of evidence in order to keep my sister Tricia's rape case from growing cold. It was technically illegal, but it worked. The man who had attacked my sister was arrested and currently serving his sentence in prison.

Unfortunately, justice for Tricia came at a high cost. I lost my job at the Georgia Department of Insurance and my law enforcement certification, making me totally unemployable as a police officer in the state. Worse, once I'd gained the reputation as someone who would

tamper with evidence, numerous criminals I'd arrested used that one action to create reasonable doubt about their own arrests. As a result, some dangerous fraudsters ended up going free.

And Prosecutor Kay Lanyon was pissed about it. Not only was she bitter that I did not serve jail time for my crime, but she was enraged that the fallout tainted her own conviction record.

Bitter wasn't really an adequate word. She hated me with the heat of a thousand suns.

Lanyon didn't care that I'd lost my job and my reputation. Not to mention a sizable chunk of money in legal fees. She intended to make me pay, no matter what. And so far, she'd done a bang-up job. She'd used corrupt GBI agents and a shady local judge to perform a search of my home. She had discovered a file of information about Ted Insley, my former boss, and she'd fully intended to pin his murder on me.

Only I didn't kill him. And I had evidence to prove it. Evidence that she couldn't make disappear.

Not that the truth mattered to her. She seemed intent to convict me of *any* crime with a lengthy prison sentence, whether or not I was guilty of it.

Ditto for Mark.

Of course, Lanyon was involved in Mark's current situation.

The witch.

I could just picture her in her little pencil skirt, stiletto heels, and a set of devil horns.

"It was the lineup *you* requested," a male voice responded. His tone was softer, but there was anger behind it just the same.

Lanyon made a sound somewhere between a growl and a hiss and then said, "*That* isn't what I requested."

“Every witness identified Mark Vincent as the shooter,” the male said, his tone defensive. “That’s what you wanted.”

“I wanted IDs I could use in court,” Lanyon said in a tight voice. “A lineup has to be believable to be admissible in the courtroom. The stand-ins you provided made Vincent an obvious choice. Hell, people who weren’t even in the restaurant would have picked him out of that lineup.”

I couldn’t make out the male’s response, and then Lanyon continued. “That will never make it out of a suppression hearing.”

“Sure it will,” the male said. “The judge will push it through.”

The man, whoever he was, was probably referring to Judge Hutchinson, the same corrupt justice who signed Lanyon’s search warrant for my house.

“To what end?” Lanyon demanded. Her tone had transformed from irritated to pedantic. She spoke as if talking to a small child as she explained the situation. “Pushing a flawed lineup through trial will leave us open to a future appeal in a higher court. A higher court with a *less friendly* judge. We can’t afford the risk, not when legitimate evidence is out there.”

Legitimate evidence?

I suppressed a bark of laughter at that. There was no *legitimate* evidence to prove that Mark Vincent shot Samuel Oliver. But she said it with such conviction. If anyone else had heard that last sentence, they might believe that the prosecutor wanted to put a legitimately dangerous person behind bars. They might think that Lanyon believed her own words: Mark was a violent predator and a corrupt officer.

But I knew better.

Kay Lanyon was as corrupt as they come. She was working the system.

There was a pause and then the sound of Lanyon's heels approached my waiting area. I squashed back into my chair, hoping she wouldn't turn her head and notice me when she passed by. Not that I could really hide. But still, this was not the kind of conversation you wanted to be caught eavesdropping on.

"The lineup was a formality." The male's voice boomed down the hallway. Lanyon's steps slowed and then stopped. "Vincent is a dirty cop, you know that."

I heard Lanyon's heels clatter back down the linoleum toward the man she was talking to.

"If we're going to make a case against Mark Vincent," she hissed at him. "Then it has to be solid. It's not what you know. And we know he's a violent, dirty cop. It's what you can *prove*. I can't prove anything with that ridiculous lineup. The evidence you come up with has to be solid."

My fingers curled around the sides of my seat. The edges of the plastic chair dug into my flesh. Why wasn't someone with me to corroborate this exchange? Kay Lanyon had basically just admitted to fabricating evidence against Mark.

The irony of her admission had me shaking my head.

Not so long ago, Lanyon accused me of fabricating evidence against fraudsters, and here she was committing the very same crime. Projection, anyone?

Obviously Lanyon was willing to fabricate evidence against innocent people, so she likely assumed that other people—meaning me—would be willing to do the same.

"You're overreacting," the male said. "People's opinions can be swayed. Juries can be convinced. You don't need a smoking gun."

"Even the most delusional juror wouldn't buy that line—"

A door opened somewhere along the hallway, and Lanyon's voice clipped into silence.

Another set of footsteps marched in my direction, slowing to a stop long before they reached me.

“Lanyon, Special Agent Fowler,” the newcomer said, identifying the male speaker as Agent Fowler of the GBI.

I nearly stood up and did a happy dance right there. Helena St. John, my best friend and US attorney, had just entered into the discussion.

“You two ought to be ashamed of yourselves,” Helena said, her tone hard and sharp as an ax blade. “Especially you. I always respected you as a prosecutor, but you need to reevaluate your beliefs in light of the evidence.”