

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

by
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CHAPTER ONE

Other people's emergencies were Brett Logan's bread and butter. Her buzzing BlackBerry signaled business was booming. *I have a legal emergency. Can you call me? Now. 911.*

"Ms. Logan, your case is next. Is your client on bond?"

Brett looked up from the tiny screen and stood. "No, Judge. He's in the holdover." She glanced once more at the e-mail message on her phone and then shoved the pesky device in her bag. Everyone who called her had an emergency. She'd return the call as soon as she finished with her current slate of crises.

Nodding to the bailiff, Brett set her bag and purse on a chair just inside the rail before making her way to stand in front of the bench. As she waited for her client to join her, she focused on drowning out the hum of activity around her. On a given morning, there were likely to be at least a dozen cases on the court's plea docket, which meant at least a dozen attorneys and clients along with a random assortment of friends, family members, and witnesses lining the rows of the gallery. All these parties conferred with each other in their various interpretations of whispers. The result was controlled commotion that courtroom veterans had learned to ignore.

Once the bailiff positioned her client beside her, Brett placed her hand on his arm. Everett Marshall was a tall, lanky, young black man, charged with two counts of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, crack cocaine. As the judge reviewed the plea

paperwork in the file, Brett leaned over and whispered in Everett's ear. In response, he turned and gazed at the rows in the gallery, finally locking eyes with the members of his family who were there to support him.

"They're all here. You told them?" he asked.

"Of course," Brett replied. "They all wanted to be here to support you."

He nodded. Brett recognized his appreciation even in the minimal response. Up until moments ago, Everett's fate had been uncertain. He was charged with two second degree felony drug possession cases with a punishment range of two to twenty years each in the Texas Department of Corrections. Everett's first brush with the law was significant, and the prosecutor had been unsympathetic to the fact he was a first time offender. In his view, based on the quantity of drugs at issue, Everett was a drug dealer, and the best disposition was to put him away where he could do no more harm. Brett had spent all her energy finding evidence to support her contention that Everett had been drawn into his situation out of a desperate need to make money to care for his sick mother and feed and clothe his children. Along the way, he had become addicted to the currency of his drug dealing occupation. The only chance he had of breaking free was rehabilitation, not punishment. Unable to convince the prosecutor to offer anything less than ten years in the state penitentiary, she had set the case for an open plea. Everett would plead guilty, and Brett would present evidence to convince the judge to take a chance on giving her client probation with drug treatment so he could get his life back.

When Brett showed up this morning with Everett's family, friends, and employer in tow, she had a renewed discussion with the prosecutor. They reached a compromise. Everett would serve three months in the county jail and then be sent to a county-operated drug treatment facility. If he completed the drug treatment program successfully, he would be placed on probation for five years. She had explained the risk to Everett. If he messed up on even the smallest condition of his probation, he could be brought back to court and sentenced to serve anywhere up to the full twenty years. He said he

understood. She hoped he did. She had long since given up trying to distinguish between clients who told her what she wanted to hear in order to move things along and those who were sincere about their commitments.

Since the terms of the plea were now agreed, the proceeding was practically rote. When the judge pronounced the sentence, Brett shook Everett's hand and wished him good luck. She gathered all the family members in the hallway and gave them an overview of how the case would proceed from that point. They had a lot of questions, many of which Brett had to answer with maybes since Everett's future was largely dependent on how he conducted himself once he got out. The Q and A ran long.

When she finally broke free, she remembered the message on her phone. She forwarded the e-mail to her assistant with a short note asking him to get whatever information he could. Crisis well in hand, she dashed off to another courtroom down the hall, completely focused on her next case of the morning.



“I hope you had a good reason for agreeing to probation for that guy.” Ryan Foster made a habit of challenging the prosecutors in her division. Her philosophy was simple. If they knew they would have to answer for their decisions, they were more likely to make good ones.

The young prosecutor shrugged. Ryan imagined he was suffering under the false impression that his recent promotion to chief prosecutor in the 319th District Court would eliminate the need to explain his every action. After all, he was in charge of managing two other prosecutors and a heavy court docket. He probably believed he should be accorded a little deference in the way he chose to dispose of cases. Ryan hoped her strong stare would dispel him of any notion he was no longer accountable to her.

“Yes, I did. It's his first offense. He has lots of family support. His employer is holding his job, and he has a significant, but treatable drug problem.”

“So you slap him with candy-ass jail time and feel-good drug treatment. Wow, Bill, you really taught him a lesson.” Ryan paused, then swiftly changed her tone from sarcastic to sweet. “Maybe the defense attorney offered you a little something more than her persuasive legal arguments. Is that right?”

Ryan knew Bill hadn’t worked under her long enough to tell if she was ragging on him in earnest or just trying to get a rise out of him. His harsh stare told her she had really pissed him off. *Hell, admit it to yourself. You wouldn’t oppose an offer of special consideration from Ms. Logan.* Ryan struggled to control her features lest anything in her demeanor disclose she was projecting when she accused Bill of finding defense counsel particularly attractive. Brett Logan. Ryan knew who she was, but they had never directly crossed paths. Ryan only knew her name and her reputation as a fearless litigator. Prosecutors under Ryan’s command with shit cases to try regularly sought permission to cave to Ms. Logan’s mastery of the game of chicken. Brett had held out on this case, which would have been a total loser for her client, until she got a deal he could live with. Ryan was hard-pressed to admit it, but she admired Brett Logan’s steel resolve. She admired her legs and her ass too, but those details she would keep to herself. Bill’s voice cut into her thoughts.

“It’s not weakness to give someone a chance to prove himself. I’ll be watching this case. Everett Marshall makes one tiny screw-up, and I’ll be in court asking for the max. You can count on that.”

Ryan smiled. “Fair enough. Good job, Bill.” She knew without looking he was probably shaking his head as she walked away.



As Brett waited in a long line to speak to a prosecutor about a pending case, she felt the insistent vibration of her BlackBerry again. She noted her office number on the display and stepped out of the DA workroom to take the call.

“Yes?”

“Brett, are you on your way back to the office?”

Recognizing the impatient tone of her assistant/paralegal/office manager, Anthony Panetta, Brett smiled. “Not quite, Tony. I have to make one more stop. What’s up?”

“Well, Mrs. Jarvis is sitting here waiting. She brought cash. Whatever good will you’re spreading around down there can wait until after you sign up this paying client, don’t you think?”

Brett relied on Tony to run her business. He did a great job of keeping her on track, but he would never completely grasp her need to give each case her complete, undivided attention, no matter how much she was being paid. If Tony had his way, she wouldn’t take court-appointed cases like Everett Marshall’s. Unlike many attorneys, Brett spent as much time on these cases, which paid pennies on the dollar, as she did on her retained cases. She carried a heavy docket of court-appointed cases because she felt it was important to the process for everyone to have the best representation possible—no matter how much money they could afford to pay.

Tony interrupted her thoughts. “Oh, that e-mail you got? The guy wants you to call him. Only you. He wouldn’t give me any hints. Promise you’ll call him as soon as you get here. Maybe he has money too.”

Brett silently chided herself for not responding to the message herself. “Will you call him back and set up a meeting? I’ll make myself available for any time they want to meet this afternoon. And I swear I’ll be there to win over Mrs. Jarvis in about thirty minutes. Okay?”

Tony’s pronounced sigh conveyed his resignation to the fact he had no control over the situation. “Okay.”

Brett stepped back into the district attorney’s workroom. She was dismayed to see it was still crowded with lawyers jockeying for the attention of the prosecutors assigned to this particular court. Each of the twelve district courts located in the Dallas County courthouse contained one of these tiny offices located to the rear of each of courtroom. Though each prosecutor had an office on the eleventh floor of the building, these workrooms served as a war room of sorts from which they ran their morning docket. Two small desks, home to the number two and three prosecutors in the

court, lined the walls of the outer section of the office. The only distinguishing characteristic between their work area and the closet-like space accorded to the court's chief prosecutor was the presence of a door. The delay this morning was due in part to the fact that the chief prosecutor in this court, Jeff Oates, was huddled in his office with his boss, Ryan Foster.

Brett, like most everyone at the courthouse, knew who Ryan Foster was, by reputation if not personal acquaintance. Ryan was a career prosecutor. Anyone who had worked in and around Dallas County was familiar with the law and order approach of the formidable woman. Brett hadn't had any direct contact with her, but she still felt her influence. It was definitely harder to work out deals with the prosecutors in the courts under Ryan's direction. She had a tendency to be more hands-on than her counterparts, which translated into according less discretion to the prosecutors she supervised.

She even looks like a hard-ass. Ryan's blond hair was pulled back into a perfect French braid and her charcoal gray silk suit was perfectly pressed. Brett looked down at her own wrinkled suit and inwardly cursed at her inability to make it through an hour at the courthouse without looking as though she had slept in her clothes. Instinctively, she knew her hair was poking out from her head in a million different directions. She shook her head in wonder of Ryan's tight braid.

As Brett looked closer, she wondered if Ryan's fierce look was a bit contrived. Her eyes were an inviting shade of bluish gray, quick and alert, and the sharp lines of her suit didn't completely conceal feminine curves. Ryan's voice was commanding, but her tone was probably an integral part of her identity as a top dog at the DA's office. Brett wondered what she sounded like at dinner with friends, whether she ever let her guard down. *I'd like to find out.*

Her thoughts were interrupted on dual fronts. Ryan's commanding tone grew in volume as her conversation with Jeff became heated, and, further interfering with her ability to adequately eavesdrop, Brett's BlackBerry started jumping around in her purse. Cursing technology, Brett fished the beast out of her bag and read the display. Tony's growing impatience was clear: *I hope you are*

pulling into the parking lot. I can only restrain Mrs. Jarvis for so long! Brett looked once again at the line of attorneys in front of her, all now actively listening in on Ryan's discourse, and she decided to abandon this quest for the money-in-the-bank case waiting at her office.



"I know you're the chief, but this an important case. My personal involvement will demonstrate how seriously this office takes this case."

"Ryan, I've worked for months preparing for this trial."

Ryan knew he was right. She also knew how much she would have resented this intrusion were the roles reversed. Jeff Oates was an excellent prosecutor. He wasn't showy, but he worked hard and juries liked him. He had earned his position as chief in this court, and his position gave him the privilege of picking the best cases for himself. Ryan's announcement that she was taking over as lead attorney on the Edwards case was a blow to his authority.

Ryan flashed back to a similar conversation she'd had with her boss, the elected district attorney, earlier in the week.

"If I were him, I'd consider quitting. He's worked on this case for months and I'm supposed to walk in there and rip it out from under him?"

"Ryan, you need to get your name in the news. Unfortunately, your current position has left you with a low profile. Make a splashy headline, and the press will cover the front page with stories about this case and all your past victories. All that free press will bring the donations rolling in. Take the Edwards case. It's juicy, and the trial will last for days."

"Sir, it wasn't that long ago I had my own court. I remember what it's like to be in charge and then have someone from upstairs come yank it out from under you."

He ignored the implication. "Don't 'sir' me. If you want my job, you have to trust me."

His words were tough, but Ryan knew he sincerely cared about her future and the future of this office. Ryan did want his job. She wanted it more than anything. Leonard Duncan had already announced his plans to retire at the end of his term, and rumors were circulating as to who he would anoint as his successor. Ryan knew she was his choice. She was chomping at the bit to become the first woman elected District Attorney of Dallas County, but she hated inserting herself into a case, especially when it was a blatant grab at publicity. Ryan briefly considered telling Jeff the decision to make her lead on the case was Duncan's, but she decided hiding behind her boss would make her look weak.

"Jeff, you've done a great job on this case. I wouldn't want to try the case without you." Ryan knew he would click to the implicit threat. "I'm sure we'll make a great team, and I look forward to working closely with you on this case." Ryan forced a smile, turned, and marched out of the still packed workroom. She barely made it out of the room before Jeff muttered "bitch" for everyone in the waiting crowd to hear.