

April 24, 2023, County Courthouse

The killer is sitting in this courtroom and it's up to me to prove it.

It isn't every day a murder this sensational happens in Milwaukee. Sure, we've had our share of drive-by shootings, domestic arguments that escalated, home invasions that turned deadly. And yes, there was that lurid trial a while back where the deranged sicko drugged, then ate his victims. That one landed our city in the national spotlight. A once in a lifetime case.

But this one's right up there. Everyone involved is high profile. Which means it warrants the top guns. Which means my boss of nine years, Marcus Huntley, Deputy DA, is sitting first chair. I catch his eye and his expression confirms what I already know. This is the most important case of my career, and if the verdict goes south, any hope for that promotion goes right along with it.

But this isn't only about winning for me. There's a lot more at stake. Consequences I don't dare think about or I'll lose my nerve. Because even though the police are convinced this is an open and shut case, I know better.

I know they've arrested the wrong person.

Because I witnessed the murder. But for reasons I can't reveal, I have to keep quiet. Only two people know the whole story and I've sworn them to secrecy.

I watch the crowd. Examine every person in detail. Who's talking to whom, who's staring at their lap, who's looking around the room. Who's fidgeting, adjusting their tie, or rummaging

through their purse. Who looks bored and who looks agitated? But even though I'm an expert in spotting a tell, I'm coming up empty.

The electricity in the air ratchets up as the judge enters and the bailiff calls the case. I've been up most of the night, pacing the floor, rehearsing my lines, imagining how today would go. What to say and what not to say. What needs to happen so I can walk out of here satisfied.

Part of me wants to scream. Part of me wants to whimper. Part of me wants to rush out the door and never look back.

But I don't do any of those things. Instead I steel my nerves and set aside the theatrics. A bead of sweat slithers down my spine as I stand to address the judge.

In an orange jumpsuit. And handcuffs.

"Rachel Elizabeth Matthews. You stand accused of first-degree intentional homicide.

How do you plead?"

"Not guilty, Your Honor," I reply.