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THE THIRD KEY

Lead Focused / Courtroom / 6 min
Cast 5 Female x2 Male x2 Any x1

Defense attorney Margot Vance has one witness left to cross-examine. He is calm, well liked, and swears only two keys to the safe ever existed. Margot has a locksmith's invoice and one afternoon to make it count.

CHARACTERS

MARGOT VANCE (LEAD) - 50s, defense attorney, patient, precise, never raises her voice until it matters.

HOLLIS - 40s to 50s, the witness, a branch manager, composed and well rehearsed.

DRAKE - 30s to 40s, the prosecutor, sharp but a step behind.

JUDGE - 50s to 60s, any gender, dry, running out of afternoon.

TESSA REYES - 20s to 30s, the defendant, Margot's client, barely holding together.

SETTING

A county courtroom late on the second afternoon of a theft trial.

A courtroom. Late afternoon. The JUDGE presides. HOLLIS sits on the witness stand, composed. DRAKE, the prosecutor, is seated. TESSA, the defendant, sits at the defense table. MARGOT rises, a single sheet of paper in her hand.

JUDGE

Ms. Vance. Your witness.

MARGOT

Thank you, Your Honor.

(to HOLLIS)

Mr. Hollis. You've been the manager at the Ridgeway branch for how long?

HOLLIS

Eleven years.

MARGOT

And in eleven years, how many keys to the back office safe have existed?

HOLLIS

Two. Mine and the assistant manager's.

MARGOT

The assistant manager being my client. Ms. Reyes.

HOLLIS

Yes.

MARGOT

And you told this court yesterday that on the night of the fourteenth, your key was at home. On a hook. By your door.

HOLLIS

That's right.

MARGOT

Which leaves one key.

HOLLIS

Hers.

MARGOT

Hers.

MARGOT walks slowly toward the jury box, then turns.

MARGOT

Mr. Hollis, do you have a locksmith?

DRAKE

Objection. Relevance.

MARGOT

I'll get there quickly, Your Honor.

JUDGE

Get there quicker than that, Ms. Vance.

MARGOT

Yes, Your Honor.

(to HOLLIS)

Do you have a locksmith?

HOLLIS

I... everyone has a locksmith. Somewhere.

MARGOT

Do you have one on Cutler Street? Named Bram's?

HOLLIS

I've used them.

MARGOT

When?

HOLLIS

I don't remember.

MARGOT

Would the seventh of the month help you remember? A week before the safe was opened?

TESSA leans forward. MARGOT does not look at her.

HOLLIS

I may have had a house key cut.

MARGOT

A house key.

HOLLIS

Yes.

MARGOT

Mr. Hollis, I'm holding an invoice from Bram's Lock and Key dated the seventh. I'm going to hand it to you. I'd like you to read the line marked 'item.'

DRAKE

Your Honor, we haven't seen this.

MARGOT

It was disclosed Friday. It's in the supplemental exhibits. Tab nine. Counsel may not have reached tab nine.

JUDGE
(dry)

Mr. Drake?

DRAKE
(*checking*)

Withdrawn.

JUDGE
Read the line, Mr. Hollis.

HOLLIS takes the paper. He reads. He takes a long time.

HOLLIS
'High security duplicate. Restricted blank.'

MARGOT
Restricted blank. Now, in your eleven years, what kind of key in that building uses a restricted blank?

HOLLIS
(*quiet*)
The safe.

MARGOT
I'm sorry?

HOLLIS
The safe.

MARGOT
So on the seventh, you had a copy made of a key that you told this court had only ever existed twice.

HOLLIS
I was worried about losing mine. It was a precaution.

MARGOT
A precaution. And where is that precaution now?

HOLLIS
At home.

MARGOT
On the hook. By the door.

HOLLIS

Yes.

MARGOT

With the other one.

HOLLIS

Yes.

MARGOT steps back to the defense table. TESSA whispers something. MARGOT shakes her head once, very slightly, and turns back.

MARGOT

Mr. Hollis, I'm going to ask you something, and I want you to think before you answer, because you're under oath and you've been under oath for two days.

(beat)

Which pocket is it in?

DRAKE

Objection!

JUDGE

Ms. Vance...

MARGOT

Your Honor, this witness has told the jury that the only key to that safe was in my client's hand. If there's a third key, the case rests on where it is. I'm asking where it is.

JUDGE

He answered. He said it's at home.

MARGOT

Then he'll have no trouble emptying his pockets. It takes ten seconds. If I'm wrong, I'll sit down, and I'll apologize to Mr. Hollis in front of everyone here.

A long pause. The JUDGE looks at HOLLIS. HOLLIS does not move.

JUDGE

Mr. Hollis. It's not an order. But it would be a very short answer.

HOLLIS reaches slowly into his jacket. His hand stops.

MARGOT

(gently now)

Mr. Hollis. You've carried it every day since the seventh. You couldn't leave it at home. Because if anyone found it at home, that would be the end of you. So it's on you. Right now. It's been on you the whole time you were telling this jury about her.

(a beat)

Put it on the rail.

HOLLIS takes out a small brass key. He sets it on the rail of the witness stand. It makes a tiny sound. Nobody speaks.

MARGOT

(to the JUDGE)

Nothing further.

She sits. TESSA is crying. MARGOT puts one hand flat on the table between them and looks straight ahead.

END OF SCRIPT