

Prologue: Eighteen Months Earlier

More surprising than spinning out of control, than smashing through the railing, than tumbling trunk-over-hood down the hillside; more surprising even than the sheet metal buckling around her, was that she was dying in English. The woman tried to die in Russian, then in Ukrainian, but the words had forsaken her. Even her given name had fled into the swirling dust at the bottom of the ravine. She remembered only what others called her: Katie.

Katie grieved the loss of the inner voice of her childhood, as she knew would her parents, then comforted herself with the knowledge that they'd never find out. The police officers standing with an interpreter at their apartment door would say she died on impact, sparing them the horror that their only child suffered any final thoughts at all.

In truth, she felt no horror. Nor panic. Nor dread. There was just the rush of wind in the eucalyptus, as if an overture to the passing of her life before her eyes. But her mind drifted not into the past, but to another place in her present: her SatTek co-workers gathering a mile away, under Coastal Redwoods surrounded by acres of spring grass. She wondered whether they would miss her, backtrack along the twisting road when she didn't answer her cell phone, or notice the broken

railing as they drove home sunburned and bleary-eyed, then scramble down the hillside to find her body. She wished she could freshen her makeup and comb her hair, just in case.

Katie inspected the red soil blanketing the gray vinyl interior, then looked through her burst side window at dust dancing and gliding in a beam of morning sunlight. She heard the rustling of tiny feet in dry leaves. Perhaps a rabbit, a gray squirrel, or a finch returning to its work, pecking at wildflower seeds scattered by the three-thousand pounds of steel and glass that had thrashed the hillside.

A warm gust churned the air. She smelled her mother's kitchen in the bay leaves sweating in the overhanging branches and in the sage and fennel crushed by her car. She then saw herself at the dining table a month earlier, hunched over her laptop, heart pounding, typing a San Francisco address, and then later, hands shaking as she slid a letter into the corner mailbox.

Dear Mr. Special Agent in Charge:

The President of Surveillance and Targeting Technologies of San Jose, California is engaged in a massive—

Which of them knew? Which of those she saw in her mind's eye just a mile away, starting charcoal, setting up volleyball nets, pinning down the corners of tablecloths with ketchup and mustard bottles. Those men tossing footballs and glancing over at the women in little outfits they'd never worn to the office. The women trying not to giggle at white nerd-legs stuck into brown socks and clearance-rack Nikes or stare too long at the Cancun-bronzed chests of the men from the loading dock.

Which of them knew? A chill vibrated through her body. Which of them knew that she knew?

The lenses of her eyes changed focus from the thistles and nettles beyond the fractured

windshield to the pale green Tupperware laying upside-down on the dashboard, her potato salad still sealed inside. Wasted. Even back home in Lugansk among the collapsed coal mines, even in the worst of times, no one wiped off blood to eat the food of the dead. It would be--*What did Father Roman say?--It would be like eating the bread of the Eucharist without the Sacrament.*

Katie closed her eyes, her shallow breath once again infused with bay and sage and fennel—then a wrenching vertigo, as if she'd been tossed from a sailboat twisting in a hurricane. *My name . . . I need . . . to know . . . my name.*

She wanted to smile when it finally reached out to her from the whirlwind . . . *Ekaterina.*
But there wasn't time.

Chapter 1

“Come on buddy, don’t die on me. Don’t you dare die on me.”

The rain-slickered EMT pressed hard on the side-by-side bullet holes in the fifty-year old jogger’s sternum while a paramedic slipped an oxygen mask over the man’s nose and mouth. The runner was splayed out on a pre-dawn sidewalk fronting ten-million dollar mansions in San Francisco’s Pacific Heights.

“Come on man. Hang in there. You’re gonna make it. You’re gonna make it. You just gotta help me.”

“One, two, three, lift,” and the victim was moved from the wet concrete to the collapsible gurney. “One, two, three, lift,” and the gurney was raised and rolled toward the Fire Department ambulance.

“Any ID?” a beat-weary patrol officer asked as the gurney slid into the back.

“Nothing. Just this hanging around his neck.” The EMT tossed over a silver chain and house key. “Sorry, I couldn’t get his name.”

The cop rotated the key between his fingers and inspected it under the street light as if

puzzled by how a jagged sliver of metal could imprison him on duty long after his shift. He shook his head slowly, then looked up. “Am I supposed to try this thing in every fucking door in San Francisco?”

“Just do your job,” the EMT mumbled as he ran toward the cab. “Just do your job.”

* * * *

Private investigator Graham Gage lowered the barbell onto its crutches, then grabbed his ringing cell phone from the carpeted floor of his basement gym.

“Graham, it’s Spike.”

“Can’t be.” The wall clock read 5:37. “The only Spike I know is still lying in bed dreaming about bass fishing.” Gage expected a clever response. He didn’t get one.

Spike’s voice held steady. “It’s about Jack Burch.”

Gage felt his heart twist in his chest. He pushed himself up from the weight bench, then braced the phone against his shoulder and ripped off his lifting gloves. Spike was the Lieutenant in charge of SFPD Homicide.

“How bad is it?” Gage asked, heading toward the stairs to the main floor.

“I don’t know. It just came in.”

“Where’s he now?”

“Hold on . . . 3E44 . . . What’s your 1020?”

Gage took the steps two at a time. He caught a jumble of voices and static as the officer answered.

“They’re just pulling into SF Medical,” Spike said.

A crack of thunder drew Gage's eyes toward a wall of windows in the living room of his Oakland post and beam house. He had expected to see the lights of San Francisco across the Bay, but a late-October alloy of fog and storm clouds sweeping in from the Pacific had enveloped the city. Even the oak branches that framed his view were webbed in gray, their resident birds mute, invisible, cowering against a squall advancing up the hillside.

"What happened?" Gage asked as he climbed toward his third floor bedroom.

"The uniforms on the scene are telling me it was road rage. Witnesses said he'd just started jogging from his house when a guy blew the stop sign at Webster and Pacific. Jack yelled something and the asshole did a u-turn, fired a couple of shots, then took off. A neighbor recognized Jack as they put him into the ambulance."

Gage knew his friend's morning route, knew the intersection. Animated stick figures re-enacted the shooting in his mind as if in a virtual re-creation. He fought off the image of an early morning downpour washing Jack Burch's blood into a leaf-clogged gutter.

"Anybody ID the shooter?" Gage asked.

"Nobody we've talked to yet, but chances are slim. The commute hadn't started and there weren't many runners and dog walkers out because of the weather."

"And the car?"

"Generic every which way, and nobody caught the plate."

Spike's radio crackled in the background. Gage heard him double-click the handset to confirm receipt of the message.

"What's that?" Gage asked.

"They asked me for his next of kin."

Gage froze at the top of the stairs, then caught his breath, steeling himself for the answer

before he asked the question. “Did he . . .”

“No. Sorry, man. It’s not that. They just wanted contact info.”

Gage exhaled. “Put me down until his wife gets there.”

“Where is she?”

“With Faith up at the cabin. I’ll call her on the way.”

In his bedroom, Gage slipped on a pair of Levi’s, then reached for a gray hooded sweatshirt, and slid it over his body like armor.