

Under the wind, snow needled Sarah Keller's face. She ran, slipping on leaves and mud. There was no path. The forest swelled around her, thick with fir and Ponderosa pine. In her arms, the baby stirred.

Sarah tugged the blanket around Zoe's tiny shoulders. "It's okay." She whispered it raggedly. "Shh."

Branches loomed in front of them, camellias flowering red. Shielding the baby, she pushed past. Her foot snagged on a root.

"No—"

She pitched to her knees and slid, cradling Zoe. "Dammit."

She caught herself. In the rush of wind, her voice would carry. *Christ.*

She struggled back to her feet. Zoe's face screwed up and her hands balled beneath her chin. Her little cotton watch cap had come askew. Sarah rearranged it.

"It's okay, it's okay, shh."

Mud from her hand streaked Zoe's cheek. The little thing opened her eyes, mewled, and turned away from the sting of the snow.

"Quiet, quiet." *Please.* She wiped Zoe's face. And stopped. Her palm had smeared the baby's cheek with blood.

She turned her hand. "Oh—"

She was cut, a long slash along her palm. For an instant it startled her, a raw gash, sharp and numb, before the pain grew thorns and stung.

She looked over her shoulder, past the grasping roots, up the trail she'd crashed through the forest. Beyond shivering branches the house sat still and dark in the strange, shadowless morning. Sarah blinked, from shock and pain and tears.

It looked unexceptional and hideously wrong. Doors shut, shades down: abandoned. Though her coat was pulled up to her ears, the cold bored through her. The house looked like its soul had been stolen.

She turned away from it and from everything in it. *Gone.* She, Zoe, everything—gone. Chest heaving, she plunged through the trees.

Her truck was a quarter-mile away, parked on a switchback. An instinct had warned her when she drove up the mountain earlier, an eerie undertone that sighed, *Don't pull in the driveway. Keep driving. Someone's there, watching.* This place was a backwoods idyll, secluded in the coastal mountains south of San Francisco. It was lonely and wild and studded with redwoods. California dreamin'. A waking nightmare.

And it was snowing. Goddamn snowing, ten miles from the beach. The wind drove flakes against the baby's face. She squirmed and let out another mewling cry. Sarah pulled the blanket up.

"Shh. I gotcha."

Six weeks old. Barely old enough to grasp Sarah's finger and smile. And now this.

Why? Why now? They'd just gotten home. They'd had a safe trip. They'd run the gauntlet and come out untouched. Everything was okay.

Except it wasn't. The hairs on the back of Sarah's neck prickled. She glanced back again. Screened by the pines, barely visible now, the house wore a wraith's face. Windows, its blank

eyes, watched her.

Veiled beneath the wind, another sound rose, a dark flow that seemed ready to take solid form. Shivering, she turned and aimed for the switchback.

The man appeared directly in front of her. He seemed to materialize from the gray recesses of the trees.

“Jesus.” She jerked to a halt, breathing hard, and pulled Zoe against her chest.

He moved silently into her path. He was dark-eyed and somber, his face raw from the wind. His voice was low.

“Don’t move.”

Her chest heaved. “You’re too late.”

Behind her rose a crackle. The ashen light of the woods flickered and turned orange. It burnished the snow and reflected in his eyes. The house was burning.

He stood between her and the truck. Zoe let out a tiny cry. Sarah backed up a step, trying not to look toward the switchback.

He raised his hand, gesturing *stop*. “Don’t.”

She shook her head. “I’m not staying here.”

With a glass chime, the windows of the house blew out. He tensed. Eyes on the distance, he reached inside his jacket and drew a semiautomatic pistol.

He held it as though it ended all arguments, as though it answered any question she could possibly ask. But the wind shook the trees and the snow blew harder. Around them ghosts seemed to rise. She held still. Because the forest was deep, and he wasn’t the only one carrying a gun.

2

Five years later: Present day

9:03 A.M. Outside the memorial, Sarah snapped a photo and slid her phone into her jeans pocket. On the cyclone fence, mementoes fluttered in the spring breeze. Photos, flowers, miniature flags. Teddy bears. She stood alone at the gates, but as long as she looked solemn she’d be taken for a tourist, not a threat.

Not a stalker, and never a thief.

The morning was warm, the sky porcelain blue. On Harvey Avenue, rush-hour traffic rolled downtown. Across the street, the vintage red Porsche was parked, locked, and unguarded. The driver had been gone eleven minutes. He hadn’t noticed Sarah. He flicked the remote and walked away, preoccupied, leaving the 911 sitting there like a 300-horsepower lollipop. She paced along the fence.

Fifty yards away, a group of schoolchildren clustered outside the entrance to the museum. They bounced and giggled while their teachers and parents shushed them through the doors.

Let ’em laugh, Sarah thought. The sound seemed to skip off the reflecting pool. Let it echo and fill this place with life.

She continued along the fence. She'd gone full rodeo this morning: low-slung jeans and a belt with a hefty silver buckle; a plaid work shirt knotted over a ribbed white tank; city-girl cowboy boots. It was straight from the Barrel Racer Calendar, and around here, this disguise worked better than a sniper's ghillie suit. Her brown hair hung halfway down her back in the warm sunshine.

A jogger ran by, earbuds leaking Muse. The man she was tracking, the driver of the Porsche, had disappeared into an apartment high-rise down the street.

She glanced again at her watch. How much longer? Maybe she'd miscalculated. Maybe they were playing Trivial Pursuit, or making insane love, or figuring out who had set them up and why.

A police car cruised past. The officer at the wheel glanced at her.

At the museum, the kids' silvery voices ebbed. In the resulting quiet the sunshine seemed to hum from the Field of Empty Chairs—168 of them, 19 smaller than the rest.

The pines stirred. Beyond them one corner of the Murrah Building had been left after demolition: concrete and twisted rebar, plaster charred black by the heat of the explosion. City skyscrapers looked out over the memorial park, a beautiful and heartbreaking view.

On the cyclone fence, key chains glinted. Beside them hung a pair of baby shoes. Sarah stopped. Tiny Mary Janes, dangling from the fence.

Sarah glanced again at the museum entrance. Zoe had a field trip this morning too. Her kindergarten class was climbing on the bus about now.

The last of the parent chaperones shooed kids through the doors. The woman laughed quietly, staring at her phone.

That phone probably had GPS turned on, and would broadcast the woman's position to all her social media accounts, so the planet could know exactly what time she and the kids would step onto the grounds of a terrorist atrocity. Sarah never activated her phone's GPS. She knew where she was: in the center of a block drenched with ghosts, in the middle of Oklahoma City, completely on her own.

OKC was a big city, the metro area more than a million people. Sarah had found that, with effort, she could remain comparatively anonymous. Nobody got suspicious if she protected her privacy. But the place was unpretentious. Folks were friendly. They tried to take care of each other. Perhaps because of what had happened in 1995, near the spot where she stood, when Timothy McVeigh parked his Ryder truck, lit the fuse, and walked away.

The baby shoes on the fence were black patent leather. She touched them and turned away from the morning sun.

The driver of the Porsche emerged from the apartment high-rise and stalked along the sidewalk toward his car.

His name was Derek Dryden. He was a physician, a fast car nut, and an adulterer. He rented his mistress an apartment in the Cadogan Towers, and if Sarah was playing things right this morning, he'd just had a flaming argument with her.

Dryden looked harassed. He glanced around, acting exactly like a man who didn't want to be spotted.

Showtime. Sarah checked traffic and crossed the street, heading in his direction.

Her Glock was in the pickup, secure in a stainless-steel lockbox. But in her messenger bag she had a spring-lock military knife. She didn't know Derek Dryden, and planned to take no chances. A stethoscope didn't guarantee he'd be nonviolent.

The sidewalk radiated heat. The street was prairie flat, with pale grass struggling to cover red dirt, studded with a few hardy oaks; a sun-drenched and exposed walk. She and Dryden were the only people on it.

Two things had given him away: a speeding ticket and his trash. Getting him here had taken a week of Sarah's time, two hundred miles of driving, and a few pairs of latex gloves. Now came the endgame. Dryden didn't know he was being played—she hoped. Because Dryden wasn't her target. His mistress was.

Kayla Pryce had the hard body of a workout freak. In photos, she looked as though she could crack a man between her thighs like a nut. And she had a heart of acid-eaten steel. She had worked for a children's hospital charity in Houston. When its bank account turned up empty, the charity's director of finance was charged with embezzlement. The day after the cops took him in, Kayla Pryce skipped town.

The finance director was about to stand trial. His attorney planned to defend him by putting the blame for the missing money where it truly lay: on Pryce. The defense had issued a subpoena compelling her to testify. She was ducking it.

Sarah intended to change that.

But the trial was only four days away. The defense attorney was scrambling. *Find Pryce*, he said. *We don't have much time left.*

The problem was, he didn't have much information either. Just Kayla Pryce's full name, her date of birth, and a rumor that she was in Oklahoma City.

Sarah's initial digging came up empty. No address, no phone number. A criminal background check turned up nothing. Pryce's car was registered in Texas and her credit report gave Houston as her last known address. She'd canceled her rental, canceled all utilities and her cell phone account, and blown town without a forwarding address.

People on the run, people attempting to hide, stayed out of the sunlight. Often they couldn't be seen directly. But they left shadows. And that's what Sarah traced.

Kayla Pryce was sly, but she was also careless. Like most twenty-first century Americans, she suckled at the cyber-teat and couldn't wean herself from social media. Instead of deleting her accounts, she changed her settings to Private. But that didn't block Sarah from seeing her Friends list. And those friends talked to her, and about her, and eventually one shared a photo Pryce had posted, for all the world to see.

It was a photo Pryce had snapped of herself—standing by the side of a rural highway, loitering while her date got a speeding ticket. It showed her Texas hair, gym-sculpted shoulders, and duck-lipped pout. It also showed a corner of the car: a vintage red Porsche. Plus a highway marker: U.S. 62 West. And the bottom portion of a sign: ELCOME TO KIO.

The tagline: SO CLOSE TO THE COUNTY LINE.

That was enough. It told Sarah the Porsche had been ticketed where Kiowa and Comanche counties met. And that sent her to the courthouse nearest to the line.

Most people didn't realize that speeding tickets were public records. It took her two hours, but she found it: the citation for a 1976 Porsche 911, clocked doing 93 mph. The ticket bore Derek Dryden's name and his address in Oklahoma City.

His house was a mock-Tudor mansion near the country club. When Sarah staked it out, she discovered that Dryden cheated on his wife but faithfully hauled the trash can to the curb every Wednesday night.

The trash can was where she grabbed the Hefty bag that contained a receipt for the wide-screen television Dryden had purchased—the one he'd had delivered to the Cadogan Towers.

Unfortunately, the receipt was torn. The apartment number was missing. Sarah had called the store, trying to get the apartment number. No luck. She called the front desk at the Cadogan Towers, pretending to be the store, and asked if the TV had been delivered to the correct apartment. Got no joy.

So this morning she had walked into the lobby of the apartment building, carrying two dozen red roses.

"Delivery from Moonflower for Kayla Pryce," she said.

The receptionist smiled. "Aren't those gorgeous?"

Sarah walked past her toward the elevators. "And it's apartment number . . ."

"You can leave them with me."

"That's okay. I can take them up—"

"I'll see that they're delivered."

She left them. Ten seconds later she was back on the sidewalk, walking toward the memorial. She'd hoped the flowers would get a reaction out of Kayla Pryce. She wanted them to bring Pryce down to the street, chasing her for information. After all, she had signed the card: *For my one, my only, my incredible Janelle. Love, Derek.*

But Pryce hadn't appeared, or phoned the number for Moonflower—which was a spoof number that would be forwarded to Sarah's phone. However, ten minutes after Sarah left the roses, the Porsche had pulled up and Dryden had gone into the apartment building. Now, thirteen minutes later, he was returning to the car. Alone.

Kayla Pryce was everything Sarah hated: a cheat, a leech, a thief. She was cunning, devious, and remorseless. Maybe Derek Dryden knew what she was. Maybe he didn't care to know. Either way, he wasn't Sarah's concern.

Sarah watched him stomp toward his car. He looked back once at the apartment tower.

Perfect. He feared that Pryce was watching him. He wouldn't do that unless her apartment faced the street.

Sarah put on her game face. She walked up to the Porsche. Slowing, she admired it a moment, then leaned against the hood. She crossed her feet and waited for him, as if she owned the thing. Or the guy driving it.

Dryden huffed up to her, annoyed. "What are you doing?"

"This machine is a work of art." She ran her hand along the car's flank as though stroking a thoroughbred. "It's a seventy-six, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Get off."

"I'll give you 10 percent above Bluebook for it."

"Not for sale."

"Cash. Or cashier's check. I can have the money for you in twenty minutes."

He neared, hands out, gesturing *shoo*. "What did I just say? Move."

"Fifteen percent over Bluebook. It's a beauty."

"Am I talking to a wall? Get your cowgirl ass off my car."

He was four feet away. Not yet within arm's reach but close enough to set her tingling with apprehension. He was six-two and looked fit, as if he worked the weights and maybe a heavy bag. He smelled strongly of cologne and sweat.

Steady. She stood up. "I represent a collector who will pay top dollar for vintage cars like this. Let me know what it will take. At least let me give you my card."

She reached toward him—suggestively, she hoped.

He brushed past her. "Forget it."

He got in and slammed the door. She went to the driver's window, leaned down, and put one hand against the glass, plaintively.

"If you change your mind . . ."

He fired up the engine, set his hand on the gearshift, and paused. His head flicked around. His gaze clouded.

Uh-oh.

He threw open the door. "Who the hell are you?"

"Whoa." She raised her hands and backed away. "Sorry, mister."

He got out and stepped toward her. "Did you send the flowers?"

She kept backing up. "What flowers?"

He reached for her arm. "What kind of bullshit game are you playing?"

She didn't need to feign alarm. She batted his hand aside. "Don't."

He stopped himself, seeming to realize he'd crossed a line. He jabbed a finger at her. "If I find out . . ."

"Forget it. Keep your car. I don't want it."

She continued to back down the street. His pointing finger hung in the air a second longer. He shook his head in seeming disgust, climbed in the Porsche, and screeched away. She stood in

the street, hands at her sides.

Well, that was fun.

On the sidewalk was a mailbox. She walked over, wound up, and kicked it. Reminded herself: *Showtime. This is why you wore the hard-toed cowboy boots.* She kicked it again. Wiped her nose with the back of her hand. Then she walked, slowly and in open view, to the coffee shop on the corner. She went in and slumped in a seat by the window.

Sarah was no game player. She was a hunter, a manipulator, a professional liar. She was a skip tracer. She looked out the window at the Cadogan Towers, waiting.