CHAPTER 1

Cindy Thomas was tuned in to her police scanner as she drove through the Friday-morning rush to her job at the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

For the last fifteen minutes there'd been nothing but routine calls back and forth between dispatch and patrol cars. Then something happened.

The Whistler TRX-1 scanner went crazy with static and cross talk. It was as though a main switch had been thrown wide open. Codes in the four hundreds jammed the channel. She knew them all: 406, officer needs emergency help; 408, send ambulance; 410, requested assistance responding.

Cindy was an investigative journalist, top dog on the crime beat. Her assistance was definitely not requested, but she was responding anyway. Tips didn't get hotter than ones that came right off the scanner.

The location of the reported shooting was a Taco King on Duboce Avenue. Cindy took a right off Otis Street and headed toward the Duboce Triangle, near the center of San Francisco between the Mission, the Castro, and the Lower Haight.

With the sirens from the patrol cars ahead and the ambulance wailing and honking from behind, she sure didn't need the street number. She pulled over to the side of the road, and once the emergency medical bus had passed her, she drafted behind it, pedal to the floor and never mind the speed limit.

The ambulance braked at the entrance to the Taco King at the intersection of Duboce Avenue and Guerrero Street. Cruisers had blocked off three lanes of the four-lane street, and uniformed officers were already detouring traffic. People were running away from the scene, screaming, terrified.

Cindy left her Honda at the curb and jogged a half block, reaching the Taco King in time to see two paramedics loading a stretcher into the back of the bus. She tried to get the attention of one of them, but he elbowed her out of his way.

"Step aside, miss."

Cindy watched through the open rear doors. The paramedic ripped open the victim's shirt, yelled, "Clear," and applied the paddles. The body jumped and then doors slammed and the ambulance tore off south on Guerrero, toward Metro Hospital.

Police tape had been stretched across three of the four lanes, keeping bystanders from entering the parking lot and the restaurant. At the tape stood a uniformed cop—Al Sawyer—a friend of Cindy's live-in love, homicide inspector Rich Conklin.

She walked up to Sawyer with her notebook in hand, greeted him, and said, "Al, what the hell happened here?"

"Oh, hey, Cindy. If you hang on, someone will come out and make an announcement to the press."

She growled at him.

He laughed.

“I heard you were a pit bull, but you don’t look the part.” She wore blond curls, with a rhinestone-studded clip to discipline them, and had determination in her big blue eyes. That was how she looked, no manipulation intended. Still.

“Al. Look. I’m only asking for what everyone inside and outside the Taco King saw and heard. Gotta be forty witnesses, right? Just confirm that and give me a detail or two, okay? I’ll write, ‘Anonymous police source told this reporter.’ Like that.”

“I’ll tell you this much,” Sawyer said. “A guy was shot through the windshield of that SUV over there.”

Sawyer pointed to a silver late-model Porsche Cayenne.

“His wife was sitting next to him. I heard she’s pregnant. She wasn’t hit and didn’t see the shooter. That’s unverified, Cindy. Wife’s inside the squad car that’s moving out of the lot over there. And now you owe me. Big time. Give me a minute to think so I don’t blow my three wishes.”

Cindy didn’t give him the minute, instead asking, “The victim’s name? Did *anyone* see the shooter?”

“You’re pushing it, Cindy.”

“Well. My pit-bull reputation is at stake.”

He grinned at her, then said, “Can you see the SUV?”

“I see it.”

“Take a picture of the SUV’s back window.”

“All right, Al, I sure will.”

Sawyer said, “Here’s your scoop: the victim is almost famous. If he dies, it’s going to be big news.”

CHAPTER 2

Sawyer shook HIS finger at Cindy, a friendly warning.

Cindy mouthed, “Thank you,” and before she could get chased away, she ducked the tape, got within fifty feet of the SUV’s rear window, and snapped the picture. She was back over the line, blowing up the shot, when Jeb McGowan appeared out of the crowd and sidled up to her. McGowan looked like a young genius with his slicked-back hair and cool glasses with two-tone frames. He played the part of journo elite, having worked crime in his last job at the *LA Sun Times*. He had a daily column— as she had— and had done some interviews on cable news after he reported on the Marina Slasher two years ago.

Back then McGowan had implied that San Francisco was small-time and provincial.

“Why are you here?” she’d asked. “My lady friend has family in Frisco. She needs to see them more. So whaddaya gonna do?”

Cindy had thought, *For starters, don’t call it Frisco*.

Now McGowan was in her face.

“Cindy. Hey.”

That was another thing. McGowan was pushy. Okay, the same had been said of her. But in Cindy’s opinion, McSmarty was no team player and would love to shove her under a speeding bus and snatch the top spot. Or maybe he’d just stick around, like gum under her shoe, and simply annoy her to death.

“Hiya, Jeb.”

She turned away, as if shielding her phone’s screen from the morning sun, but he kept talking.

“I had a few words with a customer before she fled. I have her name and good quotes about the mayhem after the shooting. Here’s an idea, Cindy. We should write this story together.”

“You’ve got the name of the victim?”

“I will have it.”

“I’ve already got my angle,” she said. “See you, Jeb.”

Cindy walked away from McGowan, and when she’d left him behind, she enlarged the image of the Porsche’s back window. A word had been finger-painted in the dust.

Was it *Rehearsal*?

She sucked in her breath and punched up the shot until *Rehearsal* was clear. It was a good image for the front page, and for a change, no friend of hers at the SFPD was saying, “That’s off the record.”

As she walked to her car, Cindy wondered, *Rehearsal for what*? Was it a teaser? Whatever the shooter’s motive for shooting the victim, he was signaling that there would be another shooting to come.

Cindy phoned Henry Tyler, the *Chronicle*’s publisher and editor in chief, and left him a message detailing that her anonymous source was a cop and she was still digging into the victim’s identity.

Back in her car, she listened to the police scanner, hoping to catch the name of the victim. And she called Rich to tell him what she’d just seen.

He might already know the victim’s name.

CHAPTER 3

Yuki Castellano locked her bag in her desk drawer, left her office, and headed to the elevator.

A San Francisco assistant district attorney, Yuki was prosecuting an eighteen-year-old high school dropout who’d had the bad luck to sign on as wheelman for an unidentified drug dealer.

Two months ago there’d been a routine traffic stop.

The vehicle in question had a busted turn-signal light and stolen plates. The cop who’d pulled over the vehicle was approaching on foot when the passenger got out of the offending vehicle and shot him.

The cop's partner returned fire, missed, and fired on the vehicle as it took off on Highway 1 South. The cop called for assistance and stayed with the dying man.

A few miles and a few minutes later the squad cars in pursuit forced the getaway car off the far-right lane and road-blocked it. The police found that the passenger had ditched, leaving the teenage driver, Clay Warren, and a sizable package of fentanyl inside the car.

The patrolman who'd been shot died at the scene.

Clay Warren was held on a number of charges. The drugs were valued at a million, as is, and impounded. Warren and the car were identified by the dead cop's partner, and Forensics had found hundreds of old and new prints in the vehicle, but none that matched to a known felon.

Bastard had worn gloves or never touched the dash, or this was his first job and he wasn't in the system.

Yuki doubted that.

So in lieu of the killer dealer, the wheelman was left holding the bag.

The DA was prosecuting Clay Warren for running drugs in a stolen car and acting as accomplice to murder of a police officer, but largely for being the patsy. Yuki had hoped that Warren would give up the missing dealer, but he hadn't done so and gave no sign that he would.

Using the inside of the stainless-steel elevator door as a mirror, she applied her lipstick and arranged her hair, then exited on the seventh floor and approached Sergeant Bubbleen Waters at the desk.

"Hi, B. I have a meeting with prisoner Clay Warren and his attorney."

"They're waiting for you, Yuki. Hang on a sec."

She picked up the desk phone, punched a button, and said, "Randall. Gate, please."

A guard appeared, metal doors clanked open, and locks shut behind them. The guard escorted Yuki to a small cinder-block room with a table and chairs, two of the chairs already occupied. Clay Warren wore a classic orange prison jumpsuit and silver cuffs. His attorney, Zac Jordan, had long hair and was wearing a pink polo shirt, a khaki blazer, jeans, and a gold stud in his left ear.

Zac gave Yuki a warm smile and stood to shake her hand with both of his.

"Good to see you, Yuki. Sorry to say, I'm not getting anywhere fast. Maybe Clay will listen to you."