

To the Captain of my soul,
Who plots my course,
And trims my sails.
Who keeps an endless watch,
In fair wind or tempest.
Who guides me home,
Under the power of His own breath.
My hope lies in you alone.

The Betrayal
Prologue
January 15, 1999

When it came to secret meetings, these two preferred their trysts on the San Francisco waterfront, believing that no secret remains better hidden than those left out in the open. This kind of camouflage worked best in the warm summer months, when tourism peaked and hordes of visitors jostled for space along the crowded sidewalks of Fisherman's Wharf. Then, the smells of seawater and hot dogs mingled in the light breeze and warm sunshine. Manic children climbed rails lining the sidewalks, calling to one another, skipping ahead of their parents, pointing and rushing from place to place along the waterfront. In the height of the tourist season, among crowds of people and children and activity, these two remained invisible, their presence inconsequential. Over the past five months, they'd counted on that.

In January, light crowds made it harder to remain inconspicuous; however, some emergencies demand flexibility.

On this day, dark clouds hung low over a granite harbor, and a cold wind sporting tiny speckles of rain cut through their clothes and burned their faces. They spoke quietly, their heads close together, as they leaned against a balcony railing, looking out over the bay. She wore boot cut designer jeans, clunky heels, and a three quarter length leather coat; he wore Levis, a jean jacket, and glasses with custom flip up shades. From a distance, they gave the appearance of lovers, deep in ordinary lovely conversation.

"Are you certain?" he hissed. His tone held intensity unlike the happy antics of the tourists around them. A stout gray headed woman moved quite near, propping her elbows on the rail to frame a picture of the bay. Suddenly, Cara Maria slipped one arm through his, kissed his cheek lightly, and began laughing as though at some hilarious joke. He turned, caught her in his arms, and held her close, listening at the same time for the click of the camera's shutter. They said nothing.

As the woman moved away, Cara whispered, "No one can be absolutely certain. But I trust my source."

"But you said no one would notice. Especially not the Feds."

"I can't predict everything. Who would have guessed?" She turned away from the banister, leaning back against it, bending one knee and raising her heel onto the lower rail. "My sources tell me that agents confronted him last week."

"Why?"

She noticed the pitch of his voice. Anxiety always gave it a tight, high edge. "Because they think that if anyone would have a tip, he would." She chuckled. "They said they came asking for his help. His expertise." She could not suppress the smile that rose to her lips. The irony of the agent's request had not been lost on her.

"What did he say?"

"My sources are good." She nodded and looked away. "But no one is that good. I didn't exactly tape the meeting."

"Does he know?" His face had lost its color; his eyes looked haunted.

"He couldn't possibly suspect." She moved away from the rail and glanced toward the crowd of tourists on the right. Hundreds of barking sea lions, lounging on floats near the dock, riveted the attention of nearby crowds. She started walking toward them, slipping her hands into her coat pockets.

"What now?" he asked, hurrying to catch her. His voice betrayed fear. He had much to lose; his face told her he believed they had begun sliding down the slippery slope toward losing it. Losing everything.

She stopped abruptly, tossed her hair away from her face, and turned to look at him. "Now we have to change our plans a bit."

"What do you mean?" He glanced up as two men frowned and stepped around them. Cara nodded in their direction and smiled suggestively. Then she turned back toward the bay and found an open spot on the rail.

He followed. Pinching the dark lenses from his eyeglasses, he dropped them into his chest pocket.

Still looking out over the bay, with Alcatraz in the distance, she continued. "We need to start our own surveillance."

His eyebrows rose. "Surveillance? How? How can we do that?"

"It won't be hard. I can handle it, easily." She stepped closer to him, slipping one arm around his waist. Giving a gentle hug she assured him, "I already have all the skills I'll ever need."

Chapter One
March 24, 1999
Tiburon, California

North of San Francisco

On the day the pictures arrived, Kate Langston jogged on Canyon Loop Road, down to Vista Del Mar, and then ran the last two miles along Richardson Bay at an easy lope. For years, ever since they'd bought the house in Tiburon, she had run this course from the other direction. But today a brisk westerly convinced her that running up the canyon with the wind at her back would make the climb to the top less taxing. This slight change in routine was Kate's only acquiescence to her forty ninth birthday now six months past. Still a compact size eight, Kate showed few signs of her age.

On this particular day, as Kate approached the house, palms resting on the back of her hips, dragging air into her lungs, it suddenly occurred to her that she had not yet picked up today's paper. She glanced longingly toward the house, paused, and with the back of one hand wiped away the cinnamon blond hair stuck to her sweaty face. In the process, she tasted her own salty moisture and grimaced. Other women "glistened" when they exercised. Kate dripped. Honest perspiration ran off her face, down her back, and even into the recesses of her running shorts. She really wanted a shower and a drink of water.

Instead of cutting across the lawn to the front door, she stayed on the road, slowed to a comfortable walk, and headed for the mailbox. Reaching into the paper tube, she began scanning the headlines as she turned back toward the drive. Then Kate remembered the mail.

Normally, Mike brought in the mail. Not that her husband always arrived home first, but it was their routine, the comfortable pattern Kate and Mike had adopted somewhere over the course of their twenty six year marriage a tradition left over from the days of babies and school schedules. Today, Kate had managed to escape from work early, the last photo shoot for the fall catalogue complete. She'd hurried along the thirty minute drive from the office to their bay view home, eager to make her daily run while it was still light out. Now that she'd finished the run, perhaps she should bring in the mail. Sighing, she turned back to the box. Her shower and a bottle of cold water would have to wait.

The oversized mailbox held the usual collection of catalogues and bills. These she scanned with disinterest, glancing through to see if the latest Nordstrom sale catalogue had arrived. She needed a new jacket for work, and their spring preview collection featured a delightful tropical weight wool jacket that Kate hoped would drop in price. It was featured in pumpkin, a rarity even in seasons of "warm colors." Kate was determined to have it, for she loved wearing the unusual, the bright and nothing complemented her wiry frame and soft strawberry blond hair like a warm gold, tomato red, or even pumpkin.

Disappointed, Kate found no catalogue, and she shook herself, determined to put away thoughts of the pumpkin jacket. "If I keep on like this," she chided herself aloud, "I'll buy the stupid thing at full price."

Letting out a little laugh, she turned her attention to the rest of the mail. As she sorted, an oversized first class envelope seized her curiosity. Addressed to her, with bold handwritten lines, the envelope bore no return address. She looked for a postmark and found it had been mailed in

Los Angeles. Strange. Kate could think of no one who would send her a package from Los Angeles. She tore it open, still standing on the side of the road, sweating.

Her damp fingers found only pictures inside eight by tens and this surprised her. She was not expecting photos, though at work she handled them daily. She turned them over in her hands to discover a set of glossy color prints, blurred but still identifiable each with the same unavoidable message. Kate's husband with another woman. And the woman was someone she knew.

The pleasant fatigue of exercise gave way to nausea and dizziness, and the rest of the mail fell from beneath Kate's elbow. Her heart raced, as it had when she climbed the canyon, and she stumbled slightly, her strong legs trembling at the knees. Kate glanced around for a place to sit. She found nothing and landed heavily on the grass and gravel below her. Dazed and shocked, she leaned back against the mailbox post, grasping desperately for a reasonable explanation. No run had ever left Kate Langston in this condition. The pictures had kicked her in the solar plexus of her soul, and her raging body retaliated. She rolled onto her side, letting the gravel dig into the bare skin of her upper arms. She didn't cry. She made no sound. Kate Langston lay motionless, in utter stupefaction.

At that same moment, in Sausalito, a half hour from their house, Kate's husband, Mike, was about to receive a kick of his own.

Designed personally by Mike Langston and named after their daughter, the Keegan Building housed the corporate offices of DataSoft. Resting squarely in the middle of the newest and most expensive downtown corporate area in Sausalito, the building appeared neither striking nor imposing. Rather, typical of the many office complexes surrounding it, the Keegan stood a modest four floors high, enclosed entirely in reflective glass.

Inside, however, the building was very different. There Mike wanted to create a respite from the work world of competition and drive. Just inside the front doors, a dark mahogany reception desk sat before a massive two story fountain of teal patina. On either side, twin stairways of gray green marble and black pipe ascended to the next level. From the second floor, glass offices overlooked the opulent lobby.

The fountain, illuminated by carefully hidden spotlights, featured a mermaid hand feeding a porpoise family. Water, flowing in graceful arches, cascaded down over the mermaid and across the friendly faces of the waiting mammals. Mike Langston intended for DataSoft employees to enjoy moments of restful contemplation on black park benches surrounding the fountain. He believed that the sound of flowing water brought tranquility and peace. That was the way Mike wanted it. A building full of tranquility. Peaceful workers working productively.

Mike also took great pride in the office he occupied on the southwest corner of the fourth floor. A business suite, yes, but it also reflected an elegant and masculine comfort. He had selected the leather couches in the waiting area himself, along with the lights recessed into ceiling soffits. Mike Langston loved details and prided himself on the selection of fixtures and cabinets. The details that some considered trivial, Mike believed separated DataSoft from the rest of the corporate world. Mike's attention to minutiae had single handedly turned DataSoft into a model of corporate success.

On this day, as Kate lay collapsed by her mailbox, Mike met with his partner and long-

time friend, Doug McCoy, cofounder of DataSoft. In the corner of the giant office the two men sat around one end of a black granite conference table. Through office windows behind them, bustling views of harbor activity and city sounds would have distracted most men. But not Doug McCoy. And definitely not Mike.

Doug was the techie, the “propeller head” behind the DataSoft empire. He knew the inside of the personal computer as well as Mike knew the ins and outs of business and marketing. Together they made a powerful pair. They had had few disagreements in their fifteen years as partners, due in part to the willingness of each to trust the expertise of the other.

DataSoft had evolved to follow the development of the computer world. They had created and sold many different products. Most recently, DataSoft scored big in designing and selling commercial Web sites for retail sales. Doug’s expertise enabled them to create software that safely encrypted and transmitted orders and payments for anything the Web had to offer. And lately the Web had come to offer everything. With more business than they could handle, DataSoft team members felt constant pressure to keep up, produce, and promote.

Mike and Doug owed their success, in part, to their division of labor, a division so complete that each partner had several teams that reported only to them. Mike handled wholesale shipping, accounting, customer service, marketing, and technical support systems. Doug handled research and development, product design, and production systems. Only in support did their authority overlap; Doug trained technicians about the product itself, and Mike designed the parameters and policies under which they worked.

This afternoon, the two found themselves at odds with each other. “I’ve told you,” Doug pled, “I can solve the problem. We just need more time.”

“I’ve given you more time.” Mike stabbed at the table with his index finger. “There isn’t any more to give. We’ve already released a press report on the project. We said May first, and we have to make the deadline.”

“Okay, if you can’t give me more time, then at least give me more people. I can finish with a bigger staff. I know we can work out the bugs.” Doug pushed his wire frame glasses farther up onto his nose. “Let me hire some of it out to subs.”

Mike took a deep breath and tried to slow the intensity of the conversation. Rubbing the dark shadow of his afternoon beard, he stood and walked to the window. He folded his arms across his stomach, staring but not seeing the city scene below his window.

“I’ll think about it,” he said at last. Turning away from the window, he moved to his massive desk and touched the telephone. “Brooke,” he said into the speaker. “See if you can get Cara Maria up here.”

“Yes, sir,” came the polite response.

“What do we need Cara for?” Doug stood suddenly and came to the desk. “It’s a simple matter of permission. You give me permission to get the staff I need, and I’ll meet the deadline. We don’t need Cara Maria in on this.” Doug leaned forward as he spoke, a position that might have encroached on the space of others. Mike knew better than to take offense, for his partner was very nearsighted.

“Cara Maria is the Chief Financial Officer here. She runs the numbers.” Mike heard the tight edge in his voice and stopped to take a calming breath. “We hired her to help us make decisions just like this one.”

“Mr. Langston,” a young female voice came over the speaker again. “Cara says she has an appointment in fifteen minutes. Will that be enough time, sir?”

“Yes, fine,” Mike answered gruffly. “Just get her up here. And ask her to bring her numbers on the Patterson project.”

“Right away, sir.”

“Doug,” Mike straightened and slid his enormous chair under the desk. “It’s time you got a picture of my side of this company. I’ve let you have your way for the last fifteen years. I’ve never held you to a production schedule. Whatever you wanted, you got even when it hurt the company to do it. But that has to change.” Mike stood and walked back to his chair at the conference table. “You can’t live in the world of ‘throw money at it’ forever.” Leaning against his chair, he continued, “I suggest we look at the numbers together for once and see just exactly how much we already have invested in this project.”

Exasperated, Doug sighed deeply. “Don’t treat me like a child.” He paced along the conference table, turning suddenly and running one hand through his curly blond hair. “I have as much invested in this company as you do.”

Frowning, Mike sat and leaned down to adjust the thick athletic socks above his Wilson court shoes. For a moment he wished he were at the club instead of the office. Compared to conflict, slamming a tennis ball across the court would be sweet relief. Much easier than reining in his undisciplined partner. Doug seemed to grow more difficult every day. Why had he let things go this far?

“Invested, perhaps,” Mike agreed. “But I don’t like being the brakes on your irresponsible management. This project should be wrapped up by now.”

They heard a knock on the door, and Mike stood to answer. Cara Maria Calloruso passed through the doorway with the grace of a runway model. Behind her, Mike caught the delicious scent of her expensive perfume. Today, she wore black in the shape of a St. John suit, fashioned of wool crepe. The long narrow skirt, enhanced by a deep off center slit, and a long jacket fit the curves of her lean figure perfectly.

Mike glanced away as Cara walked across the room. For a moment he wondered if she planned the effect this kind of suit had on him. Her beauty always left him feeling like a preteen, gasping for air. She wore her glossy black hair twisted loosely behind her, held in place with a jeweled stake. Loose strands hung fashionably along the sides of her face. She moved confidently to the table and chose the chair beside Doug, who seemed suddenly to forget his irritation. He jumped up and held the chair for her. Mike took the seat across from Doug.

“The Patterson numbers,” she said, opening a file. Sliding it across the table, she asked Mike, “Now, what is this about? Why the sudden need to see me?” She glanced back and forth between the two men.

“I just wanted to have you here to confirm our current status.” Mike leaned back and put both palms on the arms of the mahogany chair. “Mr. McCoy here thinks a delay for product release is our only viable option.”

“It would certainly make things easier for him,” she said, turning her attention to Doug. “But we’ve published the release date. We already have orders for more systems like it.” She glanced back at Mike. “We can’t change the release date now.”

“That’s what I said,” Mike confirmed. “But Doug doesn’t agree.”

“Not quite true,” Doug interrupted. “I can make the date, I just need more engineering hours to do it.”

“How many more hours do you need?” Cara asked.

“I think with four guys and another month, we could work out all the bugs.”

“But we’re already over budget.” Cara Maria leaned back, using both hands to brush the hair away from her face.

“I told him that too.” Mike held his hand lightly across his mouth trying to suppress a smile. “But he doesn’t see that as a problem. I asked you to come in and help me convince him.”

Cara reached for the file and shuffled through the papers inside. “Here,” she said, handing a copy to both Mike and Doug. “This is last month’s accounting for the project to date. As you can see, we’re already twelve percent over our projected budget.”

Mike reached into the front pocket of his cargo shorts and retrieved a hard shelled glasses case. Placing the half lens carefully on his nose, he adjusted the position of the report and began to read. “What have you done to adjust?” he asked briskly.

“Nothing yet,” she answered. “Of course there’s the possibility of a price increase or perhaps a decrease in production costs. But it’s too early to tell yet.”

“So what? We charge a little more,” Doug offered.

Cara Maria exchanged glances with Mike. “Doug, I can’t do that,” her voice held a calm, deliberate tone. “We have competition. We aren’t the only ones trying to create this kind of product. We can’t expect to make money by selling ours at the highest price on the market.”

“We can’t win by marketing an imperfect product either.” Mike heard emotion and frustration in the tone of Doug’s voice.

“I know that product development can be frustrating,” Cara spoke gently. “But DataSoft has committed on this project. We have to finish on time.”

Mike interrupted, touching the back of her hand. “Okay. Let’s think about this. Doug needs more time, but we can’t give him that. What about hours? Can we give him that?”

“I’ll have to look into it,” she said. “I think we should put a limit on it though. No blank checks.” Her brown eyes smiled at Mike.

“All right. I agree. You work the numbers, and let me know exactly what we can reasonably spare. Get back to me, say Friday?”

Cara Maria reached for the file and straightened the papers. “I’ll do that. Now you two try to keep our expenses under control. We aren’t trying to launch the space shuttle, you know. We don’t have a government budget.” She closed the file and stood gracefully. “Now, unless you need anything else, I must be going. I have an appointment.”

“Thank you, Cara,” Mike stood and pushed in his chair. “I wonder, could you get a copy of that spreadsheet to me?”

“No problem,” she said, stepping toward him. Tipping her chin, she looked directly into his eyes. A smile touched her lips. “I’ll have Josh bring one up this afternoon.”

Mike walked her across the office, his hand lightly touching the small of her back. Opening the door, he held it as she passed through.

“I’ll get back to you,” she said, and disappeared.

As Mike moved back to the corner window, he noticed that Doug had helped himself to another full cup of coffee. Doug seemed morose, and his emotional state would be a more urgent problem than the production schedule. Mike would have to nurse Doug back to enthusiasm if he ever hoped to have the product on time. Mike sighed deeply.

A voice came over the speaker. “Mr. Langston, there’s a delivery for you.”

“So take it, Brooke.”

“I offered, sir, but the delivery person says he has to have your signature.” She paused, and he heard muttering. Brooke continued. “He says that he has orders to put it in your hands

only.”

Reluctantly, Mike agreed. “All right, bring him in.”

The door opened again, and his secretary entered followed by a delivery boy in jeans and Birkenstocks, his hair tied back in a long greasy ponytail. He walked straight to Mike and held out a manila envelope. Mike accepted it and began to open the double seal on the envelope.

The young man stepped forward, holding a clipboard in one hand and a pen in the other. “I’m sorry, sir, I need a signature.”

“Oh, certainly,” Mike agreed. Without comment, he placed his own bold initials on line thirty four. “That will be all, Brooke,” he said, dismissing them both.

When the door closed behind them, he turned the envelope over in his hand and discovered his own name scrawled across the front in bold dark strokes. No return address. No clue as to the envelope’s origin.

While Doug sat drinking coffee on the leather couch, Mike went to his desk. From the top drawer he withdrew a gold letter opener and tore open the envelope. An angry oath escaped from his lips, drawing Doug’s attention. Doug stood and crossed to the desk where Mike stared open-mouthed at a stack of glossy eight by ten color photographs.

Mike was dimly aware of Doug moving around behind his chair and looking intently at the top photo and then back at Mike. But Mike continued to stare down at the image he held in his trembling hands. In it he saw the bare back of a woman wearing a deep crimson evening gown. She danced with a man in a tuxedo. He did not need to look further. He knew the woman. He knew the place. And he recognized the face of the man whispering in her ear as his own.