

*I ride the night wind
Evil does not escape my vigilance*

One

The black-clad woman melded into the shadows cast by a line of idle railroad cars and diesel engines. Even the barrel of the pistol gripped tight in one hand failed to reflect the faint illumination from the light poles scattered in the deserted railroad yard.

“Got him. Two rows from the control tower. He’s headed toward the fence,” she whispered into her mic.

A voice softly echoed through her earpiece. “I’m on the other side of the row ... to your right.”

Focused on the man striding ahead of her, FBI Special Agent Cat Morgan eased her way over the gravel surface as she glided from car to car. Certain this was the man dubbed by the media as the Rail Killer, her grim determination pushed back the discomfort of the sweat-soaked shirt under her vest and the rancid odor of oil and diesel that hung in the humid air. Over the last four months, she’d chased the killer who rode the rails in empty boxcars. He’d find a house near the tracks and brutally murder the occupants for money and supplies, then hop another train.

After plotting locations, dates, times, and railroad schedules, she discovered a pattern in his movements. While Cat had predicted the killer’s next move, it wasn’t in time to prevent the murder of an elderly couple.

This time, they were ready. At dusk, teams of agents moved into position along several miles of track around Beaumont. Cat and her partner, Ben Kennedy, had drawn the short straw for the railroad yard and set up surveillance in the control tower. Near midnight, they

spotted a man jump from a boxcar of a passing train. Climbing down from the tower, they lost sight of him and had split up, working their way along the rows of cars.

Cat picked up the pace and needed only a few more yards to close the gap. Then—her foot slipped on the edge of a pothole. At the loud rattle of rocks, the man glanced over his shoulder. His gaze locked onto her before he leaped between two cars.

“Damn, he spotted me. He crossed the track.” Cat jumped the rail, climbed over a coupler, and paused to scrutinize the deep shadows from the cars on the next row. *Where the hell did you go?*

“I’m behind you,” Ben said.

When rocks clattered again, along with a grunt and a couple of cuss words, she figured Ben must have stepped in the same hole.

A flash of movement at the far end of the cars sent her racing along the tracks. “He’s running!” Ben’s footsteps pounded behind her.

Danger! The word exploded in her mind. A piercing screech resounded, and two large owls, their powerful talons outstretched to strike, swooped toward her head.

Cat shouted, “Take cover!” and dropped to the ground. Then did what the yard supervisor told them not to do—she rolled over the track and under a car as a shot ricocheted off the metal rail. Lungs heaved, and her heart pounded from the surge of adrenaline as she stared at the undercarriage. What just happened? It certainly wasn’t the time to figure it out.

At her warning, Ben had jumped between two cars and was on the other side. “Cat, where are you? Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” she said as she crawled from under the car and readjusted her headset that had come loose.

Winded, Ben sucked in several deep breaths. Pushing fifty, the last couple of years he’d added weight, most of which had settled around his waist. “I’m getting too damn old for this. Where the hell is he?”

“On the roof of a tank car opposite this one. We can pick him off

if we circle and box him in between us. You go left.”

Slipping around the end car, Cat leaned forward until she could see the tanker. Even lying flat, he would be visible on top of the cylindrical-shaped body. “He’s on the ground. I’ve lost him.” Another sprint and she reached the tanker.

“I’ll head to the other end,” Ben said.

He had to be hidden in this row of cars. With a ten-foot, chain-link fence on the other side, the killer had run out of room. Her back against the metal, she slid down until she could peek underneath. Moving to the next car, she stopped, ducked to check under it before going to the next.

“FBI! Stop!” Ben shouted.

A shot, then a second, and a man burst across the tracks ahead of her.

“Drop the gun!”

He pivoted—the gun pointed at her.