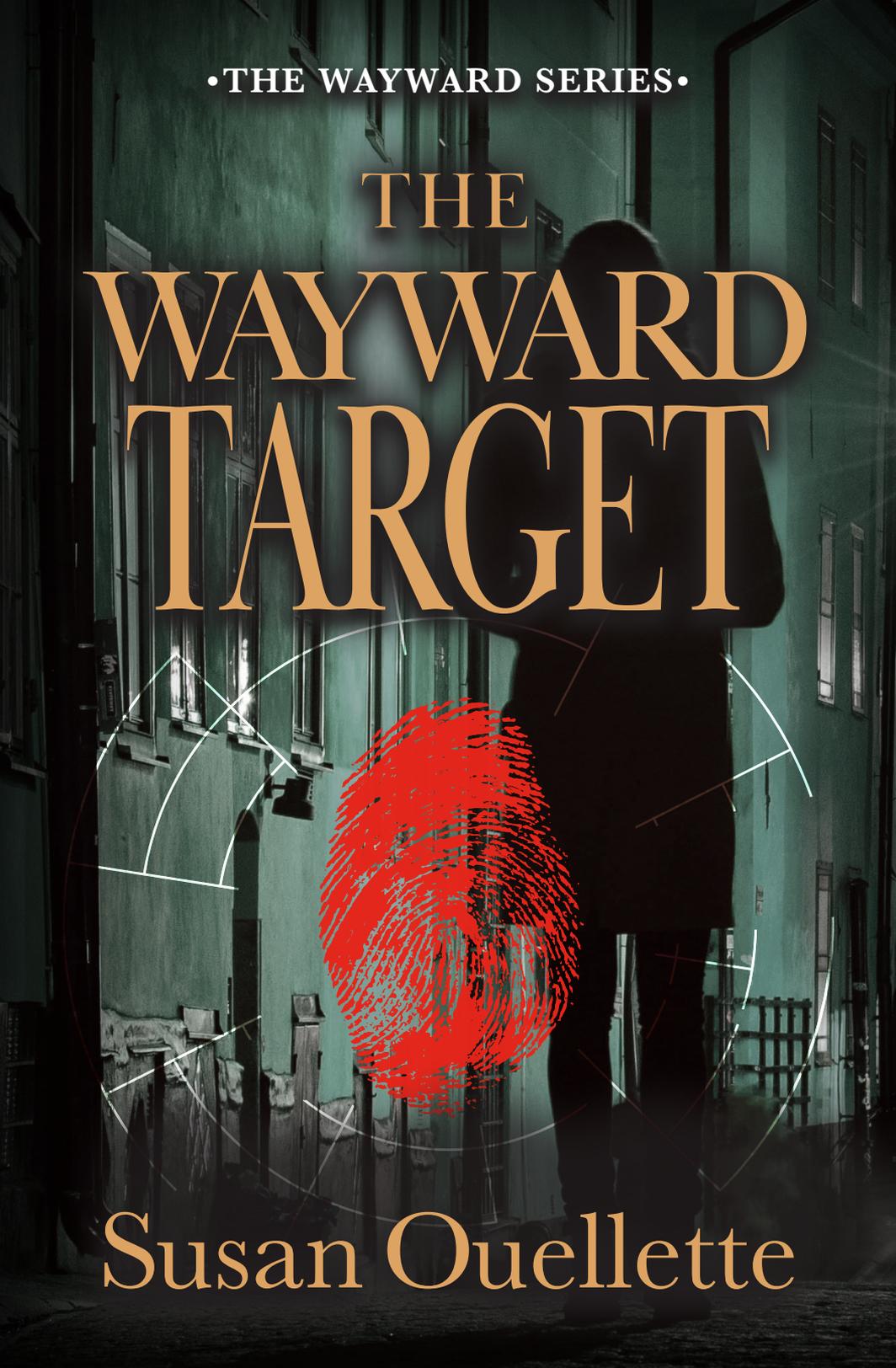


• THE WAYWARD SERIES •

# THE WAYWARD TARGET



Susan Ouellette

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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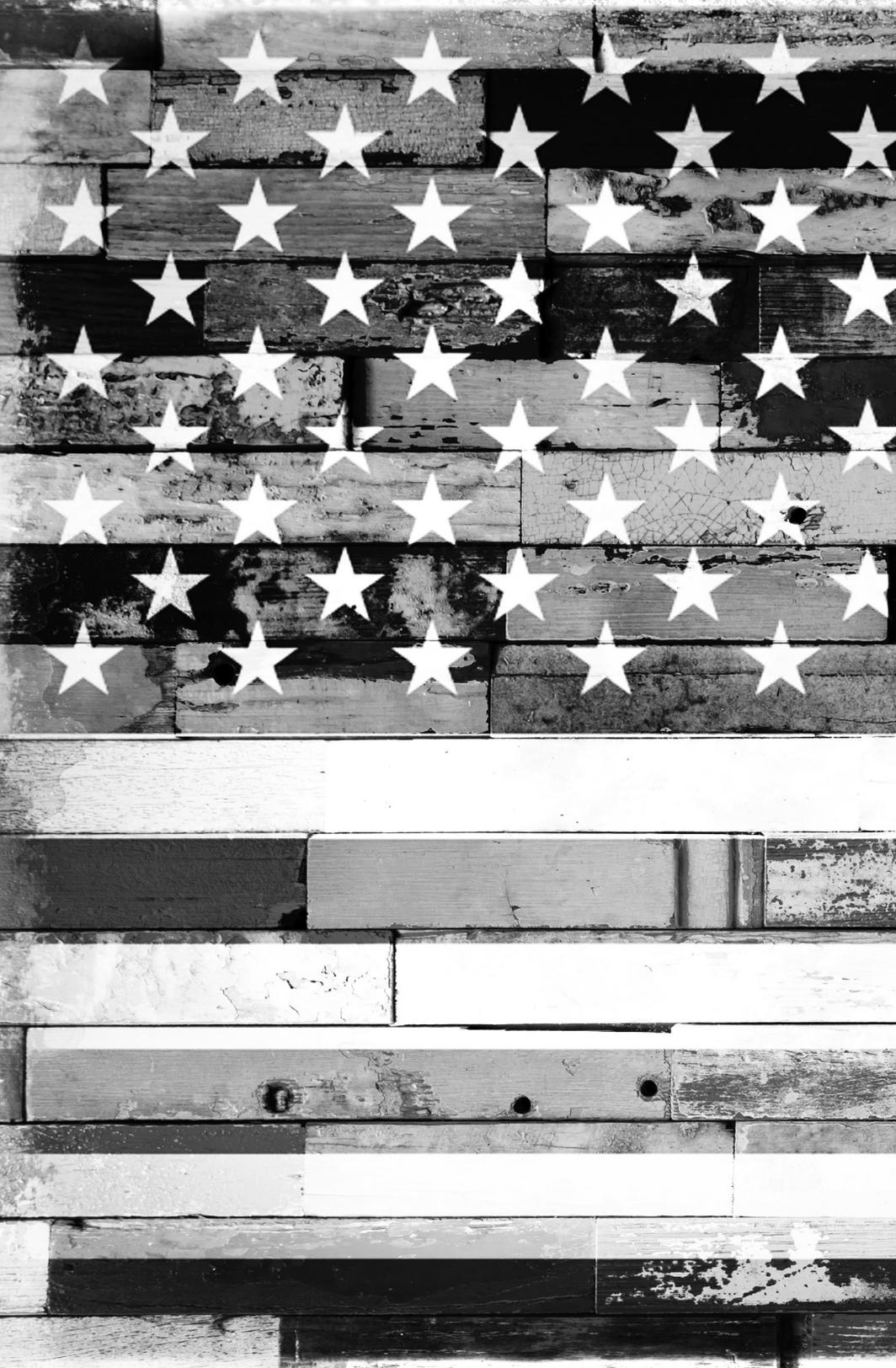
*Andrew, Shawn, and Bryan.*

*The best boys*

*a mom could ask for.*

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## CHAPTER ONE

Tyson's Fitness and Health Club  
McLean, Virginia, Sunday, June 12, 2005

**M**aggie Jenkins increased the pace on the treadmill, her auburn ponytail swaying like a pendulum with every step. She'd boosted her workout regimen over the past several months and the results showed—firm, muscular legs, a trim waist, and well-defined arms. Last fall, Roger had convinced her to join him at the gym. *It'll be good for you*, he'd promised. *Get you out of the house, get your mind off everything*

*Everything*. It was his catch-all word for what she'd been through. The terrorist attacks. Zara. All the bloodshed.

An image of hundreds of terrified children flashed in her mind. *No!* She upped the treadmill speed. The faster she ran—the more her

body ached—the easier it was to fight off the memories. The gym had become her therapy, sweat her medication. After several months of intensive exercise, she'd begun to sleep better. The nightmares came less often. But every now and then, like last night, the images crept into her dreams and she woke in a cold sweat, stomach churning, pulse pounding. She knew what had triggered it: the hearing on Capitol Hill about the school siege.

Nearby, a man hopped off a stationary bike, grabbed a remote control from the weight rack, and jacked up the volume on the television hanging on the wall. Maggie shot him a look in the mirror, but he didn't notice, absorbed as he was in the breaking news blaring from the TV.

She snatched her headphones and MP3 player from the treadmill console. Volume cranked, the lyrics from "Refugee" filled her ears. The man stood, staring up at the TV. Maggie squinted to read the graphic scrolling across the bottom of the screen.

TERRORIST ISSUES THREAT.

Now what? Another Bin Laden missive from some cave in Afghanistan? She didn't want to think about work on her day off. The latest violence and mayhem, whether domestic or international, could wait. In a few weeks, she'd be headed to the beach for a getaway with Roger. After the gym, she planned to go shopping. A new bathing suit, sandals, and a sundress or two were in order. Thoughts of the trip were interrupted by movement on her left. Several more people had abandoned their workouts and gathered in front of the TV. She tugged out an earphone and caught the anchor mid-sentence.

*"—videod in what British authorities say was his former residence in London."*

The screen filled with the image of an upholstered chair standing before a vivid abstract painting hung on an otherwise blank white wall. The view darkened for a moment as someone in a blue shirt passed in

front of the chair. The person turned and sat, his face level with the camera.

Maggie's fingers punched frantically at the treadmill's off button. She stumbled as it came to a sudden stop, sending her flying forward, her face missing the console by millimeters.

"You okay?" a male voice asked.

She regained her footing, her breath heavy, the weight on her chest suddenly unbearable. "Yeah," she said without looking at him.

*"Our brave and glorious martyrs have their reward in paradise. Those responsible for their deaths will be hunted down and executed."*

Behind the gaggle of people watching Imran Bukayev speak, Maggie's knees went weak. *Those responsible?* He meant her. She squeezed her eyes shut for a moment before turning her attention back to Bukayev. This video was filmed inside his house, the one she'd broken into in London last year. She'd recognize that garish painting anywhere. And his olive skin and shock of graying black hair were unmistakable.

*"Our work is not done. Your children are not safe. No enemy of Allah is safe. Our valiant soldiers are in place and ready to strike again at my command."*

Maggie tried to make sense of it. Bukayev wasn't in London anymore. He must've filmed this video after the school attack but before he'd fled. Now, nearly nine months later, the Brits had no idea where he was. Neither did she, despite her spending the better part of every day at Langley trying to track him down.

"I dare him to try something again," one man said, his voice full of bravado.

Sweat coursed down Maggie's face. She steadied herself with one hand on the treadmill rail. The news anchor was speaking, but she couldn't hear him, not with the ringing in her ears. *Roger!* She had to call Roger. *Deep breath. Calm down.* Her lungs felt full, her heart about to burst.

"Is this yours?" A woman's voice cut through the noise in her head.

Maggie blinked. A petite blonde with a bright smile extended her hand, Maggie's headphones and MP3 player resting on her palm.

"Yeah, thanks." Maggie studied the woman for a moment. Something about her seemed familiar.

"You sure?"

Maggie nodded, snatched her phone and water bottle from the treadmill console, and hurried for the locker room. Inside, she slumped onto a wooden bench set across from a row of lockers. After taking a swig of water and counting backward from twenty, she flipped open the phone.

"Roger? Did you see the news? It's Bukayev. I think he's coming for me."



## CHAPTER TWO

Makhachkala, Dagestan, Russia

**T**he stooped elderly man dressed entirely in black steadied himself on a cane as two burly men helped him from the sedan. He moved slowly, eyes downcast, his escorts continuously scanning the area around the Grand Mosque of Makhachkala. When they reached the soaring white building, one of the men rapped on an ornately carved wooden door on the far left.

The door swung open, revealing a young man in a flowing white thobe who gestured for them to enter. Inside the dim hallway, the elderly man straightened and shook off his entourage.

The young man stared at the visitor, no doubt assessing his bald head. It wasn't bare with age. Up close, anyone would notice that he'd

shaved it clean. And his smooth olive skin and bright brown eyes made him look younger than his forty-two years.

“As-salam Alaikum,” the visitor said in greeting.

“Wa ‘alaikum-as-salam,” the young man replied.

“I’m here to see the office manager.”

The young man nodded but didn’t move.

“He’s expecting me.”

The tone of the visitor’s voice jolted the young man into action.

“Of course, please follow me.”

Twenty feet up the hall, they turned into a hushed, windowless room. The young man gave a slight bow and exited, closing the door behind him. The visitor surveyed his surroundings. Large, dark gray acoustic panels covered the walls, ceiling, and even the floor. The room’s only light glowed from four tall lamps, one standing in each corner, and a tabletop lamp set in the center of a round wooden table.

After five minutes, a short man with wire-rimmed glasses entered the room with a security guard. “As-salam Alaikum.”

“Wa ‘alaikum-as-salam,” the visitor replied.

The office manager nodded to the guard, who proceeded to give the visitor a thorough, if not downright intrusive, pat down.

How dare they treat me like a threat. The visitor bit down hard on his tongue. He couldn’t afford to assert himself, at least not yet.

“Please, have a seat.” The office manager gestured to a wooden chair with a cracked faux-leather seat cushion.

The visitor sat, his hands folded on the table before him.

“Welcome to Dagestan, Imran.”

“Thank you, Amar. It’s a pleasure to meet you in person.”

“Likewise. Although I wouldn’t have recognized you. In your video, you had a lot of hair.”

“Precisely why I don’t anymore.” After Zara’s name leaked last September, Imran Bukayev had made a video threatening the United

States. He'd been preparing to upload it to the internet when a source in London warned him that law enforcement was investigating his connection to Zara and the school attacks in Russia and America. There'd been no time to waste, so he'd emailed the video to a trusted confidante, shaved his head, grabbed his go bag, and fled.

"We welcome you to the Grand Mosque at great risk."

Imran nodded. "I understand." Now that the video had finally aired, there was no doubt that the world's intelligence services would intensify their efforts to find him. Here in Dagestan, and no doubt throughout the country, Russian security services monitored the comings and goings of the mosque's visitors and employees. As the main mosque in all of Dagestan, it was, perhaps, the least obvious place for him to take refuge. Why would he, Imran Bukayev, one of the world's most wanted terrorist financiers, go anywhere near such a well-known mosque? Which was precisely why he'd chosen it. Sometimes hiding in plain sight was the best way to remain unnoticed. "I came here because it's not safe for me to go home yet." In truth, he had been home—in Chechnya—moving from hideout to hideout for months. But now he needed to be in a place where he could think and plan, not live in constant fear of discovery.

"I understand. Our goal is to protect you and the mosque. As such, there are some rules you must follow while you're here."

Imran pasted on a smile but bristled inside. Who was this mid-level mosque official to dictate the rules? Clearly, the man didn't know how many powerful connections he had. It was these connections that Imran needed to rekindle to get his life back.

He wasn't made for living on the run. He wasn't a warrior. He was a master planner, an orchestrator of warriors. Someone who did his best work when there were no distractions. That meant comfortable surroundings and access to whatever he needed, whenever he needed it.

“First, all communications must pass through us. We’ve taken your phone from your belongings and will provide you with a new one when the time is right.”

Imran had taken to using burner phones since he left London, but kept his old phone, always powered off, because it contained contact information for his many connections. Eyes narrowed, he said, “Make sure nothing happens to it. I’ll need it back.”

Amar continued without comment. “You will not be able to leave the mosque unless and until it becomes necessary. If there’s an emergency, we have an escape route. In the meantime, we have a small apartment set up in our basement for special visitors like you. We will provide you with whatever food and clothing you need.”

“How kind,” he said without any enthusiasm.

“You may not attend prayer services. We will provide a prayer rug for your room.”

Imran’s eyes widened. “No prayer services?”

“We are certain that Russian police send informants to our services. It’s not safe for you to mix with the general population. Which reminds me, all conversations of a potentially sensitive nature should be held in this room. It’s soundproof and swept for surveillance devices regularly.”

Imran supposed that a little paranoia was better than a disregard for security. “I’d like my things so I can shower and get settled.”

Amar nodded and stepped outside the room. A moment later he was back with the dusty rucksack containing Imran’s clothes and toiletries. “This way.”

Imran followed Amar down the hall to a door on the right, waiting behind him as he inserted a key into the lock. They descended a set of concrete stairs into a dimly lit basement. A massive furnace filled one half of the otherwise empty, unfinished space. At the far end of the room was a hallway crowded with stacked chairs, rolled prayer rugs,

and several boxes of office supplies. Halfway down the hall, Amar nudged open a door on the left, revealing Imran's living quarters.

He followed Amar inside and frowned. A sagging cot and a mismatched nightstand and chest of drawers took up half the room, which was no bigger than a ten-by-ten cell.

Amar pushed aside a purple curtain that hung incongruously on the concrete block wall. On the other side was his bathroom. A dingy commode, a small metal sink, and overhead, a showerhead that would soak the entire bathroom when used. A drain, discolored a putrid green, sat in the center of the floor.

"Over here is a buzzer to the mosque's intercom system. We'll deliver meals three times a day, but if you want a snack or need to speak with me in the secure conference room, simply push the button and I'll be with you as soon as possible."

"Am I your guest or your prisoner?" These accommodations, if they could even be called that, were an outrage. An insult. Bukayev didn't expect to be housed in quarters as swanky as his beloved London row home, but he also didn't expect to be confined to what resembled a cell in a Russian prison camp.

"You have full range of the entire basement, but I must ask that you stay out of sight unless I say it is safe to come upstairs." Amar paused. When Bukayev didn't respond, he added, "I'll have a meal sent down soon."

Bukayev watched him cross the basement and ascend the stairs. He ran his hand across his head, an old habit he hadn't dropped despite the absence of hair. He sank onto the cot, which groaned in protest. Yes, he was safe. But he was stuck, in the basement of a mosque, of all places. Unable to do what he needed to do to get back into the good graces of his benefactors. After the American school operation, which they considered a failure, he needed to convince them his word was still worth the money they'd sent him. Their cash had been used to

execute an attack on the children of Washington's elites, but it had all gone horribly wrong. Zara was to blame. She'd had other plans, a personal vendetta, that she'd kept from him. Bukayev had tried to explain that to the benefactors, but all he'd received was scorn for allowing a woman to lead the operation. There was still a chance for redemption, to please the money men and get his old life back. That's why he was here, in Dagestan—so he could execute his plan to kill the people who had murdered Zara. After that, he would launch his next and most ambitious plot to date.



## CHAPTER THREE

Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC  
Monday, June 13, 2005

**M**aggie Jenkins slipped into a seat at the back of the Senate Intelligence Committee hearing room.

“I like the disguise,” Roger Patterson whispered from the chair to her right.

Maggie patted her auburn hair which she’d hurriedly twirled into a French twist at the nape of her neck after seeing the large media presence in the hearing room. The reading glasses she sported weren’t necessary but helped to alter her appearance a bit. *Just in case.* Wherever Imran Bukayev was hiding, he might find a way to watch the hearing. And although she didn’t think he got a good look at her in London last year, she didn’t want to take the chance that he’d recognize her.

She wouldn't mind if her face was the last one he ever saw, but before her fantasies of vengeance could play out, she had to find Bukayev, the terrorist mastermind behind the Beslan and Dominion school attacks. Find him and finally, for real and for good, put the past behind her.

Roger eyed her. "You're a sexy secret agent."

She smiled and gave his arm a squeeze. After seeing Bukayev's video for himself, he hadn't left Maggie's side. Even though Bukayev couldn't possibly know that Maggie was the one who'd stopped the Dominion school attack last year, she appreciated Roger's protective show of support.

Maggie forced Bukayev's threats from her mind and focused on the two men at the witness table in front of them. Warner Thompson, the CIA's deputy director of operations sat to the left of the star witness—FBI Director Richard Miller.

Beyond them was an elongated, curved wooden dais where seventeen United States senators sat, all eyes on the witness table. Behind the senators was a gaggle of staffers who occupied an elongated, cushioned bench that ran the length of a soaring twenty-foot wood-paneled wall. To their left stood a large American flag hanging limply on a brass flagpole.

The chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee gaveled the hearing into order.

Maggie flipped open a brown leather portfolio and scribbled a note. "Do you think Warner will have to testify? What if someone asks about me? He can't lie under oath."

Roger snatched her pen. "He'll say it's classified. Can't discuss in public."

Maggie nodded as the FBI director read from the executive summary of the report on the "Investigation into the Dominion Elementary School Siege." She'd already read it from cover to cover. Twice. There was no mention of her name anywhere.

“In the aftermath of the school siege of September tenth, 2004, the FBI, the CIA, Homeland Security, and state and local law enforcement agencies have implemented unprecedented levels of cooperation.” He continued, outlining the report’s findings and fielding questions from several senators. Warner, for his part, sat unmoving beside the FBI director. He had no plans to speak but the president had wanted the nation’s law enforcement and intelligence agencies to present a united front to the country. It was supposed to be the CIA director at the table with Director Miller, but Warner had offered to fill in after the CIA chief had fallen ill suddenly.

“Mr. Chairman, if I may.” It was the senator from California, a brash, well-coifed woman with a penchant for the camera. “I can only imagine the shock and terror those children endured when their school was attacked. If we can’t keep innocent children safe in our nation’s public schools, then the FBI must come clean and explain why they weren’t able to stop this atrocity.”

“Senator Canton,” the FBI director began, “we have learned many lessons from that day. On the positive side, it is a credit to the FBI and local law enforcement that no students were killed inside the school.”

The voices in the room faded as memories flashed through Maggie’s mind. AK-47s trained on children. Teachers crying. Zara sneering and determined to exact her brand of twisted revenge. She shook her head and blinked rapidly, forcing herself to focus on the hearing.

The senator smoothed her blonde highlighted hair and leaned forward, hands folded behind the nameplate that sat on the dais in front of her. “About that ‘success’”—the senator made air quotes—“why don’t we know the name of the federal agent who killed the terrorists inside the school? The public deserves to know.”

Director Miller, a lanky, middle-aged man with close-cropped salt-and-pepper hair, lifted a document. “And the public will know. This,”

he explained, “is the truth about what happened last September at Dominion Elementary School. We are releasing our report to the public at the conclusion of the hearing. The only secrets we must maintain involve intelligence sources and methods.” He took a sip of water from a tall glass set before him on the witness table and glanced at Warner. “And in this case, the identity of the undercover federal agent must also remain a secret—for personal safety reasons.”

The senator smirked at the FBI director. “Perhaps we can arrange for a personal meeting with the agent so I can thank this person for his . . . or her . . . heroics.”

Maggie’s breath caught in her throat. Roger placed a hand on her knee and gave a gentle squeeze. She slipped her hand over his.

“Perhaps,” Director Miller offered noncommittally.

“I’ll hold you to that,” Senator Canton snapped.

Maggie watched the senator scan the room, a smile plastered across her face for the media. Her gaze met Maggie’s and seemed to linger a moment longer than necessary.

Maggie removed her hand from Roger’s and acted as if she was taking notes in her portfolio.

“Did you see that?” she scribbled.

“What?” Roger wrote back.

“Tell you later.” Maggie shut the portfolio and crossed and uncrossed her legs, her body quivering with the urge to flee the room.

Twenty minutes later, the chairman gaveled the hearing to a close. The FBI director approached the dais and shook hands with the senators who hadn’t already made a dash for the reporters lined up in the back of the hearing room. Warner, looking stately as ever in a tailored steel-gray suit that matched the color of his hair, approached Maggie and Roger.

“That went as well as can be expected.”

Maggie tugged Warner to the far edge of the hearing room.

Roger followed. "I swear that Senator Canton gave me a look."

Warner frowned. "What kind of look?"

She pulled off her glasses. They were giving her a headache. "I don't know. She stared at me, like she knew something."

Roger glanced over his shoulder. "Everyone thinks an FBI agent was inside the school. Not a CIA analyst."

"But," Maggie protested, "all the children saw me. The teachers. Police. The FBI agents outside the school. At some point, my name will come out."

Warner glanced around the hearing room. "Look, we're doing everything we can to protect your identity. The Bukayev video is alarming, but he doesn't know who you are. Besides, he's a bit preoccupied running from us, the Russians, and the Brits."

Roger's forehead crinkled in concern the way it always did when the Chechen terrorist's name surfaced.

"I know. I'm just . . . I guess it's . . . reading the report and listening to the details. It's so clinical, so detached from what it was really like inside that school." Maggie shook her head. "Never mind. I'm overreacting."

"You're not, Maggie." Warner placed a hand on her arm. "No report could possibly capture what you experienced that day. Believe me, I understand."

Of course he did. His children had been inside that school.

Warner checked his watch. "Need a ride back to the office?"

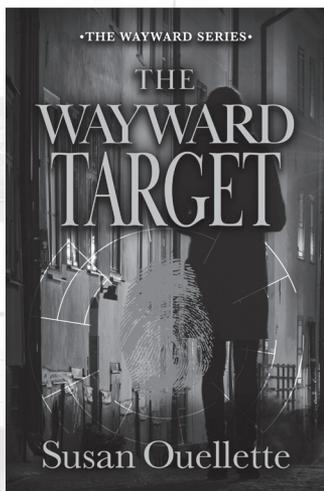
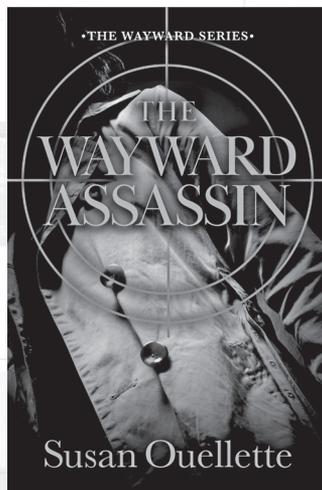
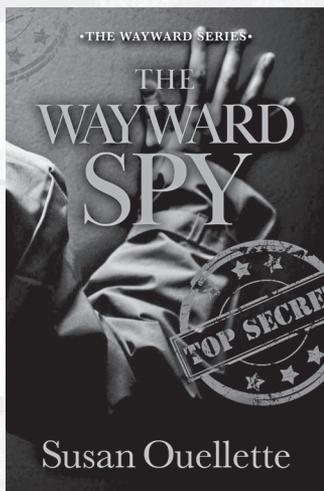
"The office?" Roger said. "I was hoping we could play hooky. Grab some lunch at the Dubliner. Get drunk and sing Irish pub songs. You in, Maggie?"

Warner cleared his throat. "You may work for the Counterterrorism Center, Roger, but I'm still your ultimate boss. Get back to work and find Bukayev."

*Imran Bukayev. Zara's lover and terrorist financier.*

The administration was determined to bring him to justice for his role in the school siege. Now that he was gunning for her, Maggie wanted nothing more than to be the one who smoked him out of whatever hellhole he was hiding in.

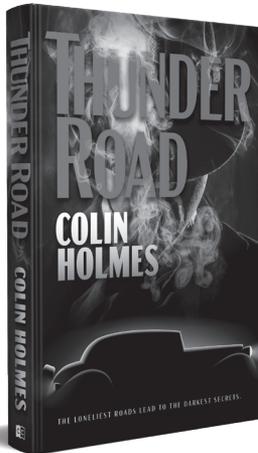
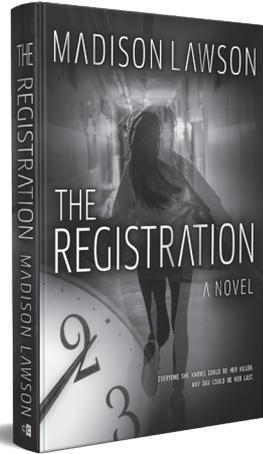
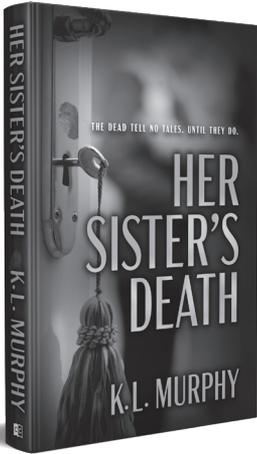
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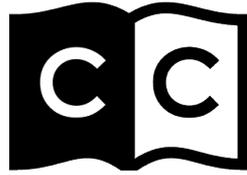
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With Maggie's movements severely restricted by the presence of a round-the-clock security detail, it's up to her boss, Warner Thompson, and CIA officer Roger Patterson to find and eliminate the terrorist who stalks her. But when a shadowy Russian operative surfaces and presents Maggie with intel that might lead her to the man who orchestrated her fiancé's death, she can no longer watch from the sidelines. Is she willing to risk her growing relationship with Roger, Warner's career, and her own life to finally get justice and bring down a major terrorist cell?

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*Susan Ouellette's Wayward series follows intelligence analyst Maggie Jenkins on a perilous mission from Russia to England to the US to defuse a new terrorist threat.*

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*"If he's coming for me, I think I should  
make myself an easy target."*



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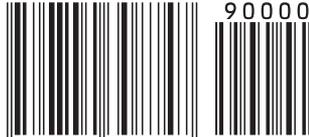
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