

# THE MISSING FIREFIGHTER

## **The California Wine Country**

Still panting hard, her tank top and running shorts wet with sweat from her run through the vineyards, Kelly stopped and listened.

She brushed back the wisps of blond hair that had fallen across her face, her hazel eyes fixed on the range of blue hills that formed the eastern horizon.

“Listen like a deer,” her grandfather had taught her. “Nose to the wind and perfectly still.”

A breeze rustled the live oaks and whispered through the straw-yellow grass. Then dust devils danced down the rows of vines—the breath of a distant desert.

Her telephone’s tinny jingle sounded the alarm:

Attention: wildfire advisory. The National Weather Service has issued a red flag warning for northern California, predicting a conjunction of high temperature, low humidity, and strong, dry winds, gusting to forty miles per hour.