

Chapter 1

Connor looked up at the Greek in the doorway blocking the sun. He was in his fifties, with dark peasant eyes and a face you could light a match on. He wore a polyester tracksuit and Nikes, and had a barrel chest that had pushed its way into the world from day one.

“I asked around, they said I should talk to you.”

“What are you looking for?” Connor said.

They were at Connor’s place in Oakland. A loft down by the tracks. The factories had moved offshore but the developers hadn’t gotten their hands on the real estate yet. But it was only a matter of time. He lived upstairs and ran his business out of the garage, where he shared space with a vintage Alfa Romeo, a blue Volvo station wagon with an Oakland P.D. bumper sticker, a ’68 Porsche 911 and a sweet Triumph TR3 roadster that he had finally finished restoring after three years up on blocks

“It’s not for me,” the Greek said. “It’s for Candy.”

He said it like she was a Snickers bar and he had a sweet tooth. The Greek's name was Tomas Papadopoulos, but everybody called him Tommy P. The Greek ran the Oakland rackets, everything from girls and drugs to gambling and protection. If you wanted to get high, get laid, or just get lost, Tommy could hook you up. Pay to play. The Oakland DA tried from time to time to take him down, but he could never make the charges stick. Images of Tommy, smiling victoriously on the courthouse steps after his acquittals, became a feature of local news broadcasts.

“Anthony,” Tommy said, snapping his fingers at the altar boy standing by the black Lincoln Town Car in the driveway. The altar boy wore a gabardine suit and a pompadour, and had soft brown eyes that reminded Connor of a cocker spaniel he had when he was a kid.

Anthony dug into his pocket, pulled out a dog-eared slip of paper. He waited for Tommy to put on his reading glasses, then, handed it to him.

“MGA,” Tommy said, looking at the paper. He took off his glasses and looked at Connor. “You ever heard of this car?”

“It's British, a sports car.”

“Never heard of it,” Tommy said, like it didn't exist.

“I'll show you a picture,” Connor said. He turned to a stack of classic car magazines on his desk and rifled through an issue until he found what he was looking for.

“Here's what it looks like,” he said, pointing to a picture of an MGA. Tommy studied the picture then looked up at Connor.

“It's a convertible.”

“They call it a roadster,” Connor said.

“Candy called it a roadster too,” Anthony said.

Tommy swiveled and stared holes into Anthony, who dropped his eyes and seemed to shrink a suit size. Tommy glanced at the picture again, but seemed unimpressed.

“So what’s the big deal about this car?”

“It’s a classic,” Connor explained. “A classic British sports car. And there aren’t many left.”

Tommy shrugged. “I don’t know from classics. I know from right now, okay? And right now my ass is in a sling. She saw one on the street and she wants one. Simple as that. She don’t know a goddamn thing about cars, but she knows what she wants. I told her, you can have anything you want, BMW, Lexus, Cadillac Escalade with the fuckin’ . . .” Tommy paused, trying to remember, then, looked at Anthony. “Anthony, what do the spooks call ‘em?”

“Spinners, Mr. P,” Anthony said, stepping forward to provide the answer, then taking a step back and resuming his place in the order of things.

“Spinners,” Tommy said, turning back to Connor. “She could have the fuckin’ spinners like the spooks. What does she want?” Tommy consulted the slip of paper. “A fuckin’ MGA.”

Connor shrugged. “You know how women are.”

Tommy crumpled the paper and threw it on the garage floor. “Let me tell you something, nobody knows how women are. Anybody who says they do is full of shit.”

Connor nodded sympathetically. Tommy was learning what every man learned over and over. Women were another country, and they did things differently there.

“So what’s it gonna cost me, this MGA?”

“Ballpark? Thirty, forty grand. Maybe more.”

Tommy’s eyes widened.

“For this? How old’s this fuckin’ car?”

“First came out in fifty-eight,” Connor said.

Tommy stared at him.

“Fifty-eight! I’m buyin’ a fuckin’ used car that’s over fifty years old?”

His voice rubbed against you like sand paper if sand paper could talk, gritty as the streets he ruled as gangster number one. Tommy shook his head and turned to Anthony.

“You talk to her about this?”

Anthony responded with a helpless shrug.

“She got her mind made up, Tommy. You know how she is.”

Tommy nodded, a mobster in love who knew all too well.

“This car gonna run, or is it gonna be in the shop all the time?”

“Both,” Connor said with a rueful smile.

“That’s what I figured you were gonna say.” Tommy looked downcast. “I’m gonna be payin’ through the nose for this fuckin’ car. How’s long’s it gonna take you to find it and get her off my back?”

“Hard to say,” Connor said. “There’s not too many left anymore, but maybe I’ll get lucky. It’s not like you’re buyin’ a Toyota.”

Tommy stared at Connor, “Who the fuck said anything about a Toyota?” He swiveled to Anthony, who blinked.

“She don’t want no Toyota, Mr. P.”

Tommy turned back to Connor.

“You hear that? If she wanted a Toyota we wouldn’t be here, right, Anthony?”

“Right, Mr. P.”

Connor smiled to himself. The man had missed his calling. He could’ve worked up an act that would have killed in the Catskills. Him and Anthony, the mobster and the altar boy. Good and evil, the eternal struggle played for laughs.

“So don’t waste my time with fuckin’ Toyotas, okay? Just find the car.” He cocked his head at Anthony. “Anthony here’s your point of contact. You let him know when you find the car. Candy takes a look, she likes it, you get paid. She don’t like it you keep looking, right, Anthony?”

“Right, Mr. P.”

It was like Tommy was living in an echo chamber, and he liked the way it sounded.

“You good with that?” Tommy said, looking at Connor.

“I’m good.”

Tommy paused for a moment, and gave Connor a curious look.

“You were a cop, right? Oakland P.D.?”

Connor nodded.

“You did your homework.”

“I like to know who I’m doin’ business with.”

“That’s understandable,” Connor said. “But I’m not a cop anymore.”

Tommy nodded. “So I heard.” He waved a hand at Anthony. “Okay, we’re done here. Get his card. Give him yours.”

Connor palmed off a business card and gave it to Anthony. He stared at it with a puzzled expression, then, looked up at Connor.

“‘Vintage Connor.’ I don’t get it. What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means I find old cars for people who want ‘em,” Connor said. Sometimes I find trouble, too. Like maybe this time.

Tommy walked toward the car. Anthony had opened the back door on the driver’s side and was waiting for the opportunity to close it. Suddenly, Tommy stopped and looked up at the sky. He stared at it for a long moment, as if he were receiving divine guidance from an even bigger big shot. Then he turned back to Connor.

“You know what? I just had a great idea.”

Connor braced himself.

“Why don’t you come out to the house tomorrow and meet her? She can tell you what she wants. She’s got pictures and everything.”

Connor held up his hand. Tommy P. was enough. He didn’t need to meet the family.

“I know what I’m looking for, Tommy,” he said. He just needed to find the car and take twelve percent off the top.

“Yeah, but you don’t know Candy,” Tommy said with a sly smile. “Right, Anthony?”

“Right, Mr. P.”

“Say around ten,” Tommy said. “I’ll tell Candy you’re coming. She loves company.”