

## Chapter 1

The maid found her.

She was in the tub with the water up to her neck. Room 21C at the Moonlight Motel on Fremont Street. Her eyes were open and her lips were parted, as if she'd been interrupted in the middle of a sentence.

A safety razor lay in the seashell soap dish. The faucet was running and Ferrari red bath water was overflowing and washing across the bathroom floor. The water had seeped into cracks in the fake Italian tile and then leaked through the ceiling of the room downstairs.

From there it had drizzled onto a sweet young thing from Sacramento who was giving what she hoped was the last blowjob of the night. Well short of the money shot she jackknifed off the muscle car guy beneath her and ran screaming out the door wearing little more than the blood on her back.

It was Monterey in August, when rich collectors, trophy wives and the world's most beautiful vintage cars all descended on the Monterey Peninsula for a weekend of

high-priced auctions, classic car shows and racing at Laguna Seca. The events brought flash and glamour to a scenic stretch of California coastline, and drew collectors and enthusiasts from all over the world. For three days, the roads leading into Monterey were gridlocked, the hotels were booked and it was impossible to get a table at the city's best restaurants. The hookers were back too, ready to cash in on the repeat business offered by men with appetites and the money to satisfy them. Murder, on the other hand, if it was murder, was making a first-time appearance.

Meanwhile, across town at the Marriott on Calle Principal in the heart of Monterey's historic downtown, the lights were still on in Connor's room. Over the course of three nights, at three different auctions, including one in a tent adjacent to the Marriott, he'd scored a '59 Maserati 3500 GT Vignale Spyder for a Silicon Valley software exec who got rich outsourcing jobs to Taiwan; won the bid on a Lotus Ford Cortina for a San Francisco surgeon who did brains and wanted to go racing; and bought a cherry MGA roadster for a divorcee who wanted to put the top down.

He had hoped to finish up the paperwork before he turned in for the night. The forecast was rain, and Connor never took his '67 Alfa Romeo coupe out in the wet. Rain meant rust for vintage cars, especially forty-year-old Italian classics. He figured if he left early enough he could beat the weather home.

Instead it was past two in the morning and he was on the phone with a sheep farmer in Australia who'd somehow forgotten about the time difference, and wanted Connor to forget about it too. His name was Derek Jarvis and he'd seen a rare Jaguar XK120 alloy roadster in the Christie's catalog for the auction at the Monterey Jet Center. Jarvis decided he wanted the car and asked Connor to bid on it. Only 240 alloy roadsters

were built between 1949 and 1950. They had aluminum bodies and overhead-cam straight-six engines, and were faster and more fun to drive than the steel-bodied versions that hit the States in the fifties. If you were lucky enough to find one it would cost you around two hundred grand in show condition.

“You get the Jag?” Jarvis asked.

“You know what time it is, Derek?” Connor rubbed his eyes. He was sitting at the desk in front of a pile of papers wearing a black Oakland P.D. sweatshirt and gray sweatpants.

“Sorry, mate. I forgot.”

Connor paused.

“Ray? You there, mate?”

Connor let him wait, then smiled.

“Yeah, I got it.”

Jarvis let out a victory cheer. Connor pulled the phone away from his ear. He thought of kangaroos and aborigines, chased by men like Jarvis in khaki jackets and Land Rovers.

“Well, done, Ray. Well done. What was the bid?”

“A hundred and eighty-eight thousand US.”

Jarvis whistled.

“How many bidders?”

“Three others beside you.”

“Wankers, all of ‘em. When’s it shipping?”

“Soon as I set it up.”

“When’s that?”

Connor rubbed his eyes again and glanced at the papers in front of him.

“Soon as I wake up,” Connor said, and hung up.

He glanced again at the papers and decided to tackle them in the morning. Connor hated paperwork. Especially at this time of night. He reached for a pack of Camel Lights in the coat slung over the back of the chair and tapped out a cigarette. He pushed back from the desk, went out on the balcony to grab a smoke.

There was a cool breeze blowing in from the bay, strong enough to make him cup his hand around the flame. He pulled the smoke down into his lungs and looked out at the marina. There was a full moon, and down by the water white yachts were gleaming as if they were under a spotlight.

A siren wailed, took Connor back to the shooting galleries south of the interstate in Oakland. The neighborhoods they called Killing Fields, Murder Dubs, Ghost Town. He’d worked them all in a dented Crown Vic black and white with puke stains in the back. But that was another life. Cop life. A life he left five years ago. He felt far from that now, standing on a top-floor hotel balcony overlooking the Monterey lights.

But he didn’t know about the blonde in the tub. Or why she would matter. What he did know was he was beat. He stubbed out the cigarette and went back inside and called it a night.