

Prologue

The Dark Side

He pulled the gun and laid it on the low table between us. The clamorous sounds of downtown Detroit suddenly grew muted, amplifying the stillness that filled the room.

This fucking doesn't look good.

My eyes never wavered from his gaze, yet I knew the gun was a snub-nosed Colt .38. Not big, but very lethal, especially at close range. There was maybe eight feet between us. The odds of him missing me were damn near zero.

I mustered every ounce of my street persona as William “Sonny” Sonetti, the alter ego I inhabited as a federal undercover agent with the Bureau of Narcotics. I permitted no fear or surprise to register. I let a small sneer of disdain tug at the corners of my mouth, nodding ever so slightly as we stared at one another.

“That make you feel better, does it?”

He continued to eye me, forearms resting on his knees, his long slender fingers dangling loosely as he sat on the couch in his second-floor walk-up. He straightened but did not lean back into the cushions. The gun remained within easy reach. I had been in Detroit only a few weeks, but I knew he was a major player among heroin dealers. He wasn't physically big, but he was menacing enough—even before he pulled the gun.

“You say you know Philly,” he said, appraising me coolly.

We sat opposite one another, the table and the gun between us. I didn't respond.

“Well, I know Philly,” he said, a small smile lighting his dark face. “Let’s you and me talk Philly.”

I pursed my lips, giving nothing away.

Know Philly? Oh yeah. I knew Philly. I’d worked the streets of Philadelphia for a year and a half before being transferred to Detroit. The bureau didn’t like to keep an undercover agent too long in any one locale. It wasn’t conducive to his health. But in the eighteen months I was there, I came to know the seamier, darker side of South Philly: the rank, sour-smelling bars and juke joints where connections are made; the shadowy heroin “shooting galleries” where hardened junkies struggle to find a vein to tap. I knew the shabby, filthy streets where drug dealers take your money and disappear, then several minutes later send their five-year-old daughters back up the sidewalk with their little purses swinging, smiling as they come up to where you’re sitting in your car, saying, “Hi, Sonny. My daddy told me to give this to you.”

Oh yeah, I *definitely* knew Philly. In ways most people couldn’t begin to imagine.