



Series concept by Daniel Knauf

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I. THE DETECTIVE:

RICO CRUZ was born a century too late.

Present day Los Angeles fits him like an ill-tailored suit. With his rough features, his unruly shock of dark hair, Cruz looks like a man who would be more comfortable tipping tequila with Pio Pico in *el Pueblo* than sipping latte on the corner of Sunset and Gower.

He's the kind of man who fills up a room by the sheer force of his presence—colors get a bit crisper, jokes get a bit funnier, and the next thing you know, you're telling him your life story, just thrilled as hell to bask in the 1,000 kilowatt light of his undivided attention.

Cruz will assume the best in a man until he's proven wrong. And when that happens, the die is cast. If he doesn't like you, he'll let you know it. After that, you have two chances of getting back in his good graces: Fat and thin.

If you're a friend, Cruz will stop a bullet for you. If not, he won't waste one on you. Unless you're begging for it.

Rico Cruz's father was the rarest bird in the Jack-Webb-Adam-12 LAPD of the 1960s, a Mexican cop, a beat-walker in the Valley Division. The old man bought it when a four-year-old kid picked up daddy's gun during a routine domestic and accidental squeezed one off. Cruz was fourteen.

Cruz's mother made him swear never to pin on a badge, then promptly drank herself into an early grave, leaving him and his kid sister, **MARIA**, orphans in their late teens.

When he was twenty, he worked full-time in a custom auto-shop, racing stock-cars and demolition derbies on the side. Most of his prize-money went to Maria to help her pay college tuition. When she suddenly died from a speedball at a frat party, he was stunned—he'd had no idea she was into anything harder than wine-coolers.

Everyone in the old neighborhood loved Maria.

But nobody was more devastated than Cruz.

He sold the family house, kicked around the country on a restored ElectraGlide, drinking hard, living hard. It took him three years to figure out that he could run away, but he couldn't get far from himself. Maura was in a grave and he was supposed to be the one who looked after her. And like any good Catholic boy, he knew there was penance to pay.

He decided, to hell with Mom. I'm gonna be a cop.

II. HIS RISE:

The Los Angeles Police Academy failed to knock off his rough edges, but what Cruz lacked in political savvy, he more than made up for in dedication, a raw talent for deductive logic and an innate sense of street-justice.

Within three years, he made detective. Within seven, he was bordering on legend, working Narcotics downtown, routinely making the DEA look like a pack of circus-chimps. Cruz and his squad chewed up the little fish and spit them out, chumming for the big sharks running the West Side.

His men loved him. Respect, admiration and loyalty—those things are nice, but they won't buy a ticket on the bus. Love is a different thing altogether, and Cruz's boys would sooner sell out their dear old mothers than give him anything but their best.

While a lot of cops might let their knuckles do the walking, Cruz was more likely to nail a suspect through a combination of psychological manipulation and the patient construction of a strong, unassailable case. This is a guy who found clues in places nobody even thought to look, who could take a half-baked, haphazard jumble of random relationships, and define a motive even a brain-dead downtown jury could understand.

That was the Cruz way.

It won him commendations and service awards and promotions. He was the pride of his superiors, the darling of the press, and the envy of his peers.

In short, he was the best damn cop the LAPD ever had in its splendid, sordid history. A dedicated straight-shooter with squeaky-clean baggage. Didn't owe anybody a damn thing. And at Parker Center, there's a word for a cop like Cruz.

That word is "doomed."

So nobody was surprised when he went down in '98.

III. HIS FALL:

Todd Sellars was the Carl Karcher of crank, a hot-shot rich kid with a Fortune 500 dad and a chain of methamphetamine labs in the valley, churning out kilos of the stuff and distributing it in bulk from Oxnard to H.B. through a loose confederation of surfers, psychos and skinheads.

And the kid was slick. Cruz jigged, Sellars jagged. He was just too oily to get pinned. Cruz brought his two best hound-dogs on the case, Guitierrez and Frost.

Eighteen months, half-a-dozen wasted search warrants, and three missing-presumed-dead

informants later, Guitierrez and Frost finally came to the brilliant conclusion that if they couldn't nail Sellars clean, they'd settle on nailing him dirty.

So four pounds of crystal meth just happened to turn up in the back of the kid's M5.

Maybe it was frustration, maybe it was bad judgment. Maybe it was just plain stupid. Whatever it was, it was damn sloppy.

A certain five-foot, two-inch Cajun *uber-lawyer* by the name of NORMAN FABREAU blew in on a blizzard of writs. Norm was the top guy when it came to sticky problems for L.A.'s Frappacino Set—the movers, the shakers, the politicians, pro athletes and studio chiefs and celebrities. Soup to nuts, DUI to murder one, Fabreau was guy at the top of everyone's Rolodex. Word was, Todd Sellars had him on speed-dial.

Fabreau didn't have to do much digging to find out that said crystal had been stolen from the evidence room three days before said bust.

Anyone else would've rolled over on those two knuckleheads, but Cruz was stand-up. He took the full hit. The Police Commission and I.A. knew that there must have been others in on the frame. Furious that he wouldn't rat out his boys, they referred the Cruz case to the D.A. who, with an election-year hard-on, threw the proverbial book at him.

Seven inside, three-and-a-half for good behavior.

IV. CRAWLING FROM THE WRECKAGE:

When Cruz got out of the joint, he found himself short one wife, one kid, and one career. Ex-felons can't carry heat, so moving into private-sector security was out of the question.

Although he was on good terms with his ex, he still had child support payments to contend with. Plus there were living expenses—essentials like take-out Thai noodles, beer and old movies. Plus shelter and clothing. And given the fact that Jeb Bush wasn't one of his drinking buddies, a presidential pardon didn't look to be on Cruz's immediate horizon.

About the only thing he was good at besides being a cop was his first love: Cars.

So Cruz opened a shop in North Hollywood, NoHo Custom Auto.

His specialty was the big, mean, bad-ass chariots Dodge/Plymouth kicked out in the late '60s—the Cudas, the Challengers, the Roadrunners. For giggles, he'd take in the occasional Firebird ragtop or Shelby-American, but his heart belonged to the Mopars. Nothing made his blood sing like the basso-thunder of a cherry-tuned 440 Magnum and the electric joy-buzzer vibration of a Hurst pistol-grip shifter. Except maybe a solid, clean bust—but that was, as the archeologists say, ancient history.

At least he thought so until the calls started coming in.

At first, it was old friends who needed help—the cheating wife, the missing kid, the bullshit slip-and-fall. Strictly on a non-professional, no-fee basis so he wouldn't get in dutch with the state for running private investigations without a license.

Pretty soon, some flannel-mouth must've mentioned that Cruz was moonlighting as a sorta-kinda-private-investigator to Norman Fabreau, Esq.

V. THE LAWYER:

Despite the fact that Fabreau had been instrumental in taking him down, Cruz always had a healthy admiration for the little Cajun

Back in his day, Cruz wouldn't let a case cross a prosecutor's desk unless the evidence was "Norm-proof." Sometimes, he'd even round up his boys and sit in on Fabreau's trials, watch him systematically eviscerate the Feds or some other law enforcement unit. Norman Fabreau had a gift for turning mountains of evidence into strip-mines of innuendo.

"How would you like," Cruz would whisper gleefully, pointing at some poor, pallid, dumb-ass FBI feeb choking on the stand under one of Fabreau's withering cross-examinations, *"to be that guy?"*

As for Norman, he respected Cruz's honesty, thoroughness and professionalism. They were friends the way two great opposing generals are friends. Good for a drink. Good for a laugh. Good for the occasional favor or advice. But not too close, because there was always the chance that one might have to kill the other at some point.

And when that day actually came, when Fabreau triggered one of the worst public shit-storms the LAPD had ever weathered, he deeply regretted taking Cruz down.

So it might've had more than a little to do with guilt over the Sellars affair when Fabreau called to offer Cruz investigative work. That, and the fact that he might get a top-shelf investigator at a bottom-shelf price. But Cruz said no—he was a parolee, and the last thing he needed was the hassles of working without a license or the I.R.S. crawling up his ass for taking money under the table.

Besides, NoHo Custom Auto was doing big business. The customer waiting list had spun out to almost five months and things were humming.

Only one small problem: Cruz was going broke.

There was overhead. There was insurance. There were parts and paint and Snap-On Tools. There was payroll. There was his two Rottweillers, Pico and Sepulveda. There was the fact that Cruz was deplorably sloppy with account receivables and late-pays.

Worst of all, there were the "spec restorations."

Every month or so, Cruz would tow some rusting hulk of Detroit arcana into the shop—a 1964 Polara Max Wedge or a 1970 Hemi 'Cuda—with an eye toward bringing it back from the dead and making a killing.

Cruz was never satisfied until the car was literally showroom new, pure bone-stock, down to the damn pushbuttons on the radio. In his enthusiasm, he'd inevitable plow too much money into the rolling sinkholes to ever hope to turn a profit. A prime example was a Challenger R/T convertible that sucked up over \$71,000.00 in parts, paint and labor, only to yield a lousy \$34,500 sale.

Pretty soon, those offers from Norman Fabreau were sounding pretty good. And eventually, they led to The Arrangement.

VI. THE ARRANGEMENT:

The Arrangement came about by accident.

Cruz was buffing a freshly restored 1969 Superbird to a high polish. Norm was giving him yet another one of his customary c'mon-man-can't-you-just-take-this-one-case hand jobs when he happened to notice the lovely, hugger-orange Detroit iron under Cruz's chamois.

"Is that a Roadrunner?" he asked, somehow failing to notice the foot-tall factory decal of Chuck Jones' famous cartoon bird chirping "bee-beep" on the rear quarter-panel.

"No," deadpanned Cruz, "it's a Studebaker Avanti."

"Aww, damn. That *is* a shame. Because the man I was just telling you about, my client? He says he'd give his left gonad for a primo Roadrunner."

After taking a moment to ponder why it is that brilliant professional men like Norman Fabreau invariably turn into brain-dead bimbos when it comes to automobiles, Cruz said, "Norm, it is a Roadrunner."

Fabreau asked how much he wanted for it. Cruz explained that there was a vast gulf between what he "wanted" for the car and what he could "get" for the car: He'd dumped over sixty-eight large into the Plymouth, and he'd be lucky to reel in thirty.

"You tell me you only work for the personal friends?" asked Fabreau.

"That's right. Close personal friends."

Fabreau smiled.

"If this man I told you about," he said slowly, choosing his words very carefully, "gave you \$75,000 for that *joli* ride, would it make him a close personal friend?"

VII. THE UPSHOT:

So Cruz took the gig.

Assisted by a ragged crew of friends and employees in the shop, he conducts investigations for "close personal friends" who happen to be willing to pay three-to-four times market-value for the vintage cars he restores.

In the meantime, he struggles to balance his on-again-off-again relationship with his beautiful ex-wife, Jolie—a woman he can't seem to fall out of love with, no matter how hard he tries. And then there's his daughter, Alex, who seems to hate his guts despite his best efforts.

They say wolves mate for life, and so did Rico and **JOLIE CRUZ**. Rico is as likely to spend the night at Jolie's ranch in Sunland as he is to sleep at his own place, a tidy little restored 1958 Air-stream trailer behind the shop. The fact that they've been divorced for over six years doesn't seem to make much of a difference as far as sex goes. But then, sex was never the problem between Rico and Jolie.

It was everything else.

THE UPSHOT (cont'd):

Similarly complex is his relationship with his 16 year-old daughter, **ALEJANDRA "ALEX" CRUZ**. Jolie insists on sending her to The Arroyo Academy, a rich-girl's prep-school in Pasadena. Between hanging out with millionaire's daughters, riding lessons and ballet, Alex barely has time to see her father. When she does, it's with acute embarrassment. The kicker is that Cruz is the one who pays her damn tuition.

After all, there's nothing more fun than footing the bill for your own child's estrangement.

Cruz's employees at NoHo Custom Auto serve as back-up in his investigations:

MARISA PEREZ, a former call-girl and junkie, divides her time between keeping the books and making sure the wheels don't fall off her boss's operation.

As Cruz says, "I got half a brain. I had to hire the other half."

She owes her life to Rico Cruz. He dragged her out of the gutter, helped her get clean and paid her tuition for Microsoft certification out of his own pocket. And it wasn't the first time he'd done it. Though he wasn't a sucker for every junkie-hooker with a pretty face, if he saw a flicker of determination and intelligence, he'd take them on as "personal projects."

A shrink might say his charity-work was due to guilt over his sister's death. Cruz would say, "No shit. So what?"

Sometimes it worked. More often, it didn't. But when you spend your spare time picking up sick baby birds, keeping them warm, feeding them with eyedroppers and teaching them to fly, you should get used to a thin success rate. In twenty years, Cruz never has.

When Marisa heard he was opening shop, she quit a six-figure IT job at Sun Microsystems to work for peanuts and giggles at NoHo Custom Auto. She's never regretted it. Not once.

CHUY VILLASENOR, his paint and body man, works stake-out and surveillance. A former car-thief, Chuy snagged enough Benzos and Beemers over his career to fill the A-Lot at a Lakers game. He supplemented his GTA income by fabricating clever, custom hidey-holes in the vehicles run by a gang of mules running junk up from Nogales.

Sweet-natured despite the baggies and gang-tatts, Chuy's a master of discretion when it comes to tailing cars—a regular invisible man.

At six-foot-four, a solid 290 pounds, **NILES CARTLAND**, an ex-pro rugby player, served two years in Australian Special Forces before he was summarily discharged for punching out an officious French officer during the Gulf War.

Cartland made his way to the States, finding a niche as the "big scary white dude" for several loan-sharks before coming to Los Angeles and perpetrating one of the richest bank heists in California history. Cruz arrested him when his partners decided to launder their cash through a gang of Jamaican dope-dealers in the Southbay.

In the joint, Niles was introduced to an industrial sewing-machine, and it was love at first sight. When he's not restoring Mopar interiors in the shop, he provides Cruz with back-up and muscle when the need arises.

And, knowing Cruz, the need arises fairly regularly.

VIII. THE SERIES:

The offbeat adventures of ENRICO "RICO" CRUZ, former LAPD detective, ex-con and inveterate gear-head who makes his living restoring classic 60's muscle-cars while providing services as a private investigator and security consultant on the side. The action takes place in and around Los Angeles, from the beaches to the desert to the megalopolis in between.

Cruz operates out of his North Hollywood body-shop, NoHo Custom Auto. In exchange for the purchase of his cherished-out Dodges and Plymouths (at grossly inflated prices), he provides investigative services for the wealthy clientele of Beverly Hills attorney, NORMAN FABREAU.

Cruz also performs pro bono work for his "close personal friends," an odd collection of cops, ex-cops, bikers, priests, hookers, nuns, thieves, and other assorted saints and sinners.

The show's tone will be seasoned by the dry, ironic wit of our smart-ass protagonist, splashed with a healthy shot of color through our supporting cast, guest-stars and their sometimes sordid, sometimes absurd, always interesting cases.

With its flawed protagonist, decidedly bizarre characters and off-the-wall, gritty stories, CRUZ is a reinvention of the television detective series cast in the sexy, smart cynical mold of films like GET SHORTY and SEXY BEAST.

NOTES:

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