

On The Grind
Chapter 2, Part 1
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Tony Filosianni's office was crowded with pissed-off people. Pissed about being dragged to the chief's office at twenty past midnight, pissed about the reason they were forced to be there. The LAPD sure didn't need another high-profile scandal right now, and that fact was etched on everyone's faces.

I immediately recognized all of the people standing there. The chief of police was dominating the large space. Usually a happy, pixiesque, round-faced presence, tonight Tony Filosianni scowled like a Chinese wood carving, his bald head shining in the bright overhead lights. Next to the COP was an assistant city attorney named Cole Nichols. The ACA didn't want to be there either, but he was filling in for City Attorney Chase Beal, who was up north on some kind of rubber-chicken junket.

Everybody knew Chase was planning on making a run for governor and was always out at fundraisers working on his war chest. Next to Nichols was my Peace Officers Union rep, Bob Utley. He was the only one to hesitantly engage my eyes. Bob was a big heavy guy with a Santa-friendly face who had twice successfully defended me against bogus charges at Internal Affairs. Next to Utley was the LAO, or head LAPD legal affairs officer, a tall black captain named Linc Something.

Next to him was yours truly in my borrowed Trojans sweatshirt and rain-soaked windbreaker. Behind me stood Lieutenant Matthews, the deputy commander of PSB. But by far the most bitter flavor in this alphabet soup was the chief of detectives. The COD was my own wife, Alexa. She stepped across the threshold seconds later and frowned.

Lieutenant Matthews closed the large double doors to the chief's office, signaling the start of the meeting.

"Detective Scully, I'm not sure you know FBI Agent Ophelia Love," Chief Filosianni said without a trace of the cordiality that usually marked his demeanor. He indicated a tall, lanky blonde in her mid-thirties whom I'd missed during my first quick scan of the room because she was seated against the far wall near a mahogany console.

Agent Love immediately stood at the mention of her name. She wore a cheap off-the-rack tan pantsuit and had a careless beauty that was partially disguised by rawboned farm-girl features, the most startling of which were piercing ice-blue eyes.

"Bob, what's going on?" I asked my union rep. I already knew the answer, but it's always better to play dumb at these things and let the other guy go first.

"Regarding the Venture investigation, you've been charged with felony case-tampering and blackmail," the chief said, cutting in and answering my question.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” My heart rate was inadvertently beginning to rise. *We’re into it now*, I thought.

“You can deny it, Detective, but your own partner was the one who brought this to our attention. And her concerns have been independently corroborated by Agent Love and the FBI.”

“Detective Quinn turned me in?”

Sally Quinn was my partner at Homicide Special. We had only been working together for about a year. She’d been out of rotation on maternity leave for the last six months and had just returned to duty.

“I only had time to glance at the charge sheet in the car. It says I intentionally lost evidence. I told Captain Calloway how those tapes went missing.”

“Unbeknownst to us, the FBI has been running their own surveillance on Harry Venture for half a year and they’ve got you and his wife on tape,” Chief Filosianni said.

What he was referring to was a Homicide Special case, which I had been working for two weeks. Harry Venture’s birth name was Aviv Zahavi, but he’d legally changed it when he came to America and went into the film business ten years ago, forming Venture Studios.

Harry was a fifty-year-old Israeli national who had made his initial fortune as a black market arms dealer in the Middle East. With the hundreds of millions he’d made in the gun trade, he moved to L.A. and went into the movie business, becoming one of Hollywood’s most successful action movie mini-moguls.

Money being the powerful aphrodisiac that it is, Harry soon seduced a budding young actress half his age named Tiffany Roberts, who was starring in low-budget genre movies when he met her. She was beautiful and had a Playmate’s body and, as the showbiz saying goes, was willing to do “nude” if it was shot “tastefully.” The gossip on the street was that Tiffany instantly saw what Harry could offer and became Mrs. Venture.

Big-budget movies and mega-stardom followed. But after she’d done “tasteful” nude scenes with some of Hollywood’s hottest leading men, Harry’s bedroom seemed to have lost some of its appeal and Tiffany had been quietly hunting around for a hit man to take her pudgy, foreign-born husband off the count. Word of this was quickly leaked to us by a street informant.

Since a murder solicitation by an A-list Hollywood star was an extremely sensitive situation, the squeal ended up going to Homicide Special, which is the elite LAPD homicide squad that typically handles high-profile, media-sensitive investigations.

I’d been working out of that rotation for almost three years and was assigned the Tiffany Roberts case. I was supposed to have been setting Tiffany up, posing as a hit man

and wearing a wire when meeting with her behind various discount stores, to work out the terms of the assassination of her husband Harry.

I was supposed to get her solicitation on tape, but told my captain that I had carelessly left the tapes in my car one night while I went into a Ruth's Chris to get something to eat. My car was broken into and my briefcase stolen. My boss, Captain Calloway, instructed me to reboot the deal and get her to repeat the offer of murder, but Tiffany became suspicious and broke it off. The case is currently in limbo. Now, apparently, the way they were reading it was that I had deliberately lost the tapes in return for some kind of blackmail payoff.

Of course, I'd seen all this coming. As soon as I'd reported the missing briefcase, the shit had started to ooze downhill just as I knew it would. It had ended up as felony case-tampering.

"Why is the FBI involved with this?" I asked, turning to face Case Agent Love.