

On The Grind  
Chapter 2, Part 2  
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She glanced at the ACA, Cole Nichols, who nodded his okay, so she started to tell me. She had a low, husky alto voice that didn't sound like it belonged inside her. The accent was from the South somewhere—the Carolinas or Tennessee, maybe. She was a no-nonsense fed whose demeanor told me she held me in a good deal of professional disdain.

"I'm here because after five years of working Harry Venture for gun smuggling, we finally convinced him to cooperate," she began. "He still has financial dealings with some of his old arms-dealing buddies from the Middle East. New Russian-made Kalashnikov 100 series submachine guns and PP-90 M-1s with nine-millimeter breaches suitable for NATO rounds are currently flowing into L.A.

The AK-100-series ordnance is on Homeland Security's watch list and we've pinned this smuggle to the Hispanic Eighteenth Street gangs in downtown L.A. They've established a new pipeline bringing this stuff into the country. They're smuggling it up from the Baja Desert in Mexico. Naturally, we didn't want Harry's wife to murder him in the middle of a federal op where he just became a cooperative witness. For two weeks we've been taping you taping her. Let's say your conduct was less than professional."

I glanced at Alexa, who was standing by the door, her face a frozen mask.

"We can play our surveillance videos for you, but unless you insist, out of deference to your wife I think it's better to say you're in the bag and let it go at that." Agent Love hesitated before continuing. "We accessed your bank statements and discovered you have a recent ten-thousand-dollar deposit, which none of your pay stubs or personal finances support. Unless you can tell us exactly where that ten thousand came from, then we're going to assume that you got it from Ms. Roberts in return for booting your undercover sting against her."

"Don't you have to prove that before just accusing me?" I challenged.

"We think we can," Chief Filosianni said. "Right now Harry Venture is going through his wife's bank withdrawals. If he finds one that was issued on or about the end of last month in the amount of ten thousand dollars, then that fact will be established and added to your charge sheet."

"This is all pretty damn circumstantial," I said. But I knew it wasn't. They would find that withdrawal slip. I was going down for this.

Cole Nichols, the ACA, said, "I'll take that kind of circumstantial case any day. I can also get the FBI video and, along with the fact that you reported your UC tapes stolen, it will make a very compelling picture for a jury."

"Then why am I here?"

"The city attorney and the feds both want to prosecute you, but I convinced the mayor and the federal attorney that this department doesn't need any more bad press or police department scandal," Chief

Filosiani said. "I'm willing to offer you a take-it-or-leave-it deal. You have to decide right now, tonight. It's off the table after this meeting."

"A deal?" I looked at Bob Utley, who gave me a hand gesture indicating I should shut up and let them finish. I ignored it.

"I don't want to cop to this flimsy bullshit."

"Your IA file is thick enough to choke a goat," Lieutenant Matthews chimed in from behind me.

"Nobody is going to believe anything you say. If I was you, I'd listen to the chief."

"So what are you offering?"

"Resign," the chief said. "Make a statement for the file indicating guilt so we don't have to worry about facing a lawsuit over it later. You'll cop to a lesser charge and then we'll dismiss you for cause and seal the case for the benefit of the LAPD. What really happened in this room tonight, the real reason for your dismissal, will remain a closely guarded secret."

"What about my pension?"

"You lose it. You confess to the lesser charge, waive your pension and quit," ACA Nichols said. "This is a great fucking deal, Detective. You don't deserve it. If the department wasn't still in PR trouble from the Rampart scandal, O.J. and the immigration rights melee, they wouldn't be cutting you this much slack."

"If I try this case, I promise a conviction. You'll do three to five, easy. Even if the sentence is halved for good behavior, that still puts you in the dog pile at state prison for at least two years. I'll make sure there's no special housing unit for you. A cop in gen pop is a prime target for yard aggression. That five-year stretch will turn into a death sentence."

I looked at Bob Utley. He was supposed to jump up and object, but he said nothing. Every time I glanced at Alexa, her face was cold with fury.

"Could I have a minute with my client?" Utley finally said.

We were shown into a little six-chaired conference room that adjoined the chief's office. Bob shut the door. When he turned, his eyes weren't Santa-friendly anymore. He was staring daggers. Like all honest cops, he hated police corruption. He knew I was dirty, and it pissed him off.

"They can't" I started.

"Take it," he interrupted.

"Admit I was on the take? That I took money to boot the case?"

“You tanked a solicitation-of-murder investigation and got into a sexual relationship with that movie star. I know it, and they all know it. Take the deal. It’s a lifesaver.”

“And sign away a twenty-year pension?”

“If you’re convicted, you’ll lose your pension anyway. If you fight this, you’ll go down, Shane. They’ve got a very tight case backed by videotape of you and Tiffany Roberts swapping spit all over town.”

“But”

“Take the fucking deal! You’re damn lucky the department doesn’t want to eat any more bad press.” His voice was rising in anger. We’d been friends for years, but I could tell he had nothing but contempt for me now.

“What’s the lesser charge they’re gonna accuse me of?”

“Obstruction of justice. It’s a misdemeanor requiring no time served but results in your immediate resignation without benefits.”

“Can’t I at least have a day to think about it?”

“No. The chief said the offer comes off the table the moment this meeting is over. After tonight, you’ll face the full IA charge sheet.”

“How come I get the feeling you’re on their side?”

“Shane, take the deal.” Frustration with me was packed into every word.

“Okay, okay,” I said. “Calm down.”

“Okay, what?”

“I’ll do it. I’ll sign the damn confession.”