

Chapter One

from *Big Fat F@!K-up*

by Lawrence Allan

It was a weekend afternoon in L.A., so traffic wasn't terrible. Just bad. A case of mine had taken an unexpected turn, and I nervously gripped the wheel of my beloved blue Toyota as I chased a black Ford sedan west on Venice Boulevard in Mid-City. We had been weaving through traffic since Koreatown. Three LAPD cruisers were behind us with their sirens screaming. And I was making a phone call.

Over in West Hollywood, Moe picked up on the third ring. He's my neighbor, someone I can rely on. Which is great because, at that moment, I needed his help. I didn't see this ending well.

"Jimmy! What's going on?" He was bright and cheerful, probably lounging on his couch, an iced hibiscus tea in hand, fending off the summer heat. "You have to turn on Channel 5. There's a chase on. It's amazing." He practically sang the last word.

I glanced into the sky. There was a police chopper and, behind that, Channel 5's Eye in the Sky. I turned my attention back to the Ford in front of me and tightened my grip on the wheel. "Yeah. Uh. It's me. I'm in the chase." And it all felt somehow... *familiar*.

Moe's voice tightened. "Why is he chasing you? What did you do?"

"I'm chasing *him*."

"Why in the *hell* are you doing that?"

That was a legit question on Moe's part. I do have a history of making bad decisions. Before I could justify this as work-related, the Ford made a sharp left. I did the same, barely

making it through the intersection as a couple of cars slammed on their brakes. The cops did the responsible thing and slowed down, taking their time. Show-offs.

“I need you to do me a solid. I need you to call my mom.”

Moe was silent. Finally, he asked, “Are you high right now? On pills?”

That’s when the neurons locked into place and I remembered why this felt familiar. More than a few years ago, after I had cratered my acting career, I had led the police on a slow-speed chase through the Hollywood Hills while on a combination of booze and painkillers. I really wanted some tacos and knew I shouldn’t have been behind the wheel, so I decided the responsible thing to do was to drive really slowly. However, when you ignore every stop sign and stoplight, you’re still a traffic hazard. Even at fifteen miles an hour. The whole thing ended with my crashing, if you could use that word, into a grapefruit tree and becoming a viral clip on YouTube for about three months.

“No. I’m not.” I licked my lips. I hadn’t realized how much I was sweating. High-speed chases are terrifying. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. “This is totally work-related.”

“Jimmy.” Moe used his Dad Voice. “Let *the cops* handle it.”

He was probably right.

“I can’t.” I had to see this through to the end. This elderly Korean couple — Mr. and Mrs. Li — had hired me because a pushy guy kept coming around wanting to buy a painting they had. It was sentimental to them; their only son, who had passed away, had given it to them. But maybe, for the right price, they’d be willing to part with it. After all, they had their twilight years to think of.

I yelped as I swerved out of the way of a slow-moving food truck.

They called me because they were getting nervous. The guy seemed desperate and they wanted to know if he was legit. Spoilers: He wasn't. When we confronted him, he took the painting and drove off. That's when I decided to do right by them and set off in pursuit. Like I said, I wasn't always known for making good choices.

The Ford screamed through another intersection, turned left, and roared down a narrow side street. I followed.

"Just call my mom," I told Moe. "I'm going to need a lawyer!"

The Ford was heading toward a park.

"You stop the car," Moe ordered. I could tell he was pacing in his apartment. "Let the cops handle it. *You* call your mom!"

The Ford stopped at the park with smoking tires, bumping up against the curb. Families started to scatter. The driver jumped out of the car and headed into the park. In his left arm was the painting, still framed. Fuck.

"She told me I couldn't call her anymore if I got into trouble!" I slammed my brakes, sliding to a stop next to the Ford. Over the years I had seriously pushed my luck with her, and now that I was working at her firm, she would prefer that I kept my nose clean.

"Don't get out of the car. Don't get out of the car!" begged Moe, his voice rising higher.

I got out of the car.

"Call my mom!" I shouted before tossing the cell onto the seat and running after the driver.

I'm five foot seven, a scrappy one fifty, but I'm not what you call a natural runner. Sure, I can put one foot in front of another, but it's awkward and has resulted in me getting caught while

my faster friends got away.

I saw a couple of moms and dads ignoring their kids on the playground and pointing their phones toward us to record the action. Later, they would see their footage on the news and get a taste of fleeting fame.

The driver had reached the edge of the park, tossed the painting over the fence, and was now struggling to follow it. He looked like a high school football player who had gone soft. He was about forty years old and wore a decent brown suit, the kind you get at a mall, with a white button-down shirt and cheap shoes. That was my first clue about this guy. Never trust cheap shoes.

The guy stopped trying to hop the fence, reached into his coat, and pulled out a gun. Looked like a semiautomatic something. I don't know. Guns aren't my thing, but I knew what they could do, and he was pointing this one at me. I stumbled to a stop and put my hands in the air.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," I said.

The black metal of the gun glinted in the sunlight. I hadn't expected this. This was a guy who couldn't keep a job for more than six months. He was the sort to buy the first round, max out his credit cards, and be the last one to leave the party because he had one more story to tell. He was desperate, but nothing in his life said he was "hold someone at gunpoint" desperate. Guess I overlooked something.

He spoke through clenched teeth. "This is how things are going to go."

I frowned. Was this guy serious? Do he *not* see the cops? The chopper? What made him thing *he* was in charge of this party?

“Drop the weapon! Now!” Three cops, weapons drawn, were approaching from behind, step by step, moving as one, with me stuck in the middle — the perfect place to be killed in a crossfire.

I wondered if this was how I was going to go out. Would it look good? Would *I* look good as my body was riddled with bullets, like when Sonny got it in *The Godfather*?

Jesus. What was I thinking? That’s a terrible way to go.

I turned to the cops, hands still high in the air. My heart pounded in my chest. Or was that the helicopters that hovered over us? I could see the other cops clearing out the park, kids clutching their parents’ chests, strollers rolling away, and the yellow tape coming out.

“Guys, let’s be cool, OK?” I said to the three cops with the guns. “No one wants to get shot here.”

Honestly, I wasn’t worried about them. I was worried about the other guy. I turned around to find him covered in sweat, trying to figure out who to target with his gun.

“There’s no way this goes good for you,” I told him, “if you don’t lower the gun. Like, look around. They have you totally covered.”

The driver took that moment to look around, and one of the cops decided to take a step forward. The driver gripped his weapon and aimed it at her. All around me the tension ramped up as the cops stopped moving and squared up, ready to pull their triggers.

“Hey, hey, let’s not escalate!” I shouted.

The cops checked in with each other, wondering if they should listen to this asshole. I was really hoping they would because my plan was to not have this case end in a shooting. I was thinking I could talk the guy down. In my previous life as an actor, I had been really charming.

And during my downward spiral into drugs, I got away with so much because I could spin around studio execs, my agent, my friends, even my family, with words.

The guy with the gun, he was about to get the Jimmy Cooper treatment.

I took a deep breath and told him, “OK, just so you know, they might shoot you. Live. On TV.” I pointed up to the Channel 5 chopper. “Is that how you want to go down?”

The driver swallowed hard.

“Do you have a mom or a dad?”

“I, uh, I got both,” he replied.

“OK. Great. Nuclear family.” Some people are lucky that way. “Now, just imagine how they would feel watching you get shot.”

The driver looked back at the cops, who were keeping their eyes trained on him. I leaned into his field of vision and gave him my best encouraging smile, hoping to give him that extra nudge toward making the right choice.

Finally, the driver dropped his gun onto the grass and raised his arms in surrender.

I started breathing again.

Two cops swarmed him, taking him to the ground with shouting and grunts. I watched the handcuffs come out. That’s when I felt the third cop grab my right arm and twist. As pain shot up into my shoulder, I asked to no one in particular, “What the fuck?” I tried to turn to repeat my query, but I was being thrown to the ground.

“Dude!” I gasped, looking up over my shoulder at the cop, “I’m the good guy!”