Delinquency Enforcement Agency

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I shaved an ounce or two off the top for my own stash. This was the quality shit, something we just got from a bust. I swiftly packed the smoke into a duffel bag and nodded to Cap as I left. Cap was one of the good guys, a moralist. He asked me once while I was flying the ‘copter what I thought the biggest issue was with our drug tactics and I told him I thought it was the cops, knowing damn good and well that I was one of them. He smiled, slapped me on the back, and told me I was a good man. Recently, he’d been talking a lot about something called “expansion due to the growing contraband situation” and “trying to clean out the system” but to be frank I just zone out when he talks.

        When I got home, Monica was using some of the plants as ramps for her toy cars and I told her to stop, that the “flowers” were very fragile. She pouted at me and begrudgingly headed up the stairs to our living room. I have to convince her that this was daddy’s gardening project so she wouldn’t blab to one of her teachers and have Jenkins come arrest me. I march back upstairs after I make sure everything’s okay and I ask Monica if she’s ready to go to her mother’s for the weekend. She nods yes and I speed over to Shelia’s joint. We split about three years ago, with her threatening to take Monica and bounce town, but I got Cap to call the judge up and get me custody during the divorce. Amazing what connections can do. Shelia stands in the doorway, cigarette in hand, and glares at me. Our couple’s therapist eventually just told us to see each other at birthdays and weddings. She’s kept her end of the bargain at least.

        The next day I stumble out of bed and put on my Drug Enforcement jacket. It’s time to sell. I drive down to South Main and set up shop behind Lyle’s Dry Cleaner’s. We play poker in his backroom on Tuesdays and I give him part of the cut for the space so he tends to ignore what’s going on. Agent Haynes and Clinton pull up, sirens blaring, still laughing at themselves after three damn years. These two are selfish fucks. Every time Cap and the Mayor come up with some new initiative to “clean the streets,” they hop on for their own personal gain, arresting small time dealers and crooks to get brownie points. Needless to say, they’ve been rising in the ranks. I sell them two dime bags and start to send them on their way, when Haynes asks me if I’m nervous.

        “About what?”

        “The new guy. Cap says it’s some sort of city initiative to crack down on corruption or some other vague bullshit like that.” I laugh it off and tell Haynes he must be kidding me. Every agent under the age of 30 comes to me since they know I won’t rat.

        Hell, I tell him, they’re basically my constituency.

        After I sell to a few greasy faced teenagers, I decide to pack up and head home. 80 bucks ain’t bad. I pull out a bottle of Peach Schnapps till the room can’t stand still and pass out watching Tiger miss a putt. My last ethanol-driven thought is about the new guy and how in the hell I’m gonna reel him in.

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        I jolt awake on Monday and see that I’m already late. Shit, here we go. I speed down the interstate not really paying attention to anybody but myself. I think about how Cap’s gonna have my ass for this, but then shrug it off. They can’t fire the only DEA pilot for at least 100 miles. When I get to the station, I see all the guys crowding into the meeting room, or Pigpen as the HR department likes to call it, and I quickly file into place. I remember the time Agent Sanchez replaced Cap’s state map with a picture of him drunk off his ass at the department Easter party the previous year. The room cracked with laughter and Cap just sat there with his head in his hands. He’s like that sometimes, constantly fretting over “the public opinion” as he puts it. Cap tells everybody to shut their yaps and gives a small speech.

        “As you all know, we here at the department have been concerned with the growing drug problem here in the state…” I start to zone out and think about how I have to pick up Monica tonight. I also think about the fact that some of the local kids want me to expand my operations a little and get them something harder. I’m cut off by a standing ovation and everyone’s looking to the front of the room at the clean cut, bright eyed square we’re calling a newbie. I lean over to Hopkins and ask what the hell he was even here for. Hopkins was one of the older guys who’d been with the department since damn near the beginning. He’d seen everything from “Just Say No” to Chavez. To put it simply, he’s about as anti-drug as Nancy Reagan and the Pope put together. Hopkins tells me that the state has decided having two copter’s in the air is better than one. I cringe. One of the damn reasons I hadn’t been caught yet was the fact I could just avoid my own house during fly overs. Oh well, I think. He looks fresh out of flight school, so there’s an upward chance I can get him to buy from me, like all of the other young guns in the department. Cap dismisses the meeting and I climb to the roof, ready for the week’s inaugural run. I hop in the chopper and scream when I see the kid smiling at me in the seat. The kid seems kinda hurt, so I try and fake a laugh to lighten the moment. He gives me a half assed smile and introduces himself.

        “I’m Richard,” he says. “But most everybody calls me Dick, which I guess takes on a new meaning now that I’m a cop right?” The kid chuckles a little bit and I give him a courtesy laugh. Clean jokes were never really my thing. As I’m about to return Dick’s favor, I hear the side doors open and Cap hops in with Hopkins.

        “What are you doing in here?” I shout as the rotors begin to creak out of their temporary slumber.

        “I figured I’d head along for the ride on this one, since its Agent Kelvin’s first mission with us.” Cap winks at Dick and you can almost see his head swell with a toxic mixture of pride and embarrassment. I shake my head and yell ‘Seatbelts on!’ over the wailing motor. We all put on our earmuffs and we’re off. I decide to take an average route, over one of the poorer hick-towns where the dope trade is bigger than church, while Hopkins runs the screen, till Cap tells me to fly due west. I feel my pulse drop. Right over my place. The kid sees me swallow hard and looks a little confused. I tell him it’s just my allergies as make the Helo do a solid 90 degree turn.

I feel the sweat start to drag its way across my back. Oh fuck. Ohhhhh fuck. What if they find the operation? Cap would never let me stay after that and Hopkins is too old to know what the hell is going on. Plus that kid. That damn kid. I’ve got no way to twist his arm in this one, no way to get him to back me up on this. I see my house on the horizon and close my eyes. I say a silent goodbye to Monica, to anybody I care about, to the life that was about to be thrown in jail with me, the only difference being that it’ll get capital punishment. When I open my eyes, we’ve already passed my place up.

I feel like an Edwardian Grand Piano has been lifted off my chest and breathe a weighted sigh of relief. Cap tells me he thinks that’s enough for the day and decides to end this “training course.” I smile and tell him, all right, we’ll be back before you can say busted. I start to work out how I’m gonna get the kid in on the deal, how to make sure the event I fear most never comes to fruition.

I decide to get Clinton in on it, try to get him to invite the kid to some pro drug rally in his basement, when I look out the window and see three suits all standing on the helipad. I turn back to ask Cap what this is all about when I see the kid has his gun drawn on me. Cap looks me in the eye and says

        “I expected better out of you. You’ve embarrassed the whole department and, thanks to you, we’ve got the FBI crawling up our asses. Just be thankful Agent Haynes alerted me to your little ‘side venture’ before you got yourself killed, or worse, someone else in the department.”

I look at Hopkins, trying to find some sympathy in this abyss of disaster but all I find is a shaking head and sad eyes. I think about Monica growing up without a dad and a scar for the rest of her life, having a daddy in prison. I think about the embarrassment my parents would feel, shunned by the whole town with a son hustling prison cells now. I think about my life, or the ruins of it, haunting me sitting 10 foot cell. All these horrors force me to do the drastic.

I slam the chopper off and hop out the door, head first. Hell, I think, you’re okay with this. Maybe my own kid can be better than me, do something besides rip of high schoolers and her own co-workers. With my last few seconds on, or rather before, the Earth, I send Monica a silent prayer and give in.