

Out of the Closet and into the Frying Pan By tera_gram

Rating: NC-17 for oral sex.

Pairing: Shawn/Lassiter; overtones of Gus/Juliet

Warnings: Shassie. M/M oral sex.

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Summary: Lassiter breaks the law and learns more than he bargained for.

Lassiter slipped the lock pick set into his pants pocket and turned the handle on the door of the Psych office. The lock had been easy enough. Security obviously wasn't a priority for Spencer, but he was surprised that Guster hadn't insisted on a higher quality system.

I guess we know who wears the pants in that relationship, Lassiter thought.

He stepped inside and closed the door behind him. He had now committed criminal trespass. But some things had to be done, however distasteful. Breaking section 603 of the California Penal Code was the lesser of two evils when compared with allowing Spencer to have his way with the Santa Barbara Police Department. Solving the mystery of how he was pulling off this psychic act was worth bending a few rules. Or committing a misdemeanor, as the case may be. Sargeant Joe Friday wouldn't have searched a suspect's room without a warrant, but then he didn't have someone like Spencer pushing his way into all his cases and making him look like a fool.

He went directly to Spencer's desk, identifiable by the toys, half-empty packs of Red Vines, and notepad full of doodles. By contrast, the other desk was a neat and orderly workspace. There were times when he wondered whether Guster might not be the brains behind the whole Psych operation, and just be using Spencer as a front, like a magician used flash paper to distract the audience from his sleight of hand.

He pulled open a drawer and began to rifle through it. It contained five copies of People magazine. Spencer had drawn glasses and beards on the celebrity faces and written mocking comments in the margins. He stuffed the magazines back inside and moved to the next drawer. It contained a game of Ants In The Pants and a copy of the crime section of The Courier, three weeks old. Spencer had scrawled notes on each story. "They should ask Mr. Hernandez about the broken window." "Mrs. Carpenter isn't really a witness." Another read simply, "The clerk did it."

Lassiter wrinkled his forehead and glared at the paper.

Is Spencer keeping track of cases we've solved? He wondered. *And if so, why is he*

writing his notes in the newspaper?

Then he noted that one of the stories identified a criminal for a case that was still open – the theft of a city-owned sculpture.

No. It's not possible, Lassiter thought, alarm beginning to rush through him like a fever. Spencer couldn't have written these notes before the crimes were solved. The crime section isn't a Sudoku. You don't just sit there and solve it over breakfast.

Suddenly he heard voices and the jangling sound of keys.

Damn! They were back too early. His previous scouting missions had clearly indicated that when Spencer and Guster left their office they were gone an average of 20 minutes. This was barely five.

He stuffed the newspaper back into the drawer and closed it as quickly as possible, cursing Spencer for being so unreliable as to interrupt his break-in. Lassiter glanced about desperately, spotted what he hoped was a back door, and went through it just as Shawn and Gus entered the office, arguing. It took only a moment for him to realize that he had just stepped into a large storage closet.

He muttered a word of which his mother would not have approved.

“No Shawn,” Gus was saying as he entered. “Danny Pintauro was the kid from Who’s The Boss. He came out as gay in 1997. You’ve confused him with Jeremy Miller, who played Ben on Growing Pains.

“Are you sure?” Shawn asked.

“I’m sure.” Gus nodded. “The Growing Pains kid is married to a woman.”

“Maybe I’m thinking of the other brother,” Shawn said.

“No, you’re not,” Gus said. “The other Weaver son was Kirk Cameron. He went on the O’Reilly Factor and talked about how he opposes same-sex marriage. So I don’t think he’s gay. Unless you’re arguing that everyone who dislikes gay people is secretly gay.”

“Well they are,” Shawn said. “How else do you explain where all the gay people with no style or sense of humour are? They’re in church and congress, texting obscene messages to their male underlings.”

“I don’t even think *you* agree with what you said.” Gus wrinkled his brow and stared at his friend.

“I still think it would make for fun television,” Shawn said. “One’s a proud gay man and the other’s a repressed Christian homophobe. But they’re roommates. Hilarity and sexual tension ensue. We could call it One Way or Another. It could go on after re-runs of Touched By An Angel.”

“Your premise is artificial and forced,” Gus objected. “Why wouldn’t they just realize they’re incompatible and move out?”

“I don’t know.” Shawn shrugged. “Maybe they’ve been sentenced to live together by the courts.”

“What court does that?” Gus asked.

“Joe Pesci was sentenced to live in his own tenement in The Super,” Shawn said.

“That was a punishment for his being a slumlord,” Gus responded. “What kind of court sentences you to live with someone specific?” He shook his head. “It makes no sense.”

“I think we could work out the bugs.” Shawn leaned back in his chair, put his feet up on the desk, and pulled a red vine from its package. “I’ll hammer out a treatment and we can email it to that cousin of yours who interns for that talent agency.”

“He’s my second cousin,” Gus corrected. “And he’s trying to get attention for his own scripts.” Gus didn’t add that if he were going to tap his cousin for a favour it would be to pass along his own idea for a weekly crime drama set in pharmaceutical supply company. “You know,” he added. “You only come up with these ridiculous sitcom ideas when your personal life is in a slump.”

“It’s not a slump,” Shawn said. “The tide ebbs and flows. We wax on and wax off. Although lately it has been more waxing off than on.”

“That is, without a doubt, one of the crudest metaphors I’ve ever heard you use,” Gus said.

“Who says it’s a metaphor?”

“Everyone has dry patches now and then,” Gus said. “I’ve had some.” There was a pause before he added, “Back in high school.”

“Yes,” Shawn said, “but there were good reasons for your dry stretches in high school, Gus. Mine is inexplicable.”

“What reasons?” Gus frowned.

“I have two words for you: Hammer Pants.”

“That was one time!” Gus objected.

“You still wore them. And they were like Kryptonite to women.”

“I think you’ve misunderstood how Kryptonite works, Shawn,” Gus grumbled. “But don’t try to make this about me. I’m happy with my love life. It’s you that’s having a slump.”

“Actually, there is someone I’m kind of interested in,” Shawn said.

“Well, then you should ask her out,” Gus suggested. “I don’t want to sound like Henry here, but you’re not getting any younger.”

“It could complicate our working relationship,” Shawn said.

“Is it Juliet?” Gus demanded. “Because I distinctly recall declaring dibs on her.”

“Gus—” Shawn began, but he was cut off quickly.

“No Shawn! I said dibs when we were at the Spelling Bee. You heard me just fine, and we both know it. You can’t rightfully ask her out unless I relinquish my dibs. Those are the rules.”

“It’s not Juliet. It’s actually not a girl at all. It’s a guy.”

Gus was silent for a few moments, then took in a deep breath and slowly let it out again.

“Please say it isn’t me,” Gus said evenly.

“It isn’t you.”

“Thank-you Jesus!” Gus let out a long sigh and Lassiter heard the squeak of his office chair as Gus collapsed into it.

“It’s Lassiter,” Shawn said, his voice perfectly deadpan.

“Is this a joke?” Gus asked, taking the words directly from Lassiter’s own mind. “I did not just hear that.”

“I like him. He’s got dreamy blue eyes and he carries a gun. What’s not hot about that?” When Gus didn’t reply Shawn added, “Come on! Admit that you see this. He’s smart, brave, and hot. Hell, he’s a plane crash and a few operations away from being the Six Million Dollar Man.”

“First of all,” Gus said, “We’re nowhere near the point where we could make an injured astronaut into a cybernetic agent. There is some promising research involving connecting

computers to the human brain, but that means we're closer to making a Robocop."

"I doubt that Lassiter has even *seen* Robocop," Shawn said. "Although he would probably admire the precision of his shooting."

"Second of all," Gus added, "you should just forget about liking Lassiter because Lassiter hates you. Actually hates you. As in, I think he'd like to hit you really hard."

"I didn't say our relationship wouldn't have stumbling blocks."

There was a long silence, broken by Gus' laughter. "I get it. Okay, Shawn, you win."

"Win what?" Shawn asked innocently.

"You do this every few years," Gus said. "You get all excited about some guy just to remind me that you *claim* to be bi."

"Claim?"

"That's right, claim. You never go through with anything. In all the years I've known you I've never seen you go on a date with a guy. Not one date."

"I've slept with guys," Shawn said.

"Sure you have," Gus said skeptically. "I'd be willing to bet that the last time you shared a bed with a member of the same sex you were both wearing footy pajamas."

"Those are making a huge comeback for adults," Shawn protested.

"Let's just say that I accept your fictional bisexuality," Gus said. "So you can drop this imaginary crush on Detective Lassiter and go back to being the shallow skirt chaser that we both know you are."

Gus turned on his computer and began to check his email. Shawn opened a drawer and pulled out a copy of *People*.

"Gus, dude, you've got to stop moving my stuff," Shawn said.

"I haven't touched your stuff," Gus said.

"Liar liar pants on fire." Shawn held up the magazines. "These were arranged in order of Kelly Osbourne's weight loss and they're all out of order now. Thus, like James Caan with the penguin that always faces south, you've been undone by your lack of attention to detail."

"I haven't touched your copies of *People*," Gus said. "You're finally losing your mind."

Or someone's Gaslighting you."

"That might be a helpful statement if I knew what it meant."

"It's a movie," Gus said. "Ingrid Bergman, Charles Boyer. Her husband tries to make her think she's crazy so he can get her money. It's a classic. A young Angela Lansbury plays their maid and—"

"You know what I could go for right now?" Shawn cut in, sounding distracted. "Lime popsicles."

"Really?" Gus said, hesitantly. "I don't want to spoil dinner. It's the third Wednesday of the month. That means burritos and watching *The Wire* on DVD."

"There's always room for burritos. I'm going to the 7-11 for a popsicle right now. Come with me."

"I'm fine," Gus objected. "Research actually shows that eating something sweet before dinner impairs digestion."

"I'm buying," Shawn offered.

"Let me grab my jacket," Gus said as he shut down his computer.

Lassiter waited until the office had been silent for at least two minutes before he stepped out of the closet. Forgetting his initial mission entirely, he walked quickly to the front door and slipped outside. He didn't stop until he was two blocks away, at which point he leaned against the shingled wall of a take-out stand and breathed while his mind reeled.

Lassiter's thoughts were still in hyperdrive two days later, when Shawn Spencer and Burton Guster strolled casually into his crime scene on the West Beach boardwalk, eating corn dogs.

"So help me Spencer," Lassiter warned, "If you get food in my crime scene—"

"You'll what?" Shawn asked, smiling. "Spank me?"

Lassiter had to bite his lip to hold in his retort, instead muttering "you wish" to himself once Shawn was out of earshot.

As Lassiter looked at the man who lay crumpled on the smooth concrete he had difficulty keeping his mind on the job at hand. Sure, he saw the blunt force trauma to the front temple, the overturned garbage can, and noticed the injuries to the victim's knuckles that suggested a struggle. And he noticed the food stains and smell of stale alcohol on the vic's clothing, which said "bar fight" to him. But he was doing it all on automatic pilot.

His brain was more interested in going over what he'd heard Shawn say in the Psych office Wednesday night. *Could Spencer have known I was there the whole time?* He wondered. *Could everything he said to Guster have been some kind of joke?* He could imagine the two of them holding in their laughter and pointing to the closet as they said their lines to one another. *Or is it possible that Spencer really does have some kind of a crush on me?*

“Hey Lassie!” Shawn suddenly appeared at his shoulder, corndog free, peering down at the corpse. “Ow! That must have hurt. Reminds me of that scene from the Untouchables.”

Lassiter walked over to a refuse bin nearby and looked inside, hoping to see a discarded weapon. Whatever had dented their vic's skull had been big and heavy, like a pipe. He'd have to get a uniform to collect the trashbag and go through it back at the station.

Shawn followed him. “I sense this was a barfight,” he said, placing his hand to his temple.

“Great guess, Braniac,” Lassiter muttered. His tone was sour, but inside he couldn't help wondering if Shawn had meant any of those things he'd said about him being smart, brave and hot, or if it had all been a joke at his expense. He could see Guster in his peripheral vision, but he didn't seem amused. He seemed more intent on not looking over at the body.

“Dude! Nice comic book reference,” Shawn said.

He slapped a hand onto Lassiter's shoulder and left it there. It immediately became the only thing Lassiter could think about. *Was this one of Spencer's usual shoulder slaps, he wondered, or did it mean something? Had they all meant something? Had all his inappropriate touching been an attempt to communicate sexual interest?*

By the time he pulled his focus back Guster was mid-sentence. “But in all fairness,” he was saying, “Brainiac has a twelfth level intellect.”

“Right,” Shawn agreed. “And I'm level five, maybe six, max. “Still, I didn't know that you'd been getting your geek on. You and Gus should hit the convention circuit together. You wouldn't happen to have one of the classic Star Trek uniforms in your closet, would you?”

“No,” Lassiter replied, wondering if the reference to closets was coincidental or meant as a hint. “I don't dress up in fake uniforms,” he added.

“Unless it's the civil war,” Shawn said.

“The Civil War actually *happened*, Spencer. Those uniforms are real.”

“Fine! You win. I accept that wearing a replica uniform, for a war you weren’t actually alive for, isn’t playing dress up. Happy now?”

“Not really.” He walked around the body, removing himself from Shawn’s touching range. “Let’s all try to focus on the body, shall we? I’m thinking he came from a bar or restaurant around here. We’ll get a couple of uniforms to canvas the area.”

“Or, we could just ask his spirit,” Shawn said cheerfully, and leaned in close to the body. “What’s that?” he asked the corpse, “You say you went to...” Shawn’s nose twitched, as if he were either smelling the body or impersonating a character from *Bewitched*. “...the Union Ale Brew Company on State St.” Shawn stood up again. “He says their Coconut Mocha Imperial Stout is to die for. Not that he intended to literally die, of course.”

Lassiter grimaced. “Does he happen to say who killed him?”

“No,” Shawn admitted. “He was pretty drunk. Claims it was all a blur. Although he does mention that his wallet is missing.”

“Great.” Lassiter sighed. *How does Spencer know these things?* Still, they’d have found out about the missing wallet once the coroner gave them the go-ahead to search the body. “If you’re done we’ll try some actual police work and trace his movements last night.”

“No problemo, Lassitero.” Shawn joined Gus at his spot several yards away from the body. “We’ll do it Carlito’s way and interview some barflies.”

“I haven’t seen that movie,” Gus said.

“Barfly, or Carlito’s Way?” Shawn asked.

“Either, actually.”

“I’ve seen both,” Shawn said as the two men walked out off in the direction of State St. “And let me just say, they were no Corky Romano.”

By Friday evening Lassiter was writing the report on the DB they’d found on West Cabrillo. Spencer had been correct. A visit to the Brew Company had turned up a credit card slip, a name for their vic, and a witness who saw him get into an argument with two men who left just after he did. The descriptions matched two perps known to the department and they cracked within an hour of questioning, each blaming the other and insisting they’d intended to scare him, not kill him.

Criminals are stupid, Lassiter reflected, not for the first time. *Being hit several times in the head with a heavy flashlight would certainly be scary, but only an imbecile would*

expect it to be non-lethal.

The paperwork completed, Lassiter collected his belongings and drove to Tom Blair's Pub for a late supper and enough alcohol to quell the Spencer-related clatter in his head. He hid himself in an isolated corner booth where he could have time and space to work out what was really going on and what, if anything he ought to do about it.

As he ate a large order of fish and chips and drank his second glass of scotch he realized that the idea that Spencer might really see him as akin to Steve Austin wasn't unpleasant. In fact, it was kind of thrilling. He'd loved *The Six Million Dollar Man* as a kid. He'd even had the action figure with the bionic eye you could look through. But he'd never seen himself in Steve Austin. He'd always figured he was closer to Frank Pembleton on *Homicide*: smart and ambitious, but not very well liked. Steve Austin was heroic, handsome, and a morally sound citizen. The way he'd been willing to put his feelings for Jaime Sommers aside in the face of her amnesia and crippling headaches was truly inspiring. And filing reports was certainly more interesting when he made bionic "dunna nunna nunna" sound effects in his head.

Being the subject of another man's homosexual attraction wasn't quite so comfortable. It wasn't that he was homophobic, exactly. It was just that such a situation had never arisen before—although he'd dated an actress in college and suspected that some of her male theatre friends had looked at him a little longer than was customary between men. If the issue arose he'd always figured that he'd be respectful but firm in explaining the futility of such a crush. He'd certainly been on the receiving end of enough "I like you as a friend" conversations with women to know how they went.

But Spencer was a special case. From their first meeting he'd breezed past all the normal social and physical boundaries. Spencer's physicality seemed to be part and parcel of his whole psychic act. And when his complaints about working with him were ignored it became easier to tolerate his bizarre behaviour than put a stop to it. Lassiter had to admit, Spencer's unbelievable solve rate was also a factor. If he hadn't been so good at closing cases it would have been easier to set boundaries of some kind.

And his touchy-feely nature seemed to be catching. Lassiter had been more physical with Spencer than he'd been with any other male since his days on the high school wrestling team. True, most of their close interactions had been to prevent Spencer from compromising evidence, annoying key witnesses, or otherwise embarrassing the SBPD. But while necessary, it was still intimate. Maybe his actions had awakened some kind of interest in Spencer.

My God, he thought, did I bring this on myself in some way? Have I been leading him on?

"Why so glum Detective?"

Lassiter looked up to see Shawn Spencer standing in front of his table, holding a large

colourful drink garnished with an umbrella and a wedge of pineapple.

“Spencer. Why am I not surprised to see you here?”

It's as if just thinking about him makes him appear, Lassiter thought. *Like the devil*. He tried not to look as if he'd just been caught doing something he wasn't supposed to, despite feeling exactly that way.

“I know you can't stand the thought of being separated from your gun, Lassie, but is it really a good idea to be drinking while wearing a loaded weapon?” Shawn asked. “I mean, you're no Martin Riggs, but better safe than sorry, right?”

Lassiter glared at Shawn. “I'm not *drinking*,” he explained. “I'm having *a* drink. There's a difference. And there's no way I'm removing my gun.”

“If you say so.” Shawn squeezed himself in next to Lassiter. “Skooch over, Lassie. We'll have our drinks together and then I can pour you into a cab.”

Lassiter shuffled himself further along the seat, if only so Shawn's body wasn't pressed so firmly against his own.

“I don't need to be poured into anything, Spencer. I can handle my liquor just fine.”

“I don't doubt it. I, on the other hand, am a girl drink drunk. Two of these Blue Hawaiis and I'm under the table.”

Lassiter tried not to take that as a sexual innuendo.

Lassiter awoke the next morning with a massive headache and a dizzy, queasy feeling that permeated his entire body. He opened one eye and peered at his digital clock, grateful that he had the day off and wouldn't have to drag himself in to work in this condition. He groped a hand along the bedside table and grabbed a glass of water. Hydration was the key. Now if he could only make it to the medicine cabinet and down some Aspirin.

He sat up in bed and as his sluggish mind took in his surroundings his headache became the least of his worries. Shawn Spencer, clad only in a tight pair of boxers, lay sprawled on the mattress next to him, snoring lightly. Lassiter stood up and slowly backed away from the bed, moving as silently as possible. He darted down the hall and into the bathroom, shutting and locking the door behind him. As the adrenaline coursed through his system he barely felt the pain of his hangover. Instead he felt a new type of pain as his brain tried to piece together the events of the previous night, searching for some evidence that would help him believe that he hadn't just had drunken sex with Spencer.

He took a hot shower and examined his body for bites or nail marks. He was clean. As

he was toweling off he heard the sound of Spencer, moving around in the kitchen. He wrapped a towel around his waist and then threw on his bathrobe for good measure.

Better get this over with, he braced himself. *Better deal with it here than at the station.*

He unlocked the bathroom and stepped into the hall.

Shawn looked up from the kitchen table, where he was eating a bowl of Lassiter's Cherrios. "Good morning, Sunshine!" he said. "How are you feeling this morning?"

"How *should* I be feeling?" Lassiter asked. His tone was cold, almost curt.

"You know, I expected you'd be nicer," Shawn said. "Maybe even kind of grateful." He shrugged and dug into the cereal.

"Grateful? Are you joking?" Lassiter glared at him across the table, his shoulders tense.

Shawn looked at Lassiter and chewed on his lower lip. "What do you think actually happened last night, Lassie?"

"I think it's pretty obvious," Lassiter said. He crossed his arms, realized this was a defensive body gesture, uncrossed them hurriedly, and then put his hands on his hips.

"You were drunk," Shawn said. "I brought you home and put you to bed. It was late. I was exhausted and I crashed here."

"And that's it?"

"That's it." Shawn pointed at him with a milky spoon. "I'm getting the feeling that you think I'm some kind of date rapist."

"Last night wasn't a date."

"Whatever." Shawn shrugged. "My point is, you were smashed. I wouldn't have touched you with a ten-foot penis. Nothing happened. So you can relax."

"Seriously?" Lassiter frowned, hardly daring to believe it was true.

"Yes. Trust me, Carlton, if we'd had sex, even clumsy drunken sex, you'd remember." Shawn's use of his first name seemed to confirm his words.

"I would. Of course I would." Suddenly Lassiter felt guilty for having assumed Shawn would take advantage of his inebriation.

"You didn't really think we had, did you?" Shawn asked, laughing. "'Cause that would mean that all it takes to get you into bed with me is a few too many scotches. And all

jokes aside, alcohol just lowers inhibitions, it doesn't turn you gay."

"I have to go." Lassiter felt overwhelmed by all the conflicting thoughts in his now pounding head.

"This is your apartment," Shawn pointed out.

"Then you have to go. I'll call you a cab." Lassiter looked for his phone, but wasn't even sure where his clothes were.

"No, it's okay." Shawn grabbed the bowl in both hands and drained it quickly. "I'll flag one myself." He grabbed his jacket from the arm of the couch. "I hope you feel better." He paused in the doorway. "Oh, you probably won't remember, but I made a stop on the way here. There's a present for you in your freezer."

Once Shawn was gone Lassiter strode to the freezer and opened the door, unsure of what he expected to find. There, nestled between the frozen dinners and a back-up revolver, was a lime popsicle.

He knew I was there, in the Psych office, he thought. He knows that I know.

Lassiter sat down at the kitchen table and lay his head on his arms. He felt worse now than he had when he'd woken up.

Chapter 2

Lassiter sat on the leather couch in his living room, drinking a hot cup of coffee and looking across the room at the bottle of scotch on his kitchen counter. He'd never been one of those cops who hit the bottle to make it through the night, but he was suddenly seeing alcohol as a problem. More specifically, as a gateway drug to awkward homosexual encounters. Sure, there had been his attempt to give flowers to the lady in fingerprinting (who had turned out to be a man), and there had been an incident at the departmental picnic, but none of it had been quite this blatant before.

That lost evening with Spencer complicated things. It certainly gave Spencer ammunition he could use if he decided to embarrass him at work. And when did he not do that?

The Popsicle in Lassiter's freezer had been taunting him. It reminded him that he'd assumed he'd done something physical—hell, sexual—with Spencer. As a detective, it was embarrassing to have jumped to such a conclusion based on so little evidence. He ought to have at least looked for more clues—used condoms, for example. He wasn't exactly familiar with the logistics of gay sex, but he could use his imagination. And he had definitely imagined things when he had been thinking the worst that morning. He had imagined things in vivid, technicolour detail. It was as if he had assumed himself guilty, rather than innocent—a situation that opened a whole other can of worms.

Maybe this incident with Spencer was what alcoholics meant when they talked about hitting bottom. If never feeling the smooth burn of scotch again could prevent even one more incident like this it would be worth it, wouldn't it? After all, he would never have been in that situation if he had been sober. He looked sadly at the bottle on the other side of the room and thought briefly of the ending of *Old Yeller*. He'd hate to see scotch go, but when a dog became dangerous, you had to put him down. Of course maybe he was jumping the gun, so to speak. Maybe this wasn't so much an *Old Yeller* situation as it was *Gremlins*. Follow some simple rules, and everything would be okay.

Lassiter wasn't sure that he could trust his own thought processes at the moment. He needed some face time with someone impartial that he could trust. Former Chief John Fenich had been his boss, but their relationship meant more to him than that. Fenich had always provided invaluable guidance during the most dangerous times of his life. And he had retired just before Shawn arrived on the scene, so he hadn't been tainted by the fake psychic's charm. Not that Fenich would have ever fallen for his act, Lassiter knew. The man had a mind like a bear trap. He didn't go in for new agey mumbo-jumbo. Lassiter grabbed his phone and dialled a number he didn't have to look up.

At 5:30 the next morning Lassiter was sitting on John Fenich's 25-foot fishing boat, as they headed Northwest. It wouldn't be light for another hour, but he enjoyed just sitting in the dark listening to Fenich talk about catches his friends had made recently, and fishing spots they'd recommended. Fenich stopped the boat off the Santa Barbara

lighthouse, in about 200 ft of water. The sea was choppy and cloudy, perfect for salmon fishing.

Fenich pulled out a whetting stone and sharpened the hook on Lassiter's line. Lassiter attached an eleven-inch flasher, then grabbed an anchovy from the bait bucket and hooked it on his rotary killer, a clip designed to give the bait the appearance of a struggling fish. He attached his rod to the downrigger, set the depth to 155 and then sat in his chair to wait. As the boat slowly trolled along the two men discussed recently closed cases, old friends from the department, and Fenich's golf game. Shortly after the sun rose they put on their sunglasses and pulled out their breakfast sandwiches.

"What's on your mind, Carlton? You've been distracted since you stepped aboard." Fenich poured himself a coffee and passed the thermos to Lassiter.

"Really? I didn't think so." Lassiter poured himself a cup and held it, allowing the heat to sink into his hands.

"I've known you for over twenty years," Fenich said, rubbing some condensation from his moustache, still cut to police regulation. "Something's eating at you."

"A, uh, friend of mine thinks he might have a drinking problem." *Nice*, Lassiter thought, *go with the classic 'friend' smokescreen. As if John won't see through that in a heartbeat.*

"Woke up in the wrong house?" Fenich joked. He had always had a gentle sense of humour. It had come in handy on the job. Cops saw more than their share of ugly, and sometimes you had to choose between laughing or crying. Fenich had chosen laughing, and as a result he had a friendly looking face now filled with laugh lines. It had made him a disarming figure in the SBPD, especially when his big friendly face had chewed someone out.

"No." Lassiter took a sip of coffee, wincing at the lack of milk and sugar, and kept his eyes on the water. "Woke up with the wrong person."

"That can happen," Fenich said.

"My friend," Lassiter went on, continuing the transparent lie, "had been drinking that night, so he figures that maybe the scotch is a problem."

"With all due respect to your friend," Fenich said, "that's a load of crap."

"You think so?" Lassiter raised his eyebrows. It had sounded pretty good to him.

"I've got thirty years of dealing with drunk and disorderlies under my belt," Fenich said. "And let me tell you, booze doesn't change personalities, it only revealed them. It might wash off that thin layer they normally show the world, but who they are when they're drunk is just who they are."

Lassiter frowned. "I don't know if I agree with that," he said.

"Read up on the placebo effect." Fenich pulled a package of jerky from his pocket and opened it. "Men use booze as an excuse to be the kind of guy they're afraid to be when they're sober--more more social, more aggressive, or more of a ladies man." Fenich bit off a chunk of jerky and chewed. The smell of hickory-smoked meat wafted on the air.

So what did it say about me, Lassiter wondered, that I'd actually believed, if only for a few panic-stricken minutes, that I'd slept with Spencer? He was glad that his sunglasses shaded his eyes from his friend's scrutiny.

"Well," he said. "That doesn't bode very well for my friend then."

"Did something he's not too proud of, did he?" Fenich laughed.

"Oh yeah." Lassiter took another sip of coffee. "Or he thought he did, anyway." He was pretty sure that Fenich wouldn't be laughing if he had any idea what this conversation was actually about. The subject of homosexuality had never come up during his time under Fenich's command, but he'd always thought of Fenich as old school. And old school cops didn't tend to be particularly liberal on issues like that. The two men finished their coffee in silence.

Lassiter's thoughts were interrupted by a king salmon, which after a few exploratory snaps at the tail of the anchovy on his hook had swallowed it headfirst.

Fenich stood and peered excitedly into the water. "Easy, Carlton. Let him run, tire him out," he advised.

"Thanks, I got it." Lassiter had been fishing since his grandfather had first taken him out over thirty years ago. He knew that a fighting fish on a tight line would lead to a broken line, lost catch and lost equipment. After twenty minutes of play, the Salmon's head broke the surface and Fenich stepped toward the stern to net him. The fish was easily two and a half feet long.

"That's one for the frying pan," Fenich said. He hooked it on the fish scale. "That's a nineteen pounder." He put the salmon in the fish box and pulled two beers from the cooler. "Nicely done, Carlton."

"Thanks," Carlton's face was flushed with achievement and the exertion of fighting the powerful fish. He sipped the beer and removed his jacket. The air was heating up now. By the time they finished for the day they'd be wearing t-shirts and sunscreen.

Three hours later their fish had been cleaned and their gear stowed, and Lassiter and Fenich headed back to the marina. Along the way Lassiter found his mind wandering. Things with his dad had always been complicated. So it was natural that he'd gravitated

to father substitutes, and those men had shaped the man he was today. Hank Mandel had inspired his love of justice, and of firearms. John Fenich was the reason he'd become a cop. Yet he couldn't talk to either of them about his current problem. Although to be fair, he hadn't tried. He looked at Fenich and allowed himself to feel the affection and admiration he felt for his mentor and friend. He owed it to him to at least broach the subject.

"Interesting situation came up at work recently," he began. Fenich nodded. He always loved shop talk, leading Lassiter to conclude that cops, as much as they talk about it, never really retire. "I overheard one of the consultants we work with talking to a friend of his," he went on. There was no way he was even going to mention the word 'psychic.' "And the consultant claimed he was bisexual." He looked at Fenich with his best poker face, as if this was just a topic that happened to drift across his mind, and not something he'd been dwelling on for days now.

"Bi-sexual?" Fenich said the word as if he'd never heard it before. "You mean like Elton John?"

"Actually, I think Elton John is homosexual." Lassiter said. "Bisexual is more like, uh," he combed his brain for the name of a famous bisexual. "Alexander The Great."

"All those Greeks were like that back then." Fenich scoffed. "Is the guy any good at his job?"

Lassiter sighed. "Yeah. He is." Lassiter didn't get into exactly how good Spencer was, but given Lassiter's high standards for police work, his unqualified yes would tell Fenich exactly what he needed to know.

"Then I say don't ask, don't tell." Fenich shifted in his seat and looked at Lassiter out of the corner of his eye. "The job's the job, Carlton. If he does the job the rest don't matter." Fenich shrugged and shook his big head. "All the years I spent on the force, there must have been some." Fenich didn't say more.

As Lassiter was packing up his fish it occurred to him that he may have been worrying over nothing. It was possible that Spencer and Guster had been playacting the whole time he was in their closet. Was he like the salmon, he wondered, being given just enough line to tire himself out for Spencer's benefit? Was he, to use a parlance he'd heard on Saturday Night Live once, being fished in? He couldn't very well call and ask for clarification on the Popsicle, but there was no point in working himself up into a lather over something that might just be a joke on Spencer's part.

After all, he reasoned. Spencer didn't fit any of the gay stereotypes. Sure, the man used more hair product than half the female officers in the department, but he dressed like an unmade bed. Weren't gay men supposed to be stylish? And while he had no sense of personal space, and seemed to speak innuendo as a second language, he also went through girlfriends like Lassiter went through ammunition. He'd taken O'Hara for

manicures or facials or something, but that didn't mean he liked men. It could just as easily mean that he liked O'Hara. Spencer could be metrosexual, which an article from a four-year old copy of Cosmo that Lassiter had read in his dentist's office assured him wasn't a sexual identity category. In order to figure out a plan of action he needed facts, not guesses.

Lassiter pulled out his cellphone and called up his list of informants. There was someone who owed him a favour, and it was time to collect.

His informant's mother had named him Wallace, but everyone called him Spud. Lassiter didn't know how he'd gotten that nickname, and he didn't care to know. All their informants seemed to have street names. It was how you could tell they were criminals. Honest citizens didn't have names like Spud. Spud had become known to the department due to some low-level arrests for drug possession and solicitation. Lassiter met him outside the low-rent apartment where Spud lived with the man who was currently paying his bills. But sugar-daddy or no, Spud was always interested in extra cash.

"I ain't got time for this, officer," Spud said, looking anxiously over his shoulder. "I'm waiting on a friend."

Lassiter held up a bill with a picture of Alexander Hamilton on it. "Are you listening now?"

Spud looked at Lassiter as if he were crazy.

"What if he also had a little brother?" Lassiter asked, adding a bill bearing the likeness of Abraham Lincoln.

Spud let out a long-suffering sigh. "You're the cheapest cop I know. Don't they give you guys a petty cash budget?"

"Take it or leave it. Fifteen bucks for three to five minutes work. Hell, at that scale you're getting paid more than I do."

Spud rolled his eyes, but pocketed the cash. "What I haffa do?"

"It's simple," he explained. "Just go up to the subject, flirt with him, and report back. It's not rocket science."

"You want me to make a date? You tryin' to entrap the guy?"

Lassiter kept his face frozen. There was no reason for Spud to know this was a personal issue, rather than a work one.

"I just need to know if he responds to the flirting. Drop a few secret codes and see if he recognizes them."

“Secret codes?” Spud wrinkled his nose, confused. “What kinda codes?”

“You know.” Lassiter gestured vaguely. “Secret gay codes. Lingo. I don’t know. You’re supposed to be the expert here.”

Spud rolled his eyes. “I ain’t got no secret codes. I ain’t the CIA.”

Lassiter sighed and ran a hand down his face. “I just need to know if he likes men.”

Spud smiled and gave Lassiter a lascivious look. “That all? Hell, for that I won’t even need three minutes.”

It was approaching dinner time. Lassiter circled the blocks around the Psych office until he spotted Spencer making his run for take-out food. It was usually to one of four places. Today it was pizza. Lassiter turned to Spud.

“This is perfect. Just get in there and while he’s waiting on the pizza, do your thing.”

“Okay,” Spud left the car and shuffled toward the pizza joint. Lassiter pulled the Crown Vic behind a flowering shrub and used his binoculars from his hiding place. Within seconds of entering the restaurant, Spud was throwing himself at Spencer.

So much for subtle recon, Lassiter thought bitterly. It was like watching a bad movie. Although from his vantage point it was difficult to tell if the smile on Spencer’s face was from enjoyment or embarrassment, even with the binoculars. The general anxious lump in Lassiter’s gut was quickly replaced by a tighter, angrier sensation. He took a deep breath and reminded himself that this was an intelligence-gathering operation. He was not jealous. Certainly not of someone like Spud.

After ten minutes Spud emerged from the pizza place and re-joined him in the Crown Vic, a steaming pizza box on his lap. He was half a block towards Spud’s house before the skinny young man spoke.

“You owe me another fifteen,” he said. “I had to buy a pizza.”

Lassiter glanced at him, his brow furrowed in annoyance.

“For cover,” Spud explained. “It’s a pizza place, they sell pizza.”

Lassiter pulled into the parking lot of Spud’s apartment building, removed his wallet and took out another two bills.

“So what did you learn?” he asked, holding them just out of reach. One of the first lessons he’d learned with informants was to get the information first.

“He weren’t interested in me,” Spud said. “I pushed hard, but he wasn’t having it.”

Lassiter felt his whole body relax and he passed Spud the money. Spencer wasn't into men. The whole thing had been a con. He'd known he was in the office closet and he and Guster had just strung him along.

Well played, Mr. Spencer. Lassiter began plotting his revenge. Ideally, something that would have the fake psychic wetting himself in front of O'Hara. He was so intent on his fantasy that he almost missed it when Spud spoke again.

“He’s a weirdo,” Spud said. “Said he prefers his men in unmarked cars, off-the-rack suits, and obvious hiding places. That don’t even make no sense. What’s ‘off the rack’ mean?”

Suddenly the smell of the pizza made Lassiter felt sick. Spencer knew. Had known. Still knew. He ushered Spud out of the car, deaf to his question, and drove away, wishing he could outpace his own boiling brain.

Chapter 3

Lassiter didn't think about Shawn Spencer much over the next day and a half. Sometimes spans of three to four minutes would pass where he barely thought of him at all. He stormed around the station snapping at people and shouting orders. He spent his lunch hours at the firing range. When Chief Vick assigned him a missing persons case Lassiter was relieved to have something new to focus on.

The missing man was Maxwell Harris, a reclusive millionaire who had built a fortune through property speculation. His wife had returned home late one evening to find her husband was gone. The door had been standing open and there was a message on the machine. Maxwell Harris' voice reminded Lassiter of Raymond Burr. "Darling, it's Max," the message began, "I'm in terrible trouble. I'm being followed but I think I gave them the slip. If you could meet me at the airport, and bring the...oh God. They're here." The message ended in a hoarse cry and then the line went dead. They'd traced the call to a payphone near the airport, but a canvas of the area hadn't turned up working cameras or anyone who'd spotted Maxwell. Lassiter had listened to the message dozens of times and the boys in the lab were going over a copy with every piece of equipment they had, trying to find a lead. Lassiter wasn't optimistic. Background sounds of foghorns or train station announcements usually only happened in the movies.

Lassiter had gone over the Harris house but there was no sign of a break-in, and no evidence of foul play. Looking for Harris, or what might be left of him, wasn't going to be easy. His wife had provided a description, but it was next to useless. Harris was of medium height and build, with hair that could be taken for brown or blonde, and if he had any distinguishing marks, his wife had never noticed. Lassiter sighed and hung his head. He hoped that Victoria could have provided a better description of him if he'd ever gone missing. Since Harris detested getting his picture taken, the missing man's wife didn't even have a photo she could provide them. He'd never had a drivers licence or passport photo taken, so there weren't any government records they could fall back on. Mrs. Harris said that she couldn't understand why anyone would have wanted to hurt Maxwell, and she assured Lassiter that all of her husband's business practices were strictly above board. Somehow, Lassiter didn't believe her.

If it hadn't been for the phone message, Lassiter would have been looking hard at the wife. For what it was worth, he still might. Despite pressure from City Hall to solve the case fast, it was hard to look past the fact that he did have a hefty insurance policy. If a body did turn up, Mrs. Harris would be an even richer woman.

With so few clues, there wasn't much to occupy his time. Certainly, uniforms were combing the city for a body, and they'd tapped the phone in case a ransom call came in. They were trying to trace his movements, but those had proved to be scarce, which wasn't surprising for a shut-in. Lassiter was suddenly faced with a lot of waiting—for reports, for lab work, and for a break in the case.

Waiting was not a friend to Lassiter's mind. As he headed to the gun range he found his

thoughts drifting inexorably back to Shawn, and the question of whether or not this supposed crush was as fake as his psychic act.

As the bullets from his Glock 17 tore through yet another human-outline target, Lassiter realized that one of the reasons he was so intent on uncovering Spencer's true feelings was that he wasn't entirely clear about his own. The confusing part was that Lassiter sometimes found himself responding sexually to Spencer despite being 90% sure that he wasn't gay. Yes, he'd had occasional crushes on men, but he put that down to a type of hero worship. It was normal to find Gary Cooper, or Steve McQueen attractive. And everyone, regardless of sexuality, seemed to like Johnny Depp and Brad Pitt. It didn't make him gay. Any anxieties he might have had about being gay had been laid to rest in his teens, when he'd discovered girls. He liked women. He found them attractive, and he loved having sex with them. *And sleeping with women certainly isn't gay*, he assured himself. *Except when lesbians do it.*

It wasn't as if he was effeminate in any way. Sure, some people might look critically at his lanky frame, but he had a wiry strength. And while there had been early experiments with figure skating, and some classmates had thought that joining the high school wrestling team was kind of suspicious, those years were behind him now. He enjoyed manly activities, like fishing, shooting guns, riding horses, and drinking scotch. His job was very masculine. Yet what should have reassuring suddenly seemed like over-compensation. With a few well-placed touches and innuendos, Shawn Spencer somehow managed to make him feel like one of the Village People.

Lassiter frowned and reloaded his clip.

Shawn was sprawled on the couch in the Psych office when Gus came in carrying what was obviously a gift-wrapped book. He stood at the head of the sofa, looking down at Shawn, his face concerned.

"I got you something." He held out the book. The wrapping paper was a design of tiny cartoon molars, obtained from one of the dental offices on his pharmaceutical route.

Shawn took the package and held it. "A book. How thoughtful of you, Gus. But your wrapping doesn't leave much to the imagination. Why not put it in a box? Maybe throw in some dry pasta to make it rattle? Or, put that box in an even *bigger* box. These are elementary wrapping skills, my friend."

"Just open the damn book, Shawn."

Shawn unwrapped the package and stared at the present. It was a called *You Can't Always Get What You Want*, written by a psychologist he had never heard of. It came with a CD of the book narrated by Winston Winters, another guy he had never heard of.

"I apologize for my hasty remarks," he said, dipping his head in place of a bow. "I didn't

see the CD coming. Well played.”

“Just listen to the damn thing already,” Gus said. “I’m tired of you moping around the office because the obscure hints you drop to Lassiter aren’t being picked up on. You need some perspective. I thought this book would help, but I know you’re too lazy to read. So I got one that has a CD of some guy reading it to you. Hell, all you have to do is put the CD on. How difficult is that?”

“I appreciate you putting me on the road to healing,” Shawn said. “I really do.” He looked at the book and CD, “In fact, I’m going to go sit in your car and listen to this right now. On account of CDs being such an obsolete technology, they’re only found in cars now.”

Gus raised his eyebrows. “You’re really going to listen to it?”

“Yes. Really.”

Shawn extended his hand for the keys and Gus reached out to pass them, pausing in mid-air.

“Wait a minute,” Gus said. “Your laptop can play CDs.” He pulled the keys back. “Stay away from my car unless I’m driving.”

“Fine.” Shawn went to his desk and turned on his laptop. “Where do CDs go?”

The next day, when Gus arrived at the Psych office, Shawn was sitting at his computer while a deep voice talked about how important it was to live each moment to its fullest.

Shawn paused the CD and spoke. “I’ve made a decision. I’m going to take charge of my life. I’m on my way from misery to happiness today. Like that guy from the Proclaimers.”

“The Proclaimers are identical twin brothers,” Gus said. “There are two of them.”

Shawn tilted his head, thoughtful. “I’m pretty sure it’s just one guy. He’s playing both roles, like Haley Mills in the original Parent Trap.”

“Why go with Haley Mills?” Gus asked. “Lindsay Lohan did the same thing in the remake.”

“Nope.” Shawn shook his head. “I have it on good authority that Lindsay Lohan is actually two people. That’s why she’s always being arrested.” He smiled. “Both of them are wild little scallions.”

“I think you mean *rapscallions*.”

“What are scallions?” Shawn asked.

“A type of strong flavoured onion.”

Shawn shrugged. “Maybe that’s exactly what I mean. They’re tiny and white, and they make me cry.”

Gus shook his head to dislodge Shawn’s ridiculousness. “Still,” he said. “I’m glad the book is helping you.”

“It sure is. I’ve decided I’m going to ask Lassiter out. Make my intentions clear. Point blank.”

“Let’s just hope it doesn’t turn all Grosse Pointe Blank on you,” Gus said. “Lassiter carries a gun. Possibly several.”

“What else can I do?” Shawn asked. “Show up outside his house with a boombox and blast Peter Gabriel at him?”

“I think something like Tainted Love might be more appropriate.”

“Ow! Dude! That hurt.” Shawn placed his hand over his heart, as if mortally wounded. “First I need to lay the proper groundwork. Get on Lassiter’s good side.”

“I don’t think the man has one,” Gus said.

“Sure he does. They say the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach, but I’m pretty sure that the way into a cop’s pants is through his arrest record. I’m going to help him solve that missing persons case that has them all stumped.”

“Fine, but if you end up sharing a cell with guy who’s got face tattoos you can use your one phone call to dial 1-800-I-told-you-so.”

Shawn scoffed. “That doesn’t even work as a number.”

Shawn and Gus stood outside the palatial estate of Maxwell Harris. The reclusive millionaire had been reported missing, and although O’Hara had told him that no ransom note had arrived, the folks at the SBPD feared the worst.

“Harris never leaves his house,” O’Hara had explained. “So for him to go missing is way out of character.” Forensics had been over the house from top to bottom, but there was no sign of the missing millionaire and no sign of foul play. The man had just disappeared.

“I hear they’re combing the city looking for a body,” Gus said. “Lassiter might appreciate it if you could have some kind of vision of what he looks like.”

A maid showed them in to the foyer and Mrs. Harris came down to greet them.

“Hello,” Shawn said, shaking her hand. “I’m Governor Jack Stanton,” he motioned to Gus, “and this is my assistant, Adrian Lester. We were hoping to see your husband.”

The woman stared down her nose at Shawn. “You’re a little young to be a governor.”

“Not necessarily,” Gus said, “J. Neely Johnson was Governor of California at thirty. And Sha--I mean, Governor Stanton, is much older than that.”

Shawn smacked Gus's arm. "Was that really necessary? I could totally pass for thirty."

"I have two words for you, Shawn: crows feet."

“Maybe you haven’t heard,” Mrs. Harris said, interrupting their banter, “but my husband has gone missing. ”

“Really?” Shawn said, using his surprised voice. “That’s terrible. When did this happen?”

“Four days ago now,” Mrs. Harris said, her voice dispassionate. “I came home to find him gone. I called the police right away but I had to wait before they’d let me report him missing. It’s even possible he’s been kidnapped.” Mrs. Harris glanced up toward a picture of ballerinas dancing, then back to Shawn.

Shawn looked around the room. There were pictures of Mrs. Harris, but none of her husband. He gazed up at the wall. Among the many paintings on the wall was an oil portrait of an older man.”

"Is this Mr. Harris?" Shawn asked, pointing at the painting. "We've only spoken on the phone," he explained.

“No,” Mrs. Harris’ voice was sharp. “That’s a Rembrandt.”

“Really?” Shawn said. “He’s very good. Did you know that he also makes an excellent toothpaste?”

“Why did you want to see my husband?” Mrs. Harris asked.

“We’d been discussing the possibility of buying a property through him,” Shawn said. “I need a new horse ranch for Skipper.”

“Really?” Mrs. Harris looked at him with renewed interest. “I don’t remember Max mentioning that.”

“Did your husband often discuss his work with you?” Shawn asked.

“Yes.” Mrs. Harris said, staring curiously at Shawn. “Very often.” She smiled a wide, alarmingly toothy grin. “Why don’t you leave me all your contact details and when my husband returns I’ll get him to call you?” She placed a long thin hand on Shawn’s shoulder. “What state did you say you represented?”

Shawn smiled and looked at Gus expectantly.

“He represents American Samoa,” Gus explained smoothly. “It’s an unincorporated U.S. territory in the South Pacific. Governor Stanton increased their tuna exports by 5% last year.”

“I’m sorry I was so unfriendly earlier,” Mrs. Harris said. “I’ve been so preoccupied since Max disappeared. And you weren’t exactly my idea of a career politician.”

“Things have changed a lot since the Obama election,” Shawn said. Now it’s about politics. The politics...of dancing. The politics of ooooo feeling good.”

Mrs. Harris’ lips pressed together in annoyance and she crossed her thin arms.

“We should go,” Gus said.

“I think my message is understood.” Shawn looked at his watch. “I’m afraid we do have to go. I’m scheduled to open a karaoke fundraiser in Santa Barbara Heights. It’s a lot of fun. You should swing by. I do a mean version of Straight Outta Compton.”

Gus shook hands with Mrs. Harris. “It was nice meeting you.” He then grabbed Shawn firmly by the arm and pulled him toward the door.

“Well,” Gus said. “That was fun. Are there any other relatives of Mr. Harris that you’d like to traumatize?”

“Don’t feel so bad about it,” Shawn said. “Because she,” he pointed back toward the house, “is lying.”

“How do you know?”

“Neuropsychology.” Shawn said. “I remember reading somewhere that when people are telling the truth they look up and to the left, accessing their visual cortex. But if they’re lying their eyes go up and to the right, accessing their creative centre. And she,” he pointed at the house again, this time more energetically, “looked up and to the right.”

“You didn’t read that in a book,” Gus looked accusingly at Shawn. “That’s a scene from *The Negotiator* with Samuel L. Jackson.”

Shawn shrugged. “I still say she’s lying. And now I’ve got Sam Jackson on my side.”

Lassiter glanced up from his desk to see Shawn enter the station and stop to flirt with O'Hara.

"Oh, for the love of Mike," he muttered to himself, "What is he doing here?" Spencer was wearing a blue t-shirt and red short sleeve shirt on top. "He looks like he's wearing a Superman costume." Lassiter tried to look busy. As Spencer's shadow loomed over his desk he looked up and said, "Why don't you just turn around and slide on out of here?" He pointed to the door.

"I would, Lassie," Shawn said, "but I recently sustained a serious injury on a Slip n Slide, and my physiotherapist has banned me from slipping or sliding for at least six weeks."

"Why are you here, Spencer?"

"My psychic powers tell me that you might want to take a closer look at Mrs. Harris as a suspect in the Maxwell Harris case."

"Did you have a brain tumor for breakfast?" Lassiter asked. "She's the one who reported him missing."

"Yes. I find that very suspicious."

"I didn't think you worked on suspicious, Spencer. I thought you heard voices or what-have-you."

"Yes. And right now the voices are telling me that I need to listen to Maxwell Harris' phone message."

"Fine. Lassiter made some keystrokes on his desktop and a stern and sonorous voice emerged from the speakers. Lassiter had listened to the message so many times he could lipsync to it by now.

"Darling, it's Max. I'm in terrible trouble. I'm being followed but I think I gave them the slip. If you could meet me at the airport, and bring the...oh God. They're here."

"So psychic," Lassiter began tersely, turning off the media player, "any flashes of—" he looked up at Spencer and stopped, mid-sentence. Spencer looked as if he'd just seen a ghost, which of course was ridiculous, because there were no such things as ghosts. Still, in terms of visions, it was oddly sedate. Spencer's visions were usually accompanied by movements that would have been more appropriate on a stage with a pole. This expression was almost frozen.

"Yeah..." Shawn said at last, seeming to come out of a trance. "If you could just go ahead and look into Mrs. Harris, I think you'll find something worth your while."

Lassiter asked, his eyes watching Spencer with suspicion. “If you’re so sure she’s dirty, why don’t you look into it?”

“Now I’m no expert, but aren’t the police supposed to do the actual detecting part?” Shawn asked brightly, his irreverent self once again.

“You’re right, Spencer.” Lassiter frowned, stood, and moved out from behind his desk. “Thanks for reminding me.” He spun Shawn around, grabbed him by the collar of his shirt and the band of his jeans, and began to march him away from his desk.

“Wow,” Shawn said. “Detecting really brings out the animal in you, Lassie. If this is foreplay, I have to warn you that I get a little loud when—” Shawn’s sentence was cut off when Lassiter pushed him into the alcove by the stairs. He placed a hand on Shawn’s chest and slammed him firmly against the yellow stucco wall and held him there.

“Level with me, Spencer,” he narrowed his eyes and glared down at him. “Is this all some colossal prank on your part or are you really homo...”

“—sapien?” Shawn cut in, smiling.

“No,” Lassiter growled threateningly, deep in his throat.

“—erectus? Only when you’re standing this close.”

Lassiter stepped back, his face flushed red. “Get serious for a minute, will you?”

“I’m totally serious. I’m Yahoo Serious.”

“What?” Lassiter asked, confused.

“I take it you’re not a fan of late eighties Australian comedy,” Shawn said.

“I should have known I wouldn’t get a straight answer out of you,” Lassiter said, turning away. “I’d be better off talking to McNab’s cat.”

“How’s this for an answer?”

Lassiter turned back and Shawn lunged forward, cupped Lassiter’s jaw in both his hands, and planted a firm kiss on his lips. Lassiter’s mouth was warm and dry, and Shawn’s fingertips could feel the rough bristle on his jaw. It lasted only a moment, and then, just as suddenly, Shawn released him and stepped back, his breathing high and ragged. He stood there, chin tilted up and muscles tensed, waiting for a reaction, prepared to duck in case that reaction resembled a Hawaiian Punch commercial.

Lassiter looked over his shoulder, as if to see if anyone was watching, then turned back

and looked at Shawn with narrowed eyes. “What are you after here, Spencer?”

“Dinner?” Shawn offered. “Friday at Natalino’s, on the boardwalk.” He raised his hands. “Just to talk, I swear.” Lassiter stared at him as if expecting him to break into laughter at any moment, revealing it had all been a hoax. When he didn’t answer, Shawn went on. “I’ll be there at seven. Either you’ll meet me or you’ll stand me up and I’ll be eating pasta all by myself. It’s your choice. But given how helpful I’ve been today....” He left the sentence hanging.

Lassiter stepped back, searching him with those cold blue eyes.

“Maybe.” He turned and strode back to his desk, but Shawn noticed the detective touch his lips as he went.

Lassiter sat at his desk, thinking. Occasionally his fingers would graze his bottom lip, reliving that strange moment by the stairs.

He hadn’t felt this confused since he was a child, when his unmarried cat had surprised him by having kittens. Of course most of this confusion was Spencer’s fault. The way he moved was borderline obscene. The things he said were packed with innuendo, and he took every opportunity to touch him in some inappropriate way, usually in front of others. Spencer was more physical in public with him than his last three girlfriends combined. And he had those lips, which never quite seemed to close all the way. What straight man had lips like that? They were practically forcing him to think...things. Dark, perverse things, of which his very Catholic mother and her book club would not approve.

Spencer was all kinds of wrong. Lassiter was confident that the men and women that worked alongside him were some of the best law enforcement officers that Santa Barbara had ever seen. But Spencer treated detective work like a word search puzzle and acted as if he were playing charades at every crime scene. Psychic vibrations were hokum. Lassiter knew this. But somehow Spencer solved cases. How exactly he did it still eluded him. And since his initial attempt to uncover Spencer’s secret had failed abysmally, he needed to find a new approach. He couldn’t break into the Psych office again. If there was anything incriminating there he was sure Spencer would have moved it by now. Maybe by accepting this dinner invitation, and cultivating his acquaintance a little, he could figure out Spencer’s secret and unmask him for the charlatan he was.

It’s not a date, he told himself as he reached for the phone. *Think of it as undercover work.*

Shawn ended the call and stood, staring dazedly at his phone for a few seconds. Then he swivelled his chair to face Gus, who was doing budget work at his desk.

“That was Lassiter,” he said, his voice hesitant, as if he didn’t quite believe what he was saying. “He agreed to go to dinner at Natalino’s with me.”

“Natalinos?” Gus looked surprised. “That’s a nice place. What made you choose it?”

“I went there once on that poisoning case,” Shawn said. “I didn’t actually *eat* there,” he added. “I spent most of my time pretending to be a health inspector. But the food looked good, it’s romantic, and their kitchen was clean and completely up to code.”

“Well,” Gus said, “don’t do anything to embarrass Lassiter and make him shoot you.” He paused, and then added, “And don’t take my credit card or I’m reporting it stolen and you and Lassiter can get to know each other over your arrest sheet.”

Shawn stared at Gus for a few moments, curiosity lighting up his hazel eyes.

“So you’re just 100% cool with this?” he asked. “After saying that my bisexuality was fictional you’re suddenly completely disinterested in the fact that I have a date. With a man.”

“I’m surprised that Lassiter said yes,” Gus admitted. “But I’m fine with it.” He shrugged. “If you and Lassiter want to be gay together, go ahead. It’s got nothing to do with me.”

Shawn laughed, but there was a nervous undertone to it. “We’re just meeting up for dinner. There may be some innocuous touching, perhaps some accidental groping or kissing. But that doesn’t mean we’re *being gay* together.”

“It’s Aristotilian logic, Shawn” Gus counted off the on his fingers. “One, men who want to sleep with other men are gay. Two, you and Lassiter are both men. Three, you want to sleep with one another. Ergo, you and Lassiter are...”

“Bisexual,” Shawn cut in. “One same-sex relationship isn’t going to make me no longer attracted to the opposite sex. This isn’t an episode of Buffy.”

“Fine. Enjoy being *bisexual* with Lassiter.”

“It really doesn’t bother you?”

“Hell no.” Gus smiled. “The way I figure it, that just leaves more women for me. In fact, statistically speaking, the more men date other men, the closer I get to dating Nia Long.”

“I’m glad you see it that way, buddy. And don’t worry about apologizing for not believing me earlier. I’ll take that as a given.”

Gus looked up from his bookkeeping program and narrowed his eyes at Shawn.

“I meant what I said before.” He sat up straighter and turned his attention on Shawn, who had plugged his earbuds into his computer and was pretending to be engrossed in his book on CD. “In fact,” Gus said loudly, “I’m 99% certain based on your behaviour since

that phone call that this is your first ever date with a guy.”

“What? No.” Shawn removed the earbuds and laughed, unconvincingly. He shook his head. “No. Definitely not.” Gus continued to look at him, one eyebrow cocked in disbelief. “Okay fine,” Shawn broke under the disbelieving Guster glare. “This *might* be my first date with someone of the male persuasion.”

Gus relaxed and went back to examining his financial records.

“But a date’s a date, right?” Shawn asked, uncertainty creeping into his voice. “I mean, I’ve been on dates before. This is no different, right?”

“I wouldn’t know,” Gus said, not looking up. “I don’t date men, Shawn.”

Shawn went back to his book on tape, trying to ignore the gnawing anxiety that had just appeared in his gut.

Chapter 4

Lassiter stepped out of the shower and dried himself off. Then with a towel wrapped around his waist he shaved for the second time that day. He walked into his bedroom, opened his closet and inspected its contents. It had been a while since we'd been on a date, and he hadn't known what to wear then. Choosing clothes for his pseudo-date with Spencer was an even greater challenge. He tried to keep his goal in the forefront of his mind: figure out how Spencer's really solving cases, charge him with fraud, and never have to see him darken the station again. But for some reason he seemed to be just as anxious as if this were a real date.

He chose his dark blue suit and a crisp white shirt then perused his tie rack. He held up a red tie then recalled Shawn's words when they were investigating the speed-dating ring at Shenanigans, "Chicks dig the sternum bush." Well pretend-date or no, this was not an occasion for revealing his chest hair. It invited people to imagine him naked, and it made him feel like one of the Bee Gees. Besides, he didn't have the confidence in the power of the sternum bush that Spencer had. He'd tried it with his ex-wife and she'd produced divorce papers. He settled on a light blue tie that Spencer had once said brought out his eyes.

On the way to the boardwalk he wondered if he was expected to bring flowers or something, then decided against it. Spencer had a job; he could get himself flowers if he wanted them. *Besides*, he thought, *two men eating together was just two men eating together, but two men eating together with flowers was obviously a date*. And while he had no qualms about letting Spencer think it was a date, he didn't want the whole world knowing.

Natalino's was the kind of restaurant that did a heavy traffic in couples. A speaker system played orchestral music in the background, and the light was just bright enough to allow customers to read the menu. Most of the tables were designed for two and screened off from other diners by a series of long curtains hanging from the ceiling. Lassiter took one look at the candles dotting the tables and hoped the curtains were fire retardant. He identified the exits, just in case, and made a mental note to have the fire marshal check this place out. Then he told the hostess that he was meeting someone and gave Shawn's name. She led him to a dark corner where Shawn was already seated. He was wearing a grey dress shirt and a dark blue tie, and his eyes looked almost brown in the dim light. Lassiter marveled at the fact that Spencer even owned a tie.

"You came," Shawn said, standing briefly as Lassiter sat down. Lassiter, whose mother had taught him to stand when a lady entered, wondered if Shawn thought of him as the lady in this scenario.

"You have a gift for stating the obvious, Spencer."

"I didn't know if you'd show up." Spencer wiped a sweaty palm on his pant leg and began toying with his silverware. He tried to rest an arm nonchalantly on the table and just

caught the edge of his fork tines, sending the implement flying into the air, landing with a clatter somewhere behind him. The waitstaff, familiar with the pitfalls of first dates, were very subtle about slipping him a replacement fork as they filled the table's water glasses.

Lassiter buried himself in the menu, ignoring Spencer's nervousness. "Before I order I suppose I should ask which of us is paying for this," he said.

"I figured we'd go Dutch," Shawn offered. "That way I won't feel any pressure to put out."

Lassiter smiled grimly. There was the smart-mouthed man he'd grown to... tolerate.

"Your virtue is safe with me, Spencer."

Lassiter ordered the caesar salad and garlic shrimp penne. Garlic was usually a no-no on a date, but it wasn't as if there was going to be kissing. Shawn ordered the garlic bread and the lobster pasta, and Lassiter relaxed. *Spencer obviously doesn't think of this as a real date either.* He felt confident enough to order a glass of wine.

Shawn smiled across his garlic bread at Lassiter. "So...tell me things."

"What sort of things?" Lassiter asked, spearing a crouton with his fork.

"Hobbies?" Shawn asked. "I know you like the Civil War."

"I don't *like* the Civil War," Lassiter said. "I like the ideals that three hundred and sixty thousand brave Union soldiers gave their lives to protect. The ideals of justice and equality for all men."

"And you express it by dressing up and wearing a false beard. I get that," Shawn said. "What else do you do? Do you collect stamps, or first editions or My Little Pony dolls?"

"I collect and shoot guns," Lassiter said. "I fish, but then you already know that." He went through his house in his mind's eye, looking for anything that might qualify as a hobby. Somehow he didn't think that tracking criminals or reviewing cold cases on his free-standing Claridge board counted. "Let's turn this around, shall we?" he asked, shifting the subject from his own, possibly empty personal life. "Do you have hobbies? Outside of interfering with police work, I mean."

"Of course I do," Shawn said. "I have lots of hobbies. I don't spend all my time listening to Careless Whisper and making friendship pins, you know."

"Then let's have it. What do you do?"

"Nothing special." Shawn stuck out his bottom lip slightly, as if thinking about his hobbies made him sad. "I pick something, do it intensely for a while and then move on." He waved a hand. "I get bored. I like challenges."

“I know,” Lassiter said. “I’ve seen your resume.” He took a sip of wine. “So what made you settle on private investigator?” He refused to acknowledge that there was anything supernatural about what Shawn did for a living.

“Oh, that’s an easy one,” Shawn said. He smiled. “You know how it is. You have a gift for something and you work on it until you’re really good. Then it’s so easy you can’t *not* do it.”

“You *worked* at it?” Lassiter didn’t bother to keep the disbelief out of his tone.

“Oh yeah,” Shawn said, thinking of Henry’s never-ending observation training sessions. “I worked at it. You sound surprised.”

“I am. You don’t strike me as the working at it type.”

“Not everything I do is easy, Lassie. It just looks that way.”

“So,” Lassiter looked around the restaurant to see if anyone was watching them. “Do you do this often?” He still found it difficult to believe that Shawn meant for their dinner to be a date. It hadn’t occurred to him that Shawn might mean it when he’d said Lassiter was the station’s second prettiest detective. He certainly didn’t think of himself as pretty. He had sometimes been called ‘striking,’ which he suspected was code for ‘odd-looking.’ Although if Shawn *did* think he was pretty then what, if anything, did that change? And had he given the top spot to McNab or O’Hara?

“Natalino’s?” Shawn asked. “No. I was here on a case once.”

“That’s not what I mean, Spencer.” Lassiter looked him in the eye and held the stare just long enough to make his point.

“Ask men on dates? No, I don’t.” Shawn looked thoughtful for a moment. “Well, unless slow-dancing with a life-size standee of Val Kilmer counts. But I must say, dates are different when the other person can talk.”

Lassiter’s brow creased. “Then why did you ask me here?”

“Why do you think?” Shawn’s hand reached out and rested on his thigh, just inches above his knee. Lassiter froze as if he were a Victorian maiden. Every nerve in his body seemed to shift focus to the spot on his leg, now warm from Spencer’s touch. Instead of the fake date and subtle interrogation he had planned for this evening he found his mind wandering in an entirely different direction. He suspected that gay men didn’t have the same taboo against sex on the first date that straight women did, and he wondered how far Shawn would be willing to go if they were somewhere more private. Pushing that fantasy aside as best he could, Lassiter tried to keep his mind on his purpose. He took a deep, calming breath and remembered something one of his instructors in the academy

had said (or had it been a scene from Point of No Return?): when faced with an uncomfortable situation, smile and say something off-hand.

“I think the percussion cap was one of the most significant inventions in the history of firearms.”

Shawn smiled. “I’ll try not to take that as a threat, Lassie.” Shawn removed his hand, but Lassiter’s leg felt as if the ghost of his touch still remained.

“I followed up on that tip you gave me,” Lassiter said finally.

“About Mrs. Harris?” Shawn asked, “or about using conditioner on your body hair?”

“The tip about Mrs. Harris,” Lassiter growled. “She’s clean, but her husband’s been involved in some very shady land deals. I have it on good authority that if he weren’t missing the FBI would have brought him in for questioning by now. Except for the fact that his assets are intact, I’d think he’d done a runner.”

“You mean all the money’s still in his accounts?” This information seemed to please Shawn.

“Actually, most of his assets are in his wife’s name,” Lassiter explained. “He probably transferred them so they’d be harder to freeze if the white collar crime guys got onto his scams. But it would make it harder to get his hands on cash in a hurry. And as we heard on the tape, he found out the hard way that some people aren’t very patient.”

“So you’re assuming he’s dead?” Shawn asked.

“Almost certainly,” Lassiter said. “We’ll probably start finding his body parts all over the county any day now.” He took a mouthful of food and chewed heartily. The anticipation of finding a body, even in pieces, was always reminiscent of Christmas.

“Are you a betting man?” Shawn asked. When Lassiter raised an eyebrow he continued, “I’ll bet you a hundred dollars they never find his body,” Shawn said.

“I’ll take that bet.” Lassiter smiled. He was already making plans for putting Shawn’s hundred bucks toward buying a new Smith & Wesson 629.

The two men ate their dinner and discussed cases from the past: the blue-haired bandit of Mission Street, the Skofield Park strangler, and the Montecito poisoner. Lassiter reflected that when he’d tried to discuss his work on dates with women it hadn’t always gone so well. Spencer, on the other hand, seemed to love talking about work. He reminded him of Fenich that way.

Maybe, he thought, Spencer’s more like a real cop than I’ve been willing to admit.

Lassiter threw caution to the wind and told him the dead clown story, just as an experiment. By the time he got to the part where they had opened the steamer trunk Shawn was laughing, his eyes shining with tears.

“Finally!” Lassiter said, feeling vindicated. “Someone else understands how funny that was.” For the first time he realized that Shawn had a nice smile.

“Funny?” Shawn wiped a tear from the corner of his eye. “My God, Lassie. It’s beyond funny. It’s hilarible.”

“Hilarible?” Lassiter’s brows knit. “That’s not a word.”

“Sure it is,” Shawn said. “It’s a mix of hilarious and horrible, like watching Licence to Drive, or Flavour of Love.” The waiter removed their empty plates and brought them coffee. “So,” Shawn stared up at him with his darkened irises and licked his lips, making them glisten in the candlelight. “Where do we go from here?”

Lassiter took a gulp of his coffee to give himself time to think. He had enjoyed himself. The food had been terrific, and talking to Spencer about work had felt strangely comfortable. He’d even passed the dead clown test, which had sent more than one date running for the hills. Going ahead with his original plan almost seemed as if it would spoil the evening. He told himself this was just a normal stage of any undercover job. So what if he had a bit of Stockholm Syndrome? It didn’t mean he could abandon the plan.

He looked at Shawn. “I’d like to see your place,” he said.

As they settled their bills Lassiter tried to pull his focus away from Shawn’s smile and back to his plan. The evidence he’d wanted hadn’t been at the Psych office. It had to be at Spencer’s apartment. He’d just need to excuse himself to go to the bathroom and do a quick search of the obvious hiding places. If he was lucky, by this time tomorrow he’d never have to worry about Spencer interfering in an investigation again.

Shawn’s directions led them to a house on the beach. Lassiter felt anxious as he followed him along the walk to the front doorway. *How can Spencer afford to live here?* He wondered.

As if reading his mind, Shawn said, “I’m pet-sitting for a lawyer who’s in Cuba for three months.” In response to Lassiter’s surprised look he added, “It’s okay. She’s Canadian.” The door opened onto a living room with a fireplace, plush leather chairs, and a deep red Persian area rug. It was a warm, masculine room with a small galley kitchen to the left and a door to the right that he assumed led to the bathroom and bedroom.

When no friendly or curious animal met them at the door Lassiter asked, “Where’s the pet you’re sitting?”

Shawn pointed across the room to a wall of glass. “The top row is all fish, the second row

is lizards, the third row is spiders and the bottom unit has a big snake named Reggie.”

“I wouldn’t have thought of you as the type of person someone gets to pet-sit,” Lassiter ventured.

“Really?” Shawn said, surprised. “I do it all the time. I worked at an animal hospital for a month. Animals love me.”

Lassiter looked around the apartment. If Spencer was only staying here temporarily then it was unlikely to contain anything incriminating. He watched as Shawn shook flakes into the fish tank, sprinkled mealworms into the lizard and spider terrariums, and brought something out of the kitchen for the snake. He returned to the kitchen, washed his hands, and came back, smiling.

“Now I’m all yours, Lassie.”

Lassiter swallowed and looked at Shawn in the warm light from the shaded lamps. He was standing impossibly close to him, and Lassiter could smell his cologne, musky and dark.

Should I have worn cologne? He wondered.

“I...uh...” He realized, for the first time since their date had begun, that he may have signed up for more than he could handle. He should have known that there was no way he was going to be able to worm Spencer’s deepest secrets out of him over wine and seafood pasta. Finding out how Spencer did whatever it was he did was more like a long-term project. Except maintaining the charade of dating for that long would almost certainly require more than dinner and a chaste peck on the lips.

“I’ll give you a hint,” Shawn said, smiling at Lassiter’s awkwardness. “This is the part where we kiss.” He leaned in closer, and just stood there, his lips slightly parted, waiting for Lassiter to make the next move.

Lassiter swallowed hard and wrapped his arms tentatively around Shawn. Despite all the times he’d slammed him into walls or wrestled him into a hold, touching him in this new context felt different and alien. He was suddenly conscious of how solid Shawn’s muscles felt. He closed his eyes, leaned in and pressed his lips to Shawn’s. They were soft and he tasted like creamy garlic, which contrary to common wisdom wasn’t a bad thing at all. Shawn ran his hand along Lassiter’s jaw as the kiss went on, leading inevitably to that moment where one of them would open their mouth. Lassiter felt Shawn’s hips tilt forward and grind against his thigh, and his lips parted in surprise at how hard Shawn was, providing the opening Shawn’s tongue had been waiting for.

Lassiter felt a surge of excitement welling up inside him from low in his gut. He suddenly realized that he’d been fooling himself with the idea that this was all an act. His mind might have thought he was acting, but his body didn’t seem to agree. He pulled away,

stepped back and wiped a hand across his mouth.

“I have to go,” he said, hoping that the dim light and the darkness of his suit would hide his straining erection.

“Are you sure?” Shawn moved toward him and Lassiter put out an arm to block him.

“Yeah. I am. I mean, I do. Have to go.” He turned, and strode to the door, pausing once it was open and he was safely on the other side of it. “I’ll call you.” He hurried to his car and pulled away, putting as much space between himself and Spencer as possible. His mind felt like a hurricane had been released in it. He’d assumed that this date had been a joke, and so he hadn’t felt guilty about trying to use it to his own advantage. But the hardness in Shawn’s pants suggested that the whole evening had been motivated by something entirely different. Shawn actually liked him, was attracted to him, and wanted him, sexually. And despite his attempt to pretending otherwise, the evidence of his own body suggested that maybe he’d been motivated by something similar. And a good detective didn’t ignore the evidence.

The next morning Shawn unlocked the door to the Psych office, humming the theme to Stripes as he stepped inside, then froze, his senses alert. Dozens of things in the office were slightly out of place. It creeped him out like a Mini Pops cover of Hit Me Baby One More Time. He grabbed an umbrella as a weapon and, feeling only slightly like the Penguin, padded silently into the office.

It wasn’t like the movies, where the hero comes home to discover his place trashed. There weren’t any torn cushions, no drawers were tipped open, no papers had been strewn across the floor. Yet to Shawn it was painfully obvious that someone had thoroughly searched the place. Part of him hoped this was just Lassiter’s way of getting to know him better, but whereas Lassiter had left faint newspaper-ink prints on his desk drawers and the door to the storage closet, whoever had broken in this time had worn gloves. Shawn could tell because he’d purposely avoided wiping the newspaper prints from his drawer, but whatever gloved hand had opened it last hadn’t been as careful.

Damn, he thought, looking at the hopelessly smudged prints. *I was saving those as a souvenir.*

Brandishing the umbrella menacingly, he opened the closet but saw only old Halloween costumes, a stuffed elephant he had won at a fairground, and miscellaneous sporting equipment.

Certain now that no one was lurking in the office, Shawn relaxed and collapsed into his chair. Even the valuables, like the television, DVD player, stereo, and computer were still here. He opened the drawer where he kept his candy and raised an eyebrow. His CD copy of You Can’t Always Get What You Want was gone. Shawn pressed his lips together and nodded his head slowly. Whoever had broken into the office had had an insatiable need

for the smooth deep tones of voice actor Winston Winters. And Shawn was 90% sure he knew who that was.

Chapter 5

Lassiter pulled into his driveway and sat there, trying to overcome the urge to return to the place where Shawn was staying. He shut off the ignition, pocketed the keys, walked himself into his house and then barricaded himself behind his door. He was feeling very much like Dr. Jekyll, fighting to overcome the rampaging hormone-monster in his body that was Mr. Hyde. At first he'd thought it was just the scotch that seemed to bring out his long-forgotten impulses and turn him into some sort of homosexual Lothario. But now the transformations were taking place without the aid of alcohol. Well, without the aid of much alcohol, anyway. He'd had half a glass of wine with dinner, but it certainly wasn't enough drink to stupefy his conscience.

Several hours of dark, scotch-assisted introspection later, Lassiter realized that the situation had been entirely his own fault. He'd had this repressed attraction within him, probably for years, and he'd allowed it to come out during his interactions with Spencer. Maybe he'd sensed they had some kind of sexual kinship. *Was that what they called gaydar?* His enthusiasm to uncover the secret to Spencer's psychic act had probably just been a smokescreen to justify his continuing obsession with the man. The attraction was so strong that he'd clung to the flimsiest of excuses just to eat dinner with him. He'd used Spencer as an outlet for feelings he couldn't even acknowledge to himself, and he'd ended up leading him on. Spencer had just reacted as any gay (*partly gay?*) man would have under the circumstances. He owed Spencer an apology.

While he'd have loved to just write it all out in a letter, he'd learned at an early age never to put anything on paper that you wouldn't be comfortable having Sister Mary Edgars read to a roomful of your grade four classmates. So the apology would have to be verbal, and that meant he'd have to see Spencer.

No, he thought. *That would be too dangerous right now.* He didn't quite trust himself to be able to resist his impulses. *But maybe*, he thought, *I could do it over the phone.*

He began to feel in control again for the first time in days. He'd call from work, be apologetic but curt, and then they could forget about the whole thing. He'd work harder on getting his libido under control. Maybe then he could put his full attention on this damn Maxwell disappearance.

He took a long shower before going to bed, to wash off the grime and the guilt. And if he worked out some frustration in his soap slicked hand while remembering the taste of Shawn's garlic-battered lips that was certainly nobody's business but his own.

The next morning Lassiter checked his mail, made coffee, and cleared his desk of paperwork before finally pulling out his cell phone. The thought of calling Spencer made him feel sick. He looked at his phone accusingly, as if it were the force driving him to call. He pressed some buttons and heard Shawn's cell ring.

"Lassie!" Spencer sounded happy and cheerful, but he steeled his nerves. This wasn't any

time to back down. It had to be done.

“Spencer. Glad I caught you.” His tone was cool and professional. “I wanted to clear something up. About last night.”

“An underrated performance by Rob Lowe,” Shawn said. “I really felt that he captured the angst of a man torn between ambition and love.”

“Okaaay...” Lassiter frowned and tried to keep himself on track. “Listen, I called to say. That is, I just wanted to let you know...” This had seemed so much easier when he’d come up with the plan last night.

He looked up, startled, as Juliet O’Hara smacked his desk with a rolled up report sheet. “Heads up, partner,” she said. “They just brought in a body matching the description of Maxwell Harris.”

Lassiter slapped a hand over the receiver. “Damn,” he said, his words at odds with the growing smile on his face. Finding a body, sad as it was for the family, meant a break in the case. “I guess we’d better call the wife. I mean, widow.” He turned back to the phone. “Sorry about that. Are you still there?”

“Yep,” Shawn said. “You were going to tell me something about last night.”

“I was.” He watched O’Hara as she headed down the stairs leading to the morgue. “What I wanted to say was...” He cleared his throat. Maybe this talk would be better if done face-to-face. “You owe me a hundred dollars. We just found the body of Maxwell Harris.”

“What? No way!” Shawn sounded offended at having been proven wrong. It felt nice to have the upper-hand for a change.

“Way,” Lassiter said. “Well, probably. They found the body matching his description. We just need to bring the widow down to ID him.”

“I’m coming down there,” Shawn said. “Right now.” Lassiter couldn’t tell if the high tone in his voice was anger or disbelief.

“Better stop at the bank on your way,” Lassiter said before hanging up. He could always apologize to Spencer later, after they’d settled their bet.

Shawn pocketed his phone and swore.

“Bad news?” Gus asked. He’d purposely avoided asking Shawn any questions about his date with Lassiter, but he could tell from the Bad Boys ring tone who had just called.

“As if life wasn’t being difficult enough,” Shawn said. “It’s gone from being Rubik’s Cube tricky to being Missing Link tricky.”

“You’re not seriously going to suggest that the Missing Link was a tougher puzzle than the Rubik’s cube?” Gus stared hard at his friend.

“Fine,” Shawn acknowledged. “They were both difficult, as the pieces scattered all over Henry’s garage proves. Although in my defence, the Missing Link puzzle was much harder to dismantle with a hammer and chisel than the Cube was.”

“So what’s the problem now?” Gus asked, not sure he wanted to know.

“Where do I start,” Shawn asked rhetorically. “Our office is more attractive to intruders than a house made of candy. We’ve had two break-ins in the span of a week. The body of a man I was pretty sure didn’t exist just turned up, and I won’t even get into what went wrong on my date last night, because frankly, I’m not sure. One minute it’s kisses and groping, the next minute he’s taking off like Flo-Jo.” He looked around his desk, moving magazines and take-out containers. “And now I can’t find my keys.”

Gus stared at Shawn for a moment, his face impassive as he processed all the information. “Why didn’t you tell me we’d had a break-in?” he asked finally, settling on the item that seemed most pressing and least likely to involve Lassiter. “That’s it. I’m getting a better lock and upping our insurance coverage.”

“Relax. As I told you before, a good lock just encourages break-ins by suggesting we have something valuable to protect.”

“We do have something valuable to protect.” Gus began to count off on his fingers, “Computer equipment, a game system, a television, not to mention confidential client files and my portable AM/FM radio.”

“Dude, nobody wants your radio. Those haven’t been cool since the seventies.”

“It’s a vintage piece of transistor technology, Shawn.” Gus slammed a hand onto his desk. “And someone could have stolen our identities and be using my social security number to take out fraudulent mortgages.” He picked up the phone. “I’d better call Equifax.”

“Relax. The people who broke in aren’t after your identity. I promise.” Shawn went to the door and began to walk himself through his arrival, trying to remember what he’d done with his keys.

“Wait a minute.” Gus looked at Shawn suspiciously. “You know who broke in?” When Shawn nodded Gus asked, “Then why haven’t you reported it?”

“Because nobody would believe me.” Shawn had retraced his steps to the point where he’d played a game of waste-basketball and was rooting through the bin in case he’d slam-dunked his keys.

Gus said. “I’d believe you.”

“Fine. The first break in was Lassiter, and the second was that lady whose husband is missing, Mrs. Harris.”

“It’s okay to just say you don’t know,” Gus said, annoyed.

“Like I said,” Shawn gestured toward Gus as if he were Exhibit A, “no one would believe me.”

“Fine,” Gus said. “Suppose I do believe you. It’s one thing if Lassiter can get through a locked door, but Mrs. Harris doesn’t strike me as particularly skilled at housebreaking. We’re getting a better lock.” Gus thought about the other issues on Shawn’s list and added, “I’m sorry to hear your date went sour. But realistically, you had to have been expecting that.”

“What? No I wasn’t expecting it,” Shawn said defensively. “Women love me. I have great dates.”

“I’m pretty sure that neither of you had been on a date with another guy before,” Gus offered. “It was bound to be awkward. Not that I ever want to hear the details again, but consider yourself lucky that you even got to first base.”

Yeah,” Shawn mumbled. “But he took off so fast I feel like I was walked.” He smiled triumphantly as he found his keys, which were resting in a bowl of jelly beans on his desk. “Maybe I need a cooler alter-ego, like Steve Gutenberg did in *Don’t Tell Her It’s Me*, or I could court him through a prettier friend like Steve Martin did in *Roxanne*.”

“That’s a terrible idea, Shawn,” Gus said. He made a mental note never to eat from Shawn’s bowl of jelly beans now that he’d seen him root through it with the hands that had just been touching the garbage can.

“You’re right.” Shawn said, pausing in the doorway. “I’m operating at maximum coolness now, and I certainly don’t have a prettier friend.”

Gus simply huffed and determined to throw out the jelly beans once Shawn was gone.

Twenty minutes later Shawn was standing in the morgue at the SBPD, looking at a dead man. Mrs. Harris had just identified the body as her husband and Juliet had led her away. Shawn’s eyes quickly took in the details of the body on the autopsy table. He was of

medium height and build, with hair that could be seen as blonde or brown. He looked to be about forty, and had a fresh haircut and manicured nails on his hands and feet. Except for the stab wounds on his chest, the guy was the picture of health. Shawn swore under his breath. He hated being wrong. It went against the natural order of things.

“Do those feet interest you particularly?” the coroner, Woody, asked as he strolled into the room, pulling on a second pair of latex gloves.

“Only that there’s nothing wrong with them,” Shawn said. “Listen, when you do the autopsy can you look for things like hepatitis, or signs that he’s been drinking floor cleaner or doing his own dentistry with a skate blade?”

Woody looked at Shawn curiously. “Sure I can. Is there any special reason you want to know?”

“I just had a very strong...psychic premonition...that this guy would turn out to have been homeless.” Shawn picked up a pen and grimacing, pushed the body’s lower jaw slightly open, revealing even white teeth. “But he doesn’t look very homeless.”

Woody laughed indulgently. “No. This guy wasn’t homeless. He’s well-fed. His muscle development suggests gym workouts. He’s got dental veneers. There’s no evidence of lice or scabies. He’s even seen the inside of a tanning booth recently. I’m afraid your premonition is wrong this time.”

Shawn’s brow wrinkled. “I guess so.”

“Still,” Woody said, slapping a friendly hand on his shoulder, “if I find any evidence of pancreatitis or cirrhosis I’ll give you a call. Deal?”

“Thanks,” Shawn said. He turned toward the door.

“And Shawn?” Woody called.

“Yeah?”

“You might want to leave that pen here.” He pointed to a wall-mounted hand sanitizer dispenser “And disinfect your hands, just in case.”

Shawn set the pen on the autopsy table, pumped out a generous dollop of isopropanol, and then rubbed it vigorously into his hands as he stepped into the hall.

Lassiter was there, leaning against the ochre wall. He was wearing the same dark suit he’d worn on their date, this time with a blue shirt and a red and white striped tie that made Shawn think of Captain America. It did nothing for his eyes. And if ever eyes deserved to be highlighted, Shawn thought, Lassie’s do. Lassiter’s expression was pleased, but Shawn also spotted the dark circles under his eyes that suggested late nights

and early mornings and the drawn look of worry marking his forehead. With the light from the overhead bulb he looked like a character from a film noir. Shawn sighed. He was a sucker for that sexy broken look.

“Cheer up, Spencer,” Lassiter said. “You can’t be right all the time.”

Really?” Shawn said, cocking his head, “Experience suggests otherwise.” Despite the evidence lying in the morgue, Shawn still felt right. It was the body that felt wrong.

“That’s the circle of life, Spencer. People are born, people die and people lose bets so that others can win them.”

“I’ll write you a cheque,” Shawn said, distracted. His focus was torn between the Maxwell case and Lassiter, and neither situation was making him feel very good about himself right now.

“Listen,” Lassiter said, shifting his glance down the hall for possible eavesdroppers. “I need to have a word with you. In private.” Shawn nodded and let Lassiter lead him to the viewing room of one of the interview cells. Shawn prepared himself for a second disappointment. If the vein throbbing on Lassiter’s forehead was anything to go by, he was about to deliver some bad news.

Lassiter turned and put his long hands together, as if he were about to pray. “I wanted to apologize for last night,” he began, “I was way out of line.”

“Good,” Shawn said, hesitantly. “Because I was starting to think I’d done something to put you off.” He’d gone over their date dozens of times in his mind, but all that had accomplished was to make him horny and frustrated.

“You didn’t do anything wrong.” Lassiter took a deep breath and continued. “The whole thing was entirely my fault. I apologize if my actions led you to think I was interested in you sexually. My behaviour was inappropriate. I’m very sorry and it won’t happen again.” The lines sounded practiced. This, Shawn realized, was what Lassiter had called to say to him that morning.

“You’re dumping me.” Shawn didn’t bother to keep the disappointment out of his voice.

“Well, not technically,” Lassiter squinted at him. “We weren’t actually dating.”

“We had a date. We date-ed. We kissed. You told me the dead clown story. I think it counts.”

“I’ve upset you,” Lassiter said, nodding his head. Shawn figured it was probably something he’d been taught to do during marriage counselling to show that he acknowledged the other person’s feelings.

"I'm not upset." Shawn said. "I'm pissed. You act like being attracted to me is the worst thing that ever happened to you. Frankly, it's a little insulting. Especially if you're including the day you picked out this hideous tie." He reached forward and grabbed the offending tie, giving it a brief shake for emphasis. He turned to leave then paused with his hand on the door, his head hung low. "I wasn't going to ask but now I may as well, why exactly did you break into my office? Just curious of course, since it's illegal and all."

"I'm sorry about that too," Lassiter said. He sounded exhausted and defeated. "I was looking for evidence."

Shawn relinquished his hold on the door knob and walked slowly back to Lassiter.

"Evidence of what?" he asked.

"Of how you..." he gestured at Shawn, "...do what it is you do. Professionally."

"Dude, just ask." Shawn said. He was standing close enough now that he could smell Lassiter's cologne. If he had Gus' super-smeller powers he could have recognized its brand and components, but as it was he merely found it interesting that he had chosen to wear cologne today but hadn't worn any on their date.

"Yeah," Lassiter scoffed and crossed his arms. "As if you'd just confess."

"To *you*?" Shawn locked his gaze onto Lassiter's pale blue eyes, which looked away, then quickly back again. "I might. If you *asked*." When Lassiter didn't respond Shawn continued, "You know I've got more on the line here than just a cool job. I get to work with Gus. And with you." He paused, and wondered if maybe he'd already said too much. "And Jules and Buzz and Chief Vick and that guy in fingerprinting," he added quickly, trying to erase the import of his previous words.

"Wait," Lassiter frowned. "You knew the fingerprint lady was a guy?"

"Duh!" Shawn said. "He could model gloves for Michael Jordan. We're talking serious man-hands."

"I wish someone had told me," Lassiter grumbled. He looked at Shawn with pleading eyes over purple shadows. "Can we just agree to move forward from here, with no hard feelings?" he asked.

"I don't think so," Shawn said, running a hand slowly down the hideous tie, and breathing deeply of Lassiter's scent. "My feelings are still plenty hard." He turned and walked out of the viewing room before he did something that might get him arrested.

Shawn was sitting on the couch of his borrowed apartment, watching *Some Kind of Wonderful* when his phone rang. It was Woody.

“I thought some autopsy details might cheer you up,” Woody said.

“Hit me, big guy,” Shawn said, trying to sound enthusiastic.

“Cause of death was the obvious stab wounds to the chest, probably from some kind of kitchen knife. Other than that, he’d just your typical forty-year old frat boy. “

“Frat boy?” Shawn asked. “You mean like Will Ferrell and Vince Vaughn in *Old School*?”

“Yes indeed,” Woody said. “His lungs tell me he was a smoker. His liver shows evidence of heavy drinking. Based on the toxicology screen he was probably drunk when he died. His nasal cavity showed evidence of frequent cocaine use and his heart is slightly enlarged.”

“That’s good isn’t it?” Shawn asked. “Mind you, I’m basing my knowledge on having watched *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas* over fifty times.”

“Having a big heart is only desirable metaphorically,” Woode explained. “In this condition, with the inflammation of the lining, he was well on his way to a heart attack.” He chuckled. “If he hadn’t been murdered, that is.”

“Thanks, Woody.”

“On the up side,” the coroner added, “you were right about one thing. He tested positive for Hepatitis C. But it was mostly asymptomatic, with little evidence of liver scarring.”

“That’s an STD, isn’t it?” Shawn asked.

“Sometimes,” Woody said. “But he also could have gotten it from the tattoo, if the equipment wasn’t properly sterilized.”

“Tattoo?” Shawn sat up. “What about a tattoo?”

Shawn could head the coroner turn a page in his report. “Our Mr. Harris had a tattoo of a pair of dice on his gluteus maximus,” Woody said. “It wasn’t especially good work. I’ve seen much better in both a professional and non-professional capacity.”

Shawn thanked Woody and rang off. For the first time in a while, things were starting to feel right again.

Chapter 6

Lassiter was no stranger to guilt. He was familiar with the way it gnawed at his insides and gripped him at the back of his brain, taunting him with his inadequacies and regrets. He exited Chief Vick's office, where he had reported on the Maxwell case to Agents Hawley and Martinez from the FBI's San Diego office. They'd been friendly, but he was still left with the feeling that he hadn't been quick enough to label the case a kidnapping and request their help. They were probably right. His hesitation had cost Maxwell Harris his life.

He slapped the Maxwell file onto his desk and stared at it glumly. Until the body showed up, he hadn't been convinced that it was a kidnapping case. When grown men go missing, it's usually because they don't want to be found. When you added in his shady business practices and the FBI investigation, it had seemed reasonable that Maxwell had simply done a bunk. The phone message could have been designed to mislead his wife and the authorities.

Yet the fact remained that he'd been unable to bring Mrs. Harris' husband home alive, and now all he could do was make sure that the criminals responsible got what was coming to them. How he was going to accomplish that was another issue. They had no physical evidence tying anyone to the crime. They weren't even certain that the house was the scene of the abduction. Harris' phone call to his wife had been a dead end. The lab boys had been all over the pay phone and come up with nothing but innocent people too cheap to buy a cell phone. With the discovery of Harris' body they finally had something concrete to work on. Woody was making a mould of the stab wounds in case they found a weapon to match. He had officers with sniffer dogs canvassing the area where they'd found the body. Surely some piece of evidence would lead them to a vehicle, a holding point, or a suspect. Anything.

He leaned back in his chair and flipped through the coroner's report again. The drinking and cocaine use didn't fit with the image of Harris that his wife had given them. *Had he been sneaking out at night, drinking and doing drugs? Could there have been other women? Other men? Was there a whole other side to Maxwell Harris—one his wife knew nothing about?* His credit and debit card use was no help. If he'd been leading a double life, he'd been paying for it with cash. Large amounts of cash and interactions with drug dealers opened up new lines of inquiry. He put a call through to an officer he knew on the drug squad. Maybe someone had seen Maxwell and knew his dealers. At least now, with his body in the morgue, they had a picture to circulate.

As he watched the day tick by he realized that the biggest stumbling block to solving the Maxwell case was his own pride, which was preventing him from using the best weapon at his disposal. His attempt to break things off cleanly with Spencer had gone...not so cleanly. The man's feelings were obviously hurt, and Lassiter knew that the blame for that lay at his own door. But however uncomfortable it would be to go crawling to him for help, if it was the only way this case was going to get solved, he'd just have to swallow his pride. He grabbed his suit jacket, his car keys and the case file and drove to

the Psych office. It took him twenty minutes to work up the nerve to step out of the car.

“It’s open!” Shawn called in answer to the tentative knock.

Lassiter stepped inside, holding the case file in front of his chest like a shield. He glanced around the office.

“No Guster this evening?” Lassiter had hoped that he wouldn’t be alone with Spencer. It wasn’t that he felt like he needed a chaperone, but with Guster present he felt sure that their conversation would have remained work-related.

“Why?” Shawn asked. “Come to tell me how unappealing I am again and wanted an audience?” He picked up a rubber ball from his desk, threw it at the wall and then snagged it on the rebound.

“I know I’m the last person you want to see right now,” Lassiter said, walking slowly to the edge of Shawn’s desk, “But I really need your help on the Maxwell case.”

Shawn rolled his eyes. “Dude! I’m already helping you on the Maxwell case. I’ve practically got it solved already. I’m just waiting for my evidence to arrive from Langley.”

“The FBI lab?” Lassiter leaned forward expectantly.

“No, actually, it’s being sent by a guy I met on Craigslist. But I assure you, that won’t make it any less impressive.”

Lassiter looked at Shawn with disbelief. “When you say you’ve practically got it solved, do you mean you know who did it?”

Shawn nodded. Lassiter sat down on the loveseat and collapsed back against the plush upholstery. His mind was reeling. *How can Spencer possibly know who did it?* They had no evidence, and he refused to believe that the man was being fed information by cats, fairies, spirits or the ghost of Christmas Past. That’s not how the world worked.

“I’ve known for days,” Shawn said, bouncing the ball again. “But proving it, uhhh...” He shook his head. “Not so easy.”

“You know I don’t believe in...” Lassiter waved a hand around the office, “...all of this malarkey....”

“I know, I know,” Shawn cut in. “I’m a deceiving Deceptacon and you’re a virtuous Autobot. I get it.”

“What I was going to say,” Lassiter said roughly, “was that I don’t have to believe in psychic powers to know that you’re usually right. Just tell me who did it and if there’s proof to be had, we’ll find it.” At the very least, being able to concentrate on a suspect would make a huge difference.

“Where’s the fun in that?” Shawn asked.

“Fun?” Lassiter swore under his breath. “Police work isn’t supposed to be fun.” He ran a hand down his face and growled his frustration. “I don’t know why I bother.” He stood and looked at the door, but made no effort to move toward it. Despite his words, he knew exactly why he bothered. He had hit a brick wall and saw no way around it.

“Let’s play a game,” Shawn suggested, turning his chair to face Lassiter. “You answer some questions for me, and then I’ll answer some questions for you. Complete honesty. *Squid pro cocoa.*”

“I think you mean *quid pro quo*,” Lassiter said, trying to prevent his lips from breaking into a smile. He sat back onto the loveseat.

“I’ve heard it both ways, and mine sounds more delicious.” Shawn jumped up and walked across the floor to the loveseat, perching himself on the arm. “Question one, why did you bother to show up for our date if you had no interest in me whatsoever?”

“I didn’t say that.” Lassiter hung his head and leaned forward, clenching his hands together.

“Oh but you did. You said,” Shawn put on a stern voice that Lassiter assumed was meant to approximate his own, “I apologize if my actions led you to think I was interested in you sexually. You’re a gross and hideous man, and you have a better chance of waking up in McDonaldland than you do of waking up in my bed again.”

“I never said that second part!”

“You’re right,” Shawn admitted. “I must have been reading your thoughts. On the up side, those apple pie trees sound pretty sweet and I could probably eat for a month if I could catch Mayor McCheese.”

“Just because I’m sorry you thought I was attracted to you doesn’t mean...” Lassiter closed his eyes and rested his head in his hands. “...doesn’t mean that it wasn’t the case.” Somehow it was easier to tell Spencer the truth if he couldn’t see him.

He felt Spencer shift on the arm of the sofa. “So,” Shawn’s voice was light and curious, “you found me attractive, but you didn’t want me to know. How exactly was going on a date with me part of that plan? Because that *did* lead me to suspect you liked me. As did the kissing and the boner.”

“Oh God,” Lassiter moaned into his hands. “Can’t we just pretend it never happened?”

“No way,” Shawn said, delight evident in his voice. He put an arm around Lassiter’s shoulder. “It was like the part of Clue where you’ve got the suspect and the room figured out and you’re just trying to narrow down the weapon. You were Colonel Mustard in the lounge, with the, uh, lead pipe.”

“Thanks for comparing that evening to murder,” Lassiter said sarcastically.

“Fine. It wasn’t like murder,” Shawn allowed. “It was more like a hit and run on my ego. As first dates go, I’ve had worse. I once got my arm caught in a revolving door on my way to the movies and would up with a dislocated shoulder. My date ditched me for one of the paramedics. Although in her defence he was totally hot. But I was kind of hoping that my first date with a guy would take a different path.”

Lassiter raised his head and turned to look at Shawn. “I was your first date with a guy?”

“Are we on your questions already?” Shawn asked. “Because I still have a bunch left.”

Lassiter moved to the other end of the loveseat and turned to face Shawn.

“Fine. Ask away.” He crossed his arms, and pressed his lips together, determined to get the worst part over with. If he could withstand ten or fifteen minutes of humiliation he could solve the Maxwell case. It was a price any good detective would gladly pay.

Shawn slid down the arm of the loveseat to occupy the space vacated by Lassiter, who was suddenly aware of what close quarters Spencer’s tiny sofa was for two adult men.

“Question two: If you’re so attracted to me, why did you run away?”

“There’s no way that’s your second question,” Lassiter said. “I feel like I’ve answered four or five already.”

“Technically, I’ve asked two, and you only answered one,” Shawn said. “So spill. Why the dine and dash?”

“You know why.”

“I don’t, actually. I thought we were headed for a rousing game of tug o’war, followed by some naked twister, or maybe sampling one another’s milkshakes.”

Lassiter glared at him and said, “Those euphemisms make you sound like a ‘tween.” He chewed on his lower lip and added, “Would you really have gone that far on a first date?”

Shawn smiled. “You’re jumping in with the questions again, Lassie. But thanks for bringing up the subject. Question three, how far would you have gone?”

“So help me Spencer, if you’re just pretending to know who killed Maxwell so you can pump me for personal information I will have you charged with obstruction.”

“Your body language is all stand-offish, but you keep saying things like ‘pump me.’ And I’d love to read the paperwork on that obstruction charge.” Shawn cleared his throat and spoke in his gruff imitation of Lassiter again, “The subject made me answer questions about our curtailed sexual encounter before he would—”

“Fine.” Lassiter cut in. Spencer was right. There was no way he wanted anyone at the station finding out about their date. “I saw it going to pretty much the same place. Which was why I left.”

“Spoilsport.” Shawn moved closer and put a hand on Lassiter’s leg. “We could always pick up where we left off.”

Lassiter could feel waves of heat coming off Spencer’s body. Or maybe his own body was overheating from the proximity. He couldn’t be sure. All he knew was that he was pinned against the arm of the loveseat and Spencer’s lips were getting disturbingly, tantalizingly, close. He tried to lean further back and succeeded only in lowering himself horizontal enough for Shawn to lean over him, their legs hanging off the loveseat, their chests pressed together. It wasn’t what he’d intended, but now that it was happening he didn’t exactly mind.

“What about my questions?” he asked, taking in Shawn’s intense gaze in quick, evasive glances. “Aren’t we supposed to take turns?”

“Okay, shoot.” Shawn didn’t move, but licked his lips and smiled slightly.

“Did you mean those things you said to Gus about me?” He knew that Shawn had assumed that his questions would be about the Maxwell murder, but there were some personal things he’d like to get cleared up first, and that overheard conversation had been haunting him.

“About you being sexy and brave or about you having been the stunt double for David Niven in the original Casino Royale?” Shawn ran a hand slowly down Lassiter’s chest, stopping just at his belt line and briefly grazing his badge before making his way up again.

“That first thing.” Lassiter frowned. “I wasn’t even alive when Casino Royale was made.”

“Of course I meant it, Lassie. I didn’t realize you were in the closet—figuratively speaking, of course—when I said that.” Shawn sat up, then slowly unknotted Lassiter’s tie and then loosed three buttons on his shirt.

Looking back, Lassiter figured it was probably when he removed his holster, that he made the decision to do something sexual with Shawn. His position on the tiny couch was causing the butt of his Glock to press painfully into his side, bruising his ribs. As soon as Shawn's weight lifted off him he could have bolted for the door. He could have pushed him aside and left. He could have, but he didn't. Instead, he'd slipped his arms out of his holster and set it on the floor within reach. Maybe he figured that if he was going to suffer through the guilt, he might as well get to enjoy the sin.

After all, he reasoned, It's not as if I'm signing on for some long-term commitment here. What was it Shawn said? He does something for a while and then loses interest. I'll just be another one of those things, like racquetball or collecting Pogs.

Lassiter ran his fingers through Shawn's hair, grabbed a handful at the nape of his neck, and pulled him within kissing distance. He opened his mouth and his tongue swiped against Shawn's. *He tastes like candy, Lassiter thought. Red Vines, maybe.* Kissing Shawn was unlike anything he'd ever done with women. It felt dangerous.

Lassiter paused and Shawn looked at him, his eyes wide with lust or panic. With the length of Shawn's lean body pressed against him there was no hiding the effect on either of them. Lassiter looked at the office door and then back at Shawn.

"You should lock the door," he said.

"But then I have to move," Shawn said.

"Do you really want Guster walking in here?"

"That depends." Shawn smiled. "Would that lead to an impromptu three-way or to you claiming I was trying to bite your face?"

"Lock the door, Spencer."

"Consider it locked." Shawn leaped from the couch, and within seconds had shut all the blinds and locked the door. The heavy click sounded ominous and final. Shawn laughed nervously. He turned on a lamp, switched off the overhead, and then turned on Gus' radio and stood there turning the knobs, looking for a station.

After a few minutes of radio stations alternating with static, Lassiter asked, "Are you coming back to this couch?" He'd been so preoccupied by his own anxieties that it hadn't occurred to him that Spencer might get an attack of nerves. But he was definitely looking nervous, chewing on his bottom lip and fiddling with the radio. He'd rejected three perfectly good stations.

"In a minute," Shawn said. He tuned in a station where The Smithereens were halfway through Behind the Wall of Sleep. He walked up to the couch and stood, looking down at Lassiter. "What about the rest of your questions?" He put his hands in his pockets and

then pulled them out again.

“They can wait a few minutes.” Lassiter reached out for Shawn’s arm and pulled him down to the tiny loveseat. He could feel Shawn’s heart pounding against his chest and the hardness pressing against the fabric of his jeans.

“Relax, Spencer. I’m not going to hurt you.”

“Of course not,” Shawn said. His voice still held a tremor.

After all the years of Shawn’s not-so subtle innuendos, comments on his appearance and inappropriate touches, it felt strange to suddenly find himself the sexual aggressor. He spoke low, almost a whisper, “We don’t have to do anything if you don’t want to, Shawn.” The use of his first name seemed to have a calming effect.

“No really, I’m fine.” Shawn smiled and put his hand on Lassiter’s hip. “Just uh, sorry if I’m not very good at any of this.” He laughed, less nervously this time. “I mean, I’ve been playing the home game long enough,” he glanced down at his own crotch, “but I haven’t...” He trailed off.

Lassiter combed his fingers through the side of Shawn’s hair, and leaned forward, raking his cheek against his artfully stubbled jaw and inhaling the scent of his neck and hair. He was surprised how something so unavoidably masculine could still be so arousing. He could feel the pulse in Shawn’s neck and Lassiter ran his tongue along it, experimentally. When Shawn responded he became more aggressive, and licked, sucked, and then gently bit the spot, eliciting a torrent of gasps and mumbled words.

Shawn turned his head and applied his mouth to Lassiter’s own neck. The sensations were intense, from the sandpaper roughness of Shawn’s jaw to the intense warm softness of his lips, to the sharp pressure of his teeth. And in the back of his mind Lassiter realized there was something symbolic about exposing his neck like this. It was trusting, and vulnerable. In the primal part of his brain, something about Shawn made Lassiter think of him as another predator, and surrendering to that was a heady mix of excitement and fear. He arched his back and whimpered, unable to express what he was feeling in words.

Shawn leaned back grasped Lassiter’s loose tie ends in each hand. He pulled back and gripped them, like reins.

“This is one of my favourite ties on you,” Shawn said.

Lassiter regained his composure and smiled, his teeth shiny in the dim light. “I know.”

Shawn raked his fingers through Lassiter’s exposed chest hair and then unbuttoned the remaining four buttons on his shirt and spread it open, revealing pale skin contrasting with dark hair. His hands explored the muscles and skin, feeling Lassiter’s chest rise and lower with each breath. He stooped low again and kissed Lassiter’s pecs, hesitantly, then

made his tongue into a point and traced a circle around a nipple. A sharp intake of air whistled through Lassiter's teeth, followed by a low moaning exhale. Shawn repeated the action again and again, pulling moans from Lassiter's lips rapidly now, then moved to the other nipple and did the same. Lassiter pushed his hips forward and ground against Shawn, desperate for some release.

"Uffg," Shawn said, pausing to pull a few tiny hairs from his tongue. "I'm not used to encountering that problem," he tilted his head thoughtfully, "Not with nipples, anyway."

"Sorry," Lassiter gasped. His pupils were huge, half-hidden under his heavy lids.

"S'okay," Shawn said. "It's...interesting." He unbuttoned Lassiter's dress pants and slowly pulled the zipper down. Then he wended his hand through the fly of Lassiter's boxers and pulled his rigid cock free. Shawn grasped it firmly in his fist and pumped it slowly. Lassiter's head dropped back and he groaned loudly.

The skin of Shawn's hand felt slightly rough, and the new sensation was pushing Lassiter to the edge faster than he wanted. He breathed deeply and ran through the gun safety checklist he'd learned at the Police Academy until he'd regained control. It had been a long time since he'd had sex, and while expectations around stamina were a little different under the circumstances, it would still be embarrassing to lose himself after a few minutes of groping. There was nothing to complain about in Shawn's technique, and he could feel the promising heat of the man's breath on his cock. When several moments had passed with that promise unfulfilled Lassiter brought his head forward and looked down. Shawn was leaning over his cock, his lips wet and slightly parted.

"Are you sure you're okay with this?" Shawn asked. His eyes were glassy and his voice was breathless.

"Can I trust you to keep your mouth shut about this, Spencer?" Lassiter ignored the contrast between what he'd just said and what Shawn was about to do.

"Please," Shawn scoffed. "What happens in the Psych office stays in the Psych office."

"Not good enough," Lassiter shook his head. "Too many people come to this office."

"Fine. I'll tell Gus, but that's as far as it goes."

Lassiter shrugged. "I can live with that." He watched as Shawn's mouth surrounded him in hot, wet friction. He'd been right about Shawn's lips; they were incredibly soft. He wasn't attempting any deepthroating, but his tongue was swirling like mad, and Lassiter realized that no matter how much gun safety he reviewed, this wasn't going to last very long.

Shawn glanced up at him with eyes that looked green in the dim light. The reality of the situation—the who, and the what—pushed itself to the forefront of Lassiter's mind, only

to be blocked out again by the overwhelming sensations.

“Shawn....” Lassiter felt he should give some kind of forewarning, but it was difficult just keeping it together enough to speak his name. He tried again, his voice tighter and his tone more desperate, “Shawn.” Despite his inarticulation, Shawn seemed to understand. He mumbled “uh-huh,” and the vibrations from his throat sent Lassiter arching off the loveseat and then collapsing, boneless, as he gave himself over to that amazing mouth. Lassiter clamped a hand onto Shawn’s arm as Shawn swallowed, made a brief choking sound and then swallowed again.

Lassiter lay motionless while Shawn delicately removed his sensitive cock from his mouth. Shawn retrieved a can from the office mini fridge and took a drink. He walked back to the loveseat and held the can out to Lassiter.

“Would you like to be a Pepper too?”

Lassiter sat up, accepted the can and took a gulp of the carbonated drink. After what had just passed between them it seemed gauche to balk at sharing a can of soda. He passed it back and then tucked himself into his boxers and zipped up his pants. Without his pent-up lust driving him, Lassiter was unsure how to broach the subject of reciprocating. He stood, cupped Shawn’s jaw in his hand and ran a thumb along his mouth. Then he took a deep breath, stepped in closer and kissed Shawn on the mouth. He glanced at the loveseat and then back at Shawn.

“You don’t have to,” Shawn said, answering his unspoken question.

“Shut up, Spencer.” Lassiter turned Shawn around and pushed him into a sitting position on the loveseat. He grabbed a cushion from a nearby chair and kneeled on it in front of Shawn. He ran his hands up along Shawn’s jeans and then hooked a finger under the neckband of his t-shirt, as blue as his eyes sometimes were. “Lose the shirt,” he said. Somehow giving orders made what he was about to do feel more normal. Shawn hesitated only a moment before grabbing the hem of his shirt and pulling it up and off.

“Jesus Christ Spencer,” Lassiter stroked his fingers down Shawn’s chest, where a four inch scar ran vertically between his pectoral muscles, wide, puckered, and pale against his tan skin. “What the hell happened to you?” Lassiter wasn’t sure if he felt protective, angry or impressed.

“Oh that?” Shawn waves a hand dismissively. “That’s where I had all my feelings removed. It makes life much easier. I highly recommend it.”

Lassiter ran his fingertips over the scar. It was definitely a few years old, and it looked medical rather than accidental. But if Spencer didn’t want to discuss it, he wasn’t going to push. It wasn’t as if they were going to be dating, after all. They were just...this.

He leaned in and kissed Shawn again, exploring his mouth. He pinched his nipples to

points and rolled them between his thumb and forefinger. Shawn gasped and murmured incoherently against his lips. Lassiter worked his mouth slowly down Shawn's torso, pausing to lick at each brown nipple, and lightly kiss the mysterious scar, finally finding himself at the waistband of Shawn's jeans. He twisted the button open and unzipped the fly.

"Up," he directed. Shawn shifted his weight against the back of the loveseat and lifted his hips enough for Lassiter pull both jeans and underwear firmly down to Shawn's knees, leaving him hard and exposed.

"Gus is going to make me Febreeze the hell out of this loveseat," Shawn muttered.

Lassiter grasped Shawn's erection and stroked him firmly, feeling the veins beneath his fingers and the soft skin sliding over the hard tissue. Shawn had been right about masturbation being a type of training. Touching Shawn like this didn't feel as strange as he'd expected. There was nothing he'd done, however, that was akin to going down on a man.

He filled his lungs and then slowly lowered his mouth over the head of Shawn's cock. Lassiter could smell the heavy musk of Shawn's pubic hair—a scent that was warm and arousing. In his mouth, Shawn felt huge. He kept his jaw slack and moved slowly, doing most of the work with his hand. His spit-slicked palm slid slowly along the shaft and he could hear Shawn gasping and panting above him.

Lassiter slid his free hand over Shawn's tense stomach muscles and up, across his chest, which was now slightly wet with sweat. He grasped a nipple and gently pulled and twisted, eliciting a deep cry and a slow, desperate pelvic thrust from Shawn. He ran his hand back down Shawn's body and then cupped his balls, which were high and tight. He drew a finger down, along the cleft of his ass and Shawn's legs parted as if the touch had asked a question. When Lassiter explored further he could feel his thighs tense and quiver and he withdrew his hand. Shawn's breathing had become ragged and harsh, and he had his hands raised, gripping the back of the loveseat. Each time Lassiter's mouth descended, his hips pushed forward to meet him.

As an activity, giving head was more exciting than he'd anticipated. There was something powerfully arousing about seeing Shawn writhe in response to his movements. After spending so much time wondering how the damn psychic managed to stay one step ahead of him on so many cases, it was nice to see him whimpering desperately and losing control. Lassiter was already half hard again.

"Lassie..." Shawn gasped and clamped a hand onto Lassiter's shoulder and went still and rigid. Lassiter felt Shawn's cock expand and contract, and then his mouth was flooded with liquid, sharp and sweet. It seemed to fill every available space and flow over into his throat and nose. His eyes watered and he swallowed a few times then pulled back, coughing.

“Are you okay?” Shawn asked between gasps. He’d covered himself with his hand.

“I’m fine,” Lassiter said curtly. He hadn’t expected to be perfect his first time out, but he found himself more than a little embarrassed at having gagged. He stood, grabbed the Dr. Pepper from the table where Shawn had left it and took a gulp of the harsh drink to clear his palate. He didn’t think he’d ever be able to taste that soda again without making the association. Whether it was going to be a pleasant or a negative one, he wasn’t yet sure.

“That was great,” Shawn said. He still sounded winded, and his eyes were nearly closed.

“Thanks,” Lassiter suddenly felt awkward and he looked at the desk, the lamp, and the floor—anywhere but at Shawn. He buttoned his shirt, picked up his holster from the floor and slid into it, then put his suit jacket on. It was silly, but it made him feel more protected.

He wandered over to a wall and stared at a poster, not really seeing it. He glanced quickly at the door. What he really wanted to do was go to his own apartment and process what had just happened. He touched his mouth with his fingertips. His lips tingled and he could smell Shawn on his hands.

He felt a hand on his hip and turned. Shawn was dressed, smiling, and leaning close. Lassiter let Shawn lean against his chest and wrap his arms around his waist. For several moments they just stood there, holding each other without speaking. Of all the things Lassiter had done this evening, this felt the most awkward. He wasn’t sure if the show of affection was meant to communicate gratitude or something else.

“So…” he said finally, “you were going to tell me about the Maxwell case.”

“You really want to talk about that now?” Shawn asked, not bothering to hide his surprise.

“It’s why I came here, Spencer.”

“Is it?” Shawn asked rhetorically. When Lassiter didn’t reply he removed his arms from the embrace and went to sit at his desk. “Don’t worry, Lassie. I’ll keep my promise. I’ll tell you all about it. But you have to let me have my big wrap-up where I explain whodunnit for the guys at the station.”

“Is that really necessary?” Lassiter asked. He sat in a chair on the other side of the desk, where he supposed clients must sit.

“It’s kind of how I get paid,” Shawn said, “so, yes, it’s necessary.”

“Fine. Spill it.”

Shawn began to talk. The whole story, including Lassiter’s follow-up questions, took half

an hour, during which time they both steadfastly avoided looking at the loveseat.

Chapter 7

Lassiter looked at his watch. Spencer was due to show any minute to stage his wrap-up of the Maxwell case. He'd always assumed that knowing what Spencer was going to reveal ahead of time would make these little shows of his less stressful, but he'd been wrong. Instead, he was hyper-vigilant, trying to anticipate anything that might go wrong. It didn't help that he'd spent large portions of the night staring at the ceiling instead of sleeping.

Fifteen hours had passed since he'd committed an act that the State of California used to prosecute prior to 1976. True, oral copulation wasn't a crime anymore, but that didn't make him feel any less culpable. He wasn't the sort of man who did things like that. He was tough on crime and fiscally conservative. He'd voted for Reagan—or he would have if that damn twenty-second amendment hadn't limited presidents to two terms. Blowing men in their offices wasn't part of the picture.

The worst of it was that he couldn't even decide how to feel about what he'd done. By the time he'd gotten home that evening he'd been in the throws of a full-scale regret-athon. He had gone over what he'd done with Shawn in his mind and felt horrified, both by his actions and by the sharp detail of his recall. He'd retched and used his electric toothbrush until the bristles were bent and his mouth and nose were permeated with the taste and smell of cinnamon toothpaste. He'd calmed down, taken a hot shower to relax, and then ended the evening by jerking off to the hated memory. He was feeling conflicted, to put it mildly.

It had taken some doing, but the station was busy. Mrs. Harris was in Chief Vick's office, arranging to release the body of her husband. McNab and O'Hara were completing reports on the search of the dump site and the door-to-door canvassing. Agents Hawley and Martinez from the FBI's San Diego office were in the break room, drinking coffee. Coordinating their presence without telling them more than he wanted them to know had been exhausting. Now, assuming UPS kept their delivery time, he'd be laying a murder charge today. The thought ought to make him happy, but he felt strangely blank, as if all his feelings had been put on pause.

Shawn and Gus strolled into the station drinking specialty coffees. Shawn was all smiles, as if he hadn't a care in the world. He'd probably slept like a log. And possibly in the shirt he was wearing. *Doesn't the man own an iron?*

At least Guster has the decency to look anxious, Lassiter thought. Then he realized that Shawn had probably already told Guster about their little encounter. That look of anxiety might have nothing to do with the Maxwell case.

They stopped to talk with O'Hara. Shawn sat on her desk, leaning over her and smiling. Lassiter killed time shuffling through the Maxwell file. There was no reason at all for that sour feeling that was growing in his stomach while he watched Spencer flirting with O'Hara. It wasn't that he wanted Shawn to give him that kind of attention. They didn't have any kind of claim on one another. Last night had clearly just been a one-time

anomaly for both of them. It was pretty obvious that Spencer had moved on. It was just as well. The fact that he would flirt with the woman he knew his partner liked just showed his flawed character.

When he looked up again Shawn was watching him from O'Hara's desk. He smiled with that easy grin of his and Lassiter found his focus wandering from the Maxwell case. Then Shawn dipped his head and Lassiter returned the nod. It was show time.

Shawn clapped his hands loudly. "I've received an important vision," he announced, "You might say it was Moving at the Speed of Business."

"Actually," Gus said, "UPS changed their motto years ago to Synchronizing the World of Commerce."

Shawn frowned at Gus. "Well that's a silly motto. All I can see now are swimmers with Tammy-Faye makeup delivering packages." He slapped a hand to his head and raised his voice, "I have a vision of Esther Williams in a brown uniform." But apart from O'Hara and McNab, most people were lost in their own conversations.

Lassiter raised his voice, "Can the chatter, people! Spencer's got something to say." The conversations died quickly and every eye turned to Shawn. Chief Vick and Mrs. Maxwell came out of the office and FBI Agents Hawley and Martinez emerged from the break room. Lassiter made his way behind the four of them, blocking the rear exit.

"Thank-you detective," Shawn said. "I've come bearing important messages from the spirit world." Shawn put his fingers to his head, Carnac-style. "They assure me that no one bearing the name Maxwell Harris is among them."

"Can you be more specific, Mr. Spencer? Are you saying that Maxwell Harris is alive?" Chief Vick's voice had a sharp edge to it. She looked from Shaun to Mrs. Harris and back again.

"Like a Memorex tape, my friends." Shawn smiled widely, and Lassiter thought he winked at him as he pulled a square paper envelope from his pocket and removed a CD. Off to the left, Lassiter heard a rookie cop asking what a Memorex tape was.

"Are you saying Maxwell faked his death?" O'Hara asked.

Shawn shook his head. "I'm saying he's never been alive." He passed the CD to O'Hara who loaded it into her computer and turned up the volume. The voice of Winston Winters began reading from the popular self-help book, *You Can't Always Get What You Want*. It took a few moments, but then everybody began to react.

"It's Maxwell Harris," O'Hara said. There was a general murmur among the cops and Agents Hawley and Martinez made brief eye contact and then moved closer to Mrs. Harris.

“So Maxwell Harris was making a living as a voice actor?” Buzz asked.

Lassiter felt like smashing his head against the wall. McNab was a nice guy, but at this rate he would never make detective.

“No!” Shawn shook his head. “Well, truthfully, that never occurred to me. But no. I’m pretty sure there never was a Maxwell Harris. The voice you heard was just an actor.”

“Like the voice of U.N. Owen in Ten Little Indians,” O’Hara said.

“Exactly.” Shawn smiled at her and Lassiter’s stomach tied another knot in itself.

“Then who was kidnapped?” Buzz asked.

You have to hand it to McNab, Lassiter thought. No matter how difficult he finds it, he keeps trying.

“What we’ve got here,” Shawn said, “is like a lost episode of Remington Steele. Before Pierce Brosnan showed up. Or, if you prefer, The Associate, starring Whoopi Goldberg. Although I’m guessing Remington Steele is a better known reference. Quick show of hands, who’s even seen The Associate?” He waited a few moments while people stood, looking confused, before adding, “I thought so.”

“It’s also the plot of Lars Von Trier’s Danish film, Boss of it All,” O’Hara said.

Gus smiled at her approvingly, said “Nice one,” and they bumped fists.

Lassiter rolled his eyes. Bumping fists? Guster must be out of his mind. That would never get him anywhere except that vast chasm of “like you as a friend” with sides so steep it was impossible to claw your way out. Romance was like police work. It required risk and aggression.

“Lars Von Trier?” Shawn said, frowning his brow at O’Hara. “Jules, come on!”

“What?” She shrugged defensively. “I have a cable package.”

“Personally,” Gus said, “I think everyone here would be more familiar with John Nash's imaginary boss from the movie A Beautiful Mind. It won four Oscars and two BAFTAs.”

“This is ridiculous!” Mrs. Harris said, turning to Chief Vick. “This is slander. I’ll be talking to my lawyer about this.”

“Oh, I have a feeling you’ll be talking to your lawyer very soon,” Chief Vick said.

“I saw it as clearly as if it were a restored print of The Secret of My Success,” Shawn

explained. “Mrs. Harris was the brains behind the crooked land deals, but she knew it was just a matter of time before the FBI got involved. So she invented a spouse to take all the heat. This imaginary husband was a recluse who didn’t get his picture taken. He transferred his assets into his wife’s name. He did all his work by computer and messenger, and when the FBI started closing in he conveniently went missing.”

“Exactly whose body do we have in the morgue?” Chief Vick asked slowly.

“I’ll let Detective Lassiter answer that,” Shawn said.

Lassiter cleared his throat and half a dozen faces turned his way. “His name is Trevor Gorman, and he’s a salesman from the County of San Luis Obispo. He was reported missing two days ago. His credit cards were last used at a bar here in Santa Barbara.”

“That’s amazing,” O’Hara said. “How did you figure out it wasn’t really Mr. Harris?”

“The spirits assured me that Harris was a front,” Shawn said. “I figured that if a body turned up it would be some poor homeless dude Mrs. Harris had dressed up in an Armani suit. So when Gorman’s body showed up it threw me a little.” He looked Mrs. Harris in the eye. “But knowing you were guilty helped a lot.”

“The tattoo clinched it,” Lassiter said.

“Exactly!” Shawn turned and gestured dramatically at Mrs. Harris. “What woman would describe her husband and leave out the fact that he had a pair of dice tattooed on his ass?”

O’Hara blushed and murmured to Gus, “I’d have mentioned it.”

“Damn straight,” Gus responded.

“She made her description intentionally vague so it would be easier for her to find a body to match,” Shawn collapsed into Lassiter’s desk chair as if the effort of revealing the killer had sucked all the energy from his limbs.

“Based on Spencer’s information,” Lassiter explained, “we checked missing persons reports from Santa Barbara and neighbouring counties and Gorman’s description was a match. Dental records confirmed it this morning.”

“Nice work,” Agent Hawley said, looking at Lassiter with new respect. “She thought we’d stop investigating if we thought Maxwell was dead. And then the estate would go to her.”

“Okay, okay,” Mrs. Harris raised her hands defensively. “I might have made a mistake identifying the body.” She licked her lips and her eyes darted as she struggled to think her way out of the quandary. “I was distraught....but that doesn’t prove I killed anyone.”

Lassiter pulled his handcuffs and smiled. This was his favourite part of these wrap-ups.

“You’re right,” he said, coming up behind Mrs. Harris and grabbing her by the wrists. “Except the bartender had no problem identifying you and Gorman by your photographs.” He locked the handcuffs on her and started her Miranda warning.

Agents Hawley and Martinez stepped forward. “I think we can take it from here, Detective,” Hawley said.

Lassiter smiled and held up a hand. “We’re booking her for murder first. You’ll have to wait your turn.”

After Harris had been booked and Agents Hawley and Martinez had returned to San Diego, Lassiter returned to his desk. It was way past his lunchtime and he was looking forward to eating the club sandwich and fruit cup in his desk. It took only a moment before he noticed that Shawn was still sitting in his chair, feet up on his desk, flipping casually through a copy of *The Courier*

Spencer. Of course. It’s not enough that he showboated his way through the arrest, now he’s stayed to gloat about it.

He pushed Shawn’s feet off the desk and gestured with his thumb. “Out of my chair, Spencer.”

Shawn pouted, his lips giving rise to obscene thoughts, which Lassiter swiftly quashed.

“But Lassie,” Shawn said. “I love your chair.” He wriggled comfortably into the seat. “And this,” He slapped *The Courier* onto the desk, “is some damn fine crime reporting. Just think, tomorrow we can read about how you solved the Maxwell case.”

“I appreciate your help on the case, Spencer.” Lassiter tore his eyes away from Shawn’s face, but instead found his attention wandering to his beltline, which was just as thought provoking. “Especially under the circumstances.”

“You must be remembering different circumstances than I am,” Shawn said. He rose from the chair, but didn’t move enough for Lassiter to sit. They stood, staring at each other. Lassiter felt as if the rest of the station had melted away and only this portion with him and Shawn remained.

Shawn leaned forward and for a moment Lassiter was sure he was going to kiss him, here in the bullpen. At the last minute Shawn moved to the side and landed a friendly punch to Lassiter’s arm.

“Anyway, I got you something.” He set a brown paper bag on Lassiter’s desk. Then he

was gone, leaving Lassiter standing there, rubbing his arm and trying not to feel disappointed.

Lassiter sat in his chair, still warm from Shawn's body, and opened the paper bag. It was a can of Dr. Pepper. He pulled it out, held it in his hand and started at it.

What, exactly does Spencer mean by this? he wondered. *Is he taunting me? Or is it an invitation?*

Stuck to the condensation on the can was a slip of paper. He peeled it away and carefully opened the wet note's blurry ink, "P.S. I won the bet about Maxwell's body. You owe me a hundred dollars."

Lassiter smiled. Spencer was right, and he'd pay him because an honorable man paid his debts. He pulled out his sandwich and fruitcup and popped the tab on the soda. He wasn't sure what Shawn meant by the present, but for the moment he knew what he meant by drinking it. Shawn might never be his, but the memory the soda brought back was his completely, and he wasn't about to let Shawn's intentions, public opinion, or his own guilt take it away from him. He pulled out his ipod, brought up The Smithereens album he'd bought on itunes recently and set one song on repeat. He inserted his earbuds, gripped the can, closed, his eyes, and took a sip of the rough sweet drink, giving himself over to memory.