

**You've Got To Hide Your Love Away  
(In a Box Under The Ground)  
By tera\_gram**

**Rating:** M, for cock grabbing.

**Pairings:** Shawn/Lassiter.

**Warning:** Shassie slash. Creepy situation. May trigger taphephobics.

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**Summary:** Carlton and Shawn are buried alive.

Carlton Lassiter awoke to a darkness so complete that he couldn't tell if his eyes were open or closed. He tried to sit up and realized three things very quickly: first, he was in a small enclosed space; second, he had a headache; and third, he was not alone. He felt along his side to where his cell phone was clipped to his belt. He flipped the device open and used the light to examine his surroundings. He was in a box, approximately seven feet long, four and a half feet wide, and two feet high. And the body pressed against him was Shawn Spencer, immobile and silent. He checked for a pulse. Shawn was alive, but unconscious.

*Better to leave him that way for the time being, Carlton thought. There's not much room in here. The last thing I need is Shawn freaking right the hell out. It was going to be hard enough to keep himself from panicking. He checked his holster. At least my gun is still here.*

Carlton tried to piece together the timeline. He'd been investigating the disappearance of a local woman and was questioning her neighbour, Ms. Montresor. Shawn had shown up, uninvited, and pushed his way into the interview. She'd made them tea.

*Of course, Carlton thought. We've been drugged. And, he examined the wood, locked in some kind of trunk?*

Carlton looked at his cell phone. He didn't have any bars. *No calling for help.* He kicked hard at the top of the box and a shower of dirt poured in around his feet. He coughed and pulled his shirt over his mouth, waiting for the dust to settle.

*Fuck. Not a box then. We're in a coffin. This is not good.* If he'd been alone he would have kept on kicking. But he couldn't leave Shawn behind to die. Carlton wondered if this was some sort of wish fulfilment. In the two months since he'd realized that his feelings for Spencer were more than just friendly, he'd imagined dozens of ways the two of them might find themselves alone together. Buried alive in the same coffin was not on that list. *If it comes down to it, he thought morbidly, I could shoot myself in the head and give Shawn a few more minutes of oxygen.* From the darkness next to him Shawn stirred.

"Lassie?" He sounded confused, but Carlton assumed that scared wasn't far behind.

"I'm here." He tried to sound reassuring, but his voice cracked slightly.

"Where are we?" Shawn turned on his side and looked at him in the light of the cell phone.

*Do not say 'buried alive.'* He took a slow breath, then said, "We're in a crate under the ground."

"Damn!" Shawn flashed back to their visit to Ms. Montresor's house. "I remember seeing a tiny piece of white powdery something on the saucer of my cup. I thought it was sugar but it must've been some kind of tranquilizer." He made a low wail of exasperation. "I feel so stupid right now." He pulled out his iPhone and pressed the home button. "Are you getting any bars?"

"No. But then that's not surprising. There's no reception underground."

"Okay. So far, so sucky." Shawn looked at his cell phone again. "Have you tried getting out yet?"

"Yes, I have. It was not a success." He pinched the bridge of his nose and wondered if his headache was an effect of the drugged tea or the first sign of oxygen deprivation. He sighed.

Shawn shone his cell phone light at the bottom of the crate and saw the dirt.

"So I see. We've got maybe forty-five minutes before we suffocate. Unless we panic, in which case we die faster. Either way, we'll be dead by 4:00 p.m. at the latest."

"What, is that some psychic premonition? This is no time for your ridiculous act, Spencer. There's no one to show off for here." *This is clearly a sign that my interest in Spencer was doomed from the start. The guy can't even be honest with me when we're facing certain death.*

"It's not a premonition, Lassie, it's math." Shawn looked at the clock on his phone. "It's ten to three now. It was two when we arrived. We talked for fifteen minutes before she offered us tea, and it took maybe ten minutes for it to knock us out. Someone must have helped her move our bodies. They had to dig a hole if they didn't have one already. That took some time. We've been in here fifteen minutes, tops."

"And this helps us how?" Carlton was fascinated by Shawn's logic, but unclear where he was going with it.

"You don't watch a lot of Mythbusters, do you, Lassie? They established that a standard casket holds about an hour's worth of air. This box is about double that, but there are two of us. So we've got forty-five minutes of air left."

"That's how you do it all, isn't it?" Carlton turned on his side and looked at Shawn with wonder. "You're not psychic. It's all just deduction."

“Let’s focus on this buried alive problem. You can berate me for lying to you in the afterlife, okay? Assuming we end up in the same place of course. I’ve been a little naughty.”

“Forty-five minutes isn’t very long.” *Oh God*, Carlton thought, *do not start going over all the shit in your life that you wish you hadn’t put off until later.*

“When Hodges and Brennan were buried by in a car by the Gravedigger in *Bones* they punctured the spare tire to get more air.”

“Great. That does us no good since we’re not in a car.” *Just when Shawn proves he’s a genius, he also proves he’s an idiot. It’s kind of endearing, really.*

“Adrian Monk was buried alive in a car too. He used the loud music from the stereo to signal his rescuers. It’s all mostly car burials nowadays. Our burial is seriously old school.”

“My phone plays music but there’s no way we can make it loud enough to get through however many feet of dirt we’re under.”

“Then we’re left with the Sydney Bristow/Nick Stokes/Adrian Monk method. We wait to be rescued.”

“I thought you said Monk used the car horn.”

“That was the second time he was buried alive. It happened in season 3 and again in season 6.”

“Anyone could have this happen to them once,” Carlton allowed, “but twice just sounds like carelessness.” He tried to sound optimistic. “Look, maybe we will get rescued. If O’Hara notices I’m missing she can track me with the GPS in my cell phone.”

“So she has to notice you’re missing and become alarmed enough to trace you within the next forty-five minutes. Please tell me there’s a good reason she won’t just think you went to lunch?”

“Okay,” Carlton said. “So we can’t count on rescue. Uma Thurman used kung fu to fight her way out of this same situation in the second *Kill Bill* movie. And *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* clawed her way out of her grave in season 6. I don’t have any martial arts training but I’ve thrown some punches in my time and if we—”

“Lassie!” Shawn smiled at him in the glow of the cell phone. “You *do* watch television, don’t you?”

“Of course I do. I watch *Criminal Minds*, and *Cops* and *Without a Trace* and *NCIS* and the *First Forty-Eight* and all the *CSIs* except the one set in Miami.” Shawn looked at him and raised an eyebrow. “I just don’t care for David Caruso.”

“*Buffy*? That’s hardly crime fighting, unless you consider vampires the criminals.”

"I watched it for Willow. I liked her." He paused a moment, then added. "I even cried a bit when Warren shot Tara."

"Who didn't?" Shaun flashed his cell phone light around the box, examining it. "So your plan is that we try to kick and punch our way out of this thing?"

"It's a risk, but with two of us I think we can do it." *And if we can't, I'll try shooting our way out. The sound would deafen us both, but it would definitely penetrate the wood.*

"And the dirt that will inevitable pour in here like tweens in the side door of a Justin Bieber concert? What do you suggest we do with that?"

"Come on!" Carlton said, frustrated now. "We may as well try to escape. Frankly, faced with imminent death the alternatives don't look so bad." He pulled his tie off and unbuttoned his shirt. It was getting extremely hot in the claustrophobic box now. *Unless that's an effect of panic, or a sign of impending suffocation.*

"Going by that logic," Shawn said, looking the detective in the eyes, "there's no reason you can't confess your sexual attraction to me."

"What?" *How the hell does he know? I've only known for the past eight weeks.*

"You heard me, Lassie. You like me. The pretended annoyance, all the touching—it's obvious."

"The touching?" Carlton's voice rose. "*You're the one who's been touching me.*" *I haven't touched you in any way that couldn't be interpreted as professional. Or as indicative of violent dislike.*

"Exactly!" Shawn said. "I touch you inappropriately all the time. And you let me. Now either you're the least homophobic straight guy in the world, or you're interested. Which is it?"

"I'm not gay, Spencer." Although straight doesn't seem to quite fit lately either.

"Don't want to box yourself in?" Shawn laughed. "Too soon for buried alive humour? Fine. I'm not talking labels, Lassie. I'm talking lust. Admit it. You want a sip of my milkshake."

"I'm not having this conversation with you, Spencer." *The possibility of dying is difficult enough without having to add in sexual rejection.*

"Please, call me Shawn, just to see how it feels."

"No. This is ridiculous." *Besides, he thought, I already call you Shawn in my head.*

Shawn, already close, wrapped an arm around him.

“What are you doing?” Carlton asked. His head was filled with both hope and dread. *Maybe I've already passed out*, he thought, *and this is some kind of hallucination.*

“An experiment, like on Mythbusters.” Shawn's mouth was inches away from his. “These could be our last moments together, Lassie. Kiss me. I know you want to.” Shawn put a hand on the side of Carlton's face and leaned in, stopping just short of his lips, and hung there, breathlessly waiting. Carlton was used to Shawn's lack of personal space, but it had never been this overtly sexual before. It was intoxicating.

Suddenly, before he was aware of having decided to do so, he was kissing Shawn, tasting the saltiness of his skin and feeling the wetness of his mouth and the stubble of his jaw. He didn't wonder what O'Hara or Vick or Henry or his mother would say or any of the other thoughts that intruded whenever he'd thought of kissing Spencer before. Nothing outside of the box mattered.

Shawn touched Carlton just below the belt. He pulled back instinctively but there wasn't anywhere for him to go. Shawn ran his fingers over his cock through the thin fabric of his pants, and felt him swell in response. He squeezed gently and Carlton groaned and pushed against him.

“Oh my God, Shawn,” Carlton pulled back from their kiss. “If you keep doing that I'm going to use up all the oxygen,” he panted.

“Maybe it's worth it.” Shawn looked around at the box walls. “We might even be able to have sex in here, if I ... Hey. I just realized something.”

“What?” He felt a chill along his spine. Shawn was using his ‘I've solved the mystery’ voice.

Shawn ran his hand over the wood above them, wrinkling his brow in thought. “In the Mythbusters episode the steel casket started to buckle after four feet of dirt. This wood's holding up fine. We can't be buried very deep. I think your kung-fu plan might work after all.”

“Really?” The elation at the thought that they might not die was followed by a wave of nausea as he wondered about the consequences of their brief sexual encounter. *It wasn't so much a question of whether Shawn would tell anyone, but rather, who would Shawn tell first?*

“It's worth a shot,” Shawn said. “I figure we can't be more than three feet below the ground.”

“You could get hurt,” Carlton said. “We could both get hurt.” Carlton was thinking of suffocating in an avalanche of dirt, but in the back of his mind he was also thinking of the emotional landslide that might ensue if they made it out alive.

“Time heals all wounds,” Shawn said. “Except mortal wounds. Let's avoid getting any of those. Come on, Lassie. Let's kick this coffin's ass, Buffy style.” He curled his hands into fists.

“Listen,” Carlton put a hand on Shawn's shoulder, “Can we agree that what happens in the box stays in the box?”

"Maybe." Shawn smiled and kissed him again. "But only if you don't tell anyone that I'm not psychic. Except of course Gus and Henry. They already know I'm not psychic, so I get to tell them that we're sleeping together."

"We're not sleeping together." *But I can take that as you'd like to?* Carlton's heart was racing.

"Not yet. I figured we'd save that for the 'thank God we're alive' part of the day. Your place of mine?"

"Mine." Lassiter took Shawn's hand and gave it a firm squeeze. "Now let's get out of this fucking box and arrest that crazy bitch." They took a deep breath and pulled their shirts over their noses and screamed as they struck out with their fists. Dirt poured into the box.

## Chapter 2

As the dirt poured into the crate three things went through Carlton Lassiter's mind: first, that within seconds his cell phone would be covered and he would be fighting his way out in the dark. He kept his feet flat against the bottom of the crate so he would be able to tell which way was up. Second, that there was more dirt than he'd expected, and it filled the air with a choking, eye-stinging cloud before it actually filled the box. The shirt over his mouth and nose helped some, and he squinted until his eyes were nearly closed. Finally, he was surprised at how quickly the combined strength of their punches was smashing through the wood. The dirt would be another issue. It was heavier than he'd anticipated. The light from the cellphone went out and he sucked in a quick breath.

Sometimes, particularly during his separation and divorce, Lassiter had gotten depressed. On occasion, after too much scotch, he'd wondered if his life was worth living. As always, it was his job that got him through to the next day. As corny as it might sound to others, he believed in justice and duty and thought that protecting the innocent was worth doing. As he worked to push himself through the weight of the dirt pinning him in the box he discovered two new reasons for living.

The first of these reasons was Shawn. Initially, he'd suspected that his sexual interest in the psychic consultant was some kind of masochistic impulse aimed at ruining the one thing that kept him going through his darkest moments—work. The eight weeks in which he'd struggled against his libido had been hellish, and Shawn hadn't made it any easier by showing up every week and going into ab-flashing contortions. The discovery that the attraction was mutual changed everything. It certainly explained Shawn's lack of personal space and all the overly familiar touching. His curiosity about where this interest might go could only be satisfied if they both lived. And as he pushed his aching muscles through the heavy soil he realized that he really wanted to know.

His second reason for living was one he hadn't experienced before. As a police officer he'd often been the target of violence. He'd been shot at, stabbed and hit with a car. A suspect had once tried to drop an iron sculpture of a pig on his head from a second storey window. Lassiter didn't take any of these attempts to kill him personally; they were part of the job. But being buried alive evoked an anger that was stronger than he'd ever felt before. Perhaps it was the disregard it showed for Shawn's life as well as his own. Perhaps it was the sadism of the method. Regardless, his body was invigorated by feelings that pushed him past his usual limits of endurance: hatred, and a desire for revenge.

After what seemed a lung-bursting eternity, his right hand pushed through the dirt into empty space. His burning muscles struggled with renewed energy and within seconds his head was free and he was sucking in deep lungfuls of air. He brushed the dirt from his face and opened his eyes. Shawn's head and arm were protruding from the ground next to him. The two men lay there, partly submerged, and tried to regain their strength.

*We did it*, he thought, feeling an elation close to delirium. *We're alive.*

Lassiter looked around, hyper-vigilant for any sign of danger. They were in a dirt-floored

basement. He could see a shovel and a wheelbarrow and beyond that a water heater and a motley collection of broken toys, furniture, and boxes marked "garage sale stuff." He breathed slowly and evenly, afraid to close his eyes in case their successful escape was all a dream.

His mind reeled. One summer he had taken time off and gone to visit his sister in New Jersey. They'd gone to Avon-By-The-Sea and he'd let his nephew, Peter, bury him up to his neck in the wet sand. It had been fun. Being buried in the dirt of Mrs. Montresor's basement was the total opposite of that.

"That worked better than I expected," Shawn said at last.

"If you mean we're both still alive," Lassiter whispered, "then yes, it worked better than I thought it would too."

Shawn grabbed Lassiter's hand and pressed it to his dry, cracking lips.

"Last one out of our unmarked grave's a rotten egg," he said joyfully.

Five minutes of back-breaking work later they stood brushing and shaking the dirt from their faces, hair, and clothes. Shawn grabbed Lassiter and clasped him in a tight embrace. Lassiter hesitated a moment before wrapping an arm around him. It was one thing to lay bare his interest when he'd been pretty sure they were about to die. It was a different situation now, with his whole life—and career—stretching ahead of him. It suddenly felt like a very risky idea, akin to trying to feed wolverines by hand.

"Listen, Shawn. Things were kind of... Down there, I thought we were..."

*Oh God, he thought, how do I say this without sounding like a complete asshole?*

"I'm still interested if that's what you're dancing around," Shawn said. "Just let me loose in a bathroom for half an hour first. I must look all Night of the Living Dead here."

*This is not the time to have that discussion.*

"We are pretty filthy" he said, changing the subject. His suit was ruffled, covered in dirt, and torn in a few places where it had snagged on the wood. It was a write-off. Lassiter pulled his gun and wiped it down with his handkerchief.

"Dude, who carries an actual cloth handkerchief?" Shawn whispered.

"What?" Lassiter shrugged his shoulders. "It's useful."

Shawn pulled out his iphone and called Juliet.

"Hey, Jules. It's Shawn. Listen, we've got a situation here..."

While Shawn called in backup Lassiter looked down at the hole from which they'd crawled, now an indent filled with dirt and rotting wood. He grimaced. His phone was down there somewhere. There'd be time for digging it up later. The hole was now a crime scene.

"Backup is on the way," Shawn said. "Do we go up there or wait down here?"

"Good question." Lassiter dragged a hand down his face, removing a layer of dirt. "If we assume she didn't dig that hole herself we're probably dealing with two perps, one of which is pretty strong." He sighed. He was physically exhausted.

"I'm wiped," Shawn said, as if reading his mind. "But I'm not going to feel right again unless we've handcuffed that psycho."

"You're right." Lassiter looked at the floor. There was a second area of fresh dirt and he was pretty certain they'd be pulling the body of the missing neighbour, Mrs. Fortunato, out of that one. It reminded him of a Cary Grant movie he'd seen on television late on night—Arsenic and Old Lace. "She's like one of the Brewsters."

"Would that be Punky Brewster or Brewsters' Millions?" Shawn asked. He had picked up a baseball bat from a pile of old toys and was hefting it tentatively.

"Abby and Martha, actually." Lassiter led the way up the stairs, stepping on the edges of the treads to avoid making noise. He grabbed the doorknob and began to turn it.

Shaw placed a hand on his arm. "What's the plan?" he asked. "Do we just arrest her?"

Lassiter furrowed his brow. "Of course we do." He looked at Shawn's bat. "Vigilante justice is an oxymoron, Spencer. Besides, as much as I'd like to pound the snot of out her right now, she *is* an old lady."

"Frankly," Shawn said, "after clawing my way out of my own shallow grave I'm willing to overlook that. I hope she goes for a gun and I have to subdue her."

Carlton hated to admit it, but part of him hoped that too.

When Lassiter and Shawn burst into the room they saw Ms. Montresor sitting in the living room with four other women, drinking sherry and eating almonds, biscuits and cheese. It was so incongruous with their expectations that they just stood there a moment, gun and bat in hand, frozen.

"Oh, hello gentlemen," Ms. Montresor said, as if they'd just dropped in for tea. "I didn't think we'd be seeing you up here again."

"I bet you didn't." Lassiter stepped forward, covering her with the gun. The other guests looked bewildered and frightened. "Ms. Montresor," he said, placing a dirty hand on her shoulder, "I'm arresting you for attempted murder and on suspicion of murder."

“Very well,” Mrs. Montessor said placidly. “Although I hardly see it as a crime. Mrs. Fortunato was quite obnoxious, you know.”

As Lassiter was handcuffing her, to the shocked murmurings of the assembled guests, the door to the kitchen opened and Detective O'Hara and Officer McNab entered, escorting a large glum faced man in his forties. Mrs. Montessor looked alarmed.

“You can't arrest my baby!” She wailed. “He just did the digging for me. You can't arrest a boy for listening to his mother.”

“Just watch us,” O'Hara said. She turned to Shawn and Lassiter. “I'm so glad you guys are okay. Wow. You look—” she didn't finish the sentence. “We can take it from here. You guys go home. Shower. Get some sleep. You can make your statements tomorrow.”

Outside Lassiter paced back and forth in front of his car. Handcuffing a perp usually came with a thrill of accomplishment. He was proud that he'd never crossed the line into brutality, but some felons had brought out his more aggressive side. Like Spencer did. Any anger he felt toward the criminals he arrested usually dissipated with some forceful manhandling and the sweet beauty of the criminal justice system. Today was an exception. Arresting Mrs. Montessor felt good, but it didn't come close to sating the anger that had got him out of that crate. He still felt furious, and his mind was weaving revenge fantasies that alarmed him. He turned to Shawn.

“Give me that bat,” he said.

Shawn shrugged and handed it over. Lassiter hefted it in his hand a moment and then, with a roar unlike any Shawn had ever heard, he began smashing the hell out of a series of decorative wooden daisies stuck on the side of the little house. Shawn was surprised. Such a display of anger was uncharacteristic of Lassiter; he was more the type who worked his feelings out on the gun range. He'd heard the rumours about what had happened to the figurines the detective had ordered for his ex wife's birthday a few years ago. Shawn stood by the car and waited. O'Hara came to the door, alarmed by the sound, but Shawn raised a hand to assure her that everything was under control.

Lassiter couldn't remember having felt so angry. The little wooden flowers were so fussy, so frilly, and so non-threatening, they seemed obscene to him when contrasted with the mind of the woman living in the house. They just couldn't belong to someone who would bury people alive. They had to go. The same went for that obnoxious wooden cut-out of a child gardening. Screaming a mantra of swear words he smashed into them with the bat, enjoying the feeling of destruction that reminded him that he was alive. The splintered wood flew in all directions. Finally there was nothing left of the tacky ornaments but a few pieces of colourful scrap. A garden gnome in a red pointy hat seemed to be looking at him tentatively. He set the baseball bat gently on the ground and stood there, his chest heaving from the exertion.

Shawn looked up at Lassiter, searching his eyes.

“Good to go?” he asked.

Lassiter took a minute to catch his breath, then nodded.

“Yep. I'm good to go.” He strode toward the Crown Vic, still where he'd parked it in the Montresor driveway.

Shawn climbed into the passenger seat. Normally Lassiter would have been concerned about getting his car dirty, but under the circumstances he didn't care. He had bigger things to worry about. Topping the list was the emotional tsunami he could feel building inside him. When he'd been in the crate, his focus on Shawn, and on survival had staved off the panic. But that didn't make the panic go away; it just pushed his anxieties down into his gut. Now that the danger was past all his emotions were bubbling up, threatening to overwhelm him. He needed privacy and scotch, and he needed it soon, before his professional demeanour broke in front of everybody in a way that was more embarrassing than smashing a few wooden daisies.

He pulled out of the driveway and headed in the direction of Shawn's apartment. He thought back to a class he'd taken in university where they'd memorized Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's stages of grieving: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. It had been denial that had gotten him out of the crate without completely losing it. His escape plan had been ridiculously optimistic. By all rights, they should both be dead. The realization pissed him off, and he suspected this was just the tip of the angry iceberg. He wasn't a safe person for others to be around right now. If he could just get Shawn to his place then he could go home and sort through this mess inside his head.

“So...” Shawn rocked slightly in the passenger seat, as if his boundless energy had returned. “I don't know about you, but it occurred to me in our coffin that I haven't eaten nearly enough pizza in my life. Let's order in.”

“Don't call it our coffin,” Lassiter said coldly. “I find it creepy.” *And it makes it sound as if we belonged there—a thought that might make me have to pull over if I dwell on it at all.*

“Come on. How often do you have a perp go all Vanishing on you?” Shawn noticed Lassiter's clenched jaw and blank expression. He tried another tactic. “Dude! We just emerged from our own grave. Face it, we're zombies now.” Shawn sang in high pitch, “Cause it's a thriller...thriller night...” When Gus was giving him the cold shoulder humour and an eighties song always did the trick.

“We're not zombies,” Lassiter said firmly. “Zombies are the reanimated dead. We didn't die.” *We just almost died. Like within minutes of suffocating kind of almost.* He took a deep and calming breath. He could feel the panic welling up and his eyes started to glisten. He bit his lip, hard. *Pull it together, he thought. Do not cry in front of Spencer.*

“I think I died a little when you kissed me,” Shawn said. “But I thought we'd decided on your place for celebratory sex and this direction has ‘my place’ written all over it. What gives?”

“Actually, if you don’t mind, I’ll just drop you off.” Lassiter said, trying to keep his voice steady. It took all of his willpower to say the words. He was pretty sure that watching a grown man cry and punch things all night was not what Spencer had planned for the evening.

“Exsqueeze me?” Shawn looked at him with a mixture of hurt and confusion on his face. “You’re ditching me? Was it something I said?”

“I just want to go home, shower and get some sleep.” *And drink a lot of scotch.*

“You’re seriously dumping me off at my place?”

Lassiter felt torn. His attraction to Shawn was still there, taunting him. The memory of those few moments of intimacy in the crate was intoxicating. Part of him wished he could just lose himself for the evening in outrageously wild sex. And the few times he’d thought about it, he’d been pretty sure that Shawn would have few inhibitions in that area. But he didn’t want to use sex to work out his aggression. That wasn’t the kind of man he wanted to be. And despite his ambivalence about starting some kind of same-sex relationship, he felt that Shawn deserved more than some angry sex.

“I need some time to think.”

“What about?” Shawn asked. His pushiness was great for solving cases, and sometimes Lassiter even found it endearing. But right now it was infuriating.

*Why isn’t he freaking out? Lassiter wondered. Doesn’t he have normal feelings?*

“Listen,” he said, in what he hoped was a considerate tone, “I’m not feeling so great.” *Nice understatement.* “I need some time to calm down. I think you might too.” *Or you would, if you were normal.*

He glanced over at the fake psychic, feeling a mix of jealousy and annoyance. Spencer would probably spend an hour shooting people in some video game and feel all better. He, on the other hand, had an adult life, and in the adult world things like this had more unpleasant consequences. He wasn’t looking forward to the mandatory sessions with the departmental psychiatrist that were sure to come once Chief Vick heard about the incident at the Montresor house. He wasn’t interested in talking about his feelings—not with Spencer, and certainly not with some stranger who was going to write it all down and report it to his boss. If the shrink thought he had mental problems his career was over. He grimaced. Montresor had tried to kill him, but he’d be damned if he’d let her kill his career.

“Is this about my not being psychic?” Shawn asked, his voice slightly higher than normal. “I can explain that.”

“No. It has nothing to do with that.” *I have so much crap to wade through right now that’s not even on my list.*

“See, I knew that you never believed me about the psychic thing, and I thought it would make you feel better, so I said I wasn’t, but really it’s....” Shawn was talking fast, back-peddalling on his confession as much as he could. Lassiter had seen criminals do it dozens of times. It was pathetic. More, it was insulting. “So we can go back to normal, right?” Shawn was saying. “Me solving all your tough cases and you being impressed but afraid to say so. Sound good?”

Lassiter pulled the car to a stop a block from Shawn’s apartment. He was having enough trouble controlling his anger right now. He didn’t need to get into it with Spencer about all the years he’d been misleading the Chief, lying to everyone he worked with, and defrauding the department.

*God, how could I even have considered having any kind of a relationship with someone like that?*

“Get out.” Lassiter sat staring straight ahead. He couldn’t look Spencer in the eyes right now.

“Why?” Shawn sounded like he knew exactly why.

“Get out of the car, Spencer. Now!” Lassiter put all the force he could muster behind it.

“Fine.” Shawn opened the door and stepped out of the vehicle. “Happy now? I’m out.”

Lassiter leaned over, and pulled the door closed. As Shawn watched incredulously, the Crown Vic pulled away.

### Chapter 3

Shawn walked the block to his apartment, his brow creased in confusion. He could understand why Lassiter was angry at Mrs. Montresor and her son, but why was he angry at him? Was it the result of his last minute confession that he wasn't really psychic? Or did he regret their clinch in the coffin? Either one seemed odd to him. Lassiter had never really believed he was psychic in the first place, so finding out he'd been right on that score hardly seemed to justify being so pissed. And the two of them had been dancing around their attraction for years, so it seemed odd that it would be eliciting a heterosexual freakout now.

*Shouldn't he have dealt with that before, Shawn wondered, like maybe when he first realized he was interested in me?*

Shawn hadn't had a heterosexual freakout of his own for comparison. He'd figured out something unusual was up with his sexuality when he had watched an ABC Afterschool Special starring Val Kilmer as a young alcoholic. A few conversations with Gus and some time with the encyclopaedia had answered most of his questions. A university student he'd met the summer after graduation had answered the rest of them.

When Shawn entered his apartment that evening the lights were on and Gus was waiting for him. He embraced Shawn in a crushing hug.

"I'm so glad you're okay," Gus said, breathlessly. He stepped back, brushed the dirt from his clothes and gave Shawn his most serious look. "Juliet said that you and Lassiter almost died."

"We cut it pretty close." Shawn laughed, as if it had all just been a crazy adventure. A sprinkle of dust cascaded to the floor.

"If that woman had bothered to read her E.C. Comics," Gus said, "she would have known that the buried alive always come back for revenge." He smiled, glad to see his friend safe, even if he was filthy.

"Thanks, Gus. With your expansive knowledge of comics it's hard to believe you're still single."

"I'm just saying. They always come back." Gus was used to Shawn mocking his comic interest. He was relieved to see that hadn't changed.

*Although he wouldn't joke, Gus reflected, if he'd seen the women at the last Comicon.*

Shawn took a long hot shower, washing his hair several times to clear all the dirt out. His muscles were aching and he was covered in a dozen cuts and bruises. He pulled some nasty splinters from his knuckles. He emerged several minutes later, wearing his favourite pyjama bottoms and feeling physically exhausted but mentally wired.

"We should really go to the hospital and get you checked out," Gus said. "Too much carbon dioxide can cause damage to the heart and retinas." He held up a finger and waved it back and forth in front of Shawn. "Can you follow my finger with your eyes?"

"I'm fine, Gus. Really." Seeing the look of disbelief on his friend's face Shawn went on, "I mean, *physically*, I'm fine. I'm probably going to be a little crazy for a few days. If I suddenly scream for no reason it's just me realizing I almost suffocated on my own carbon monoxide."

"You mean carbon dioxide."

"Whatever." He waved a hand. "The screaming will be pretty much the same."

"I understand." Gus said. "You've had a shock. When Jules told me what happened I stopped at the 7-11 and picked up your comfort foods."

"Sweet." Shawn rummaged through the bag of snacks. "Gus, you're awesome." He noted that Gus had brought his overnight bag, clearly intending to crash at Shawn's place in case he needed support. Shawn smiled again.

"Don't mention it. As for the crazy, I think you should talk to a professional. Do you want me to call your mom?"

"No. No no no. The last thing I want her picturing is me trapped in a wooden box under the ground."

"You're right. Moms worry. But there are lots of other psychiatrists in the Santa Barbara area. I'm sure the station could arrange a session with Dr. Erlich for you. They'd probably pay for it too, since it was their missing persons case that got you almost killed in the first place."

"Yeah. I think I'm going to take some ribbing on not having seen that coming. No matter how many times I tell them that I don't see the future they always expect me to. I blame Nostradamus."

"Actually, The Amazing Randi has debunked the idea that Nostradamus predicted the future."

"Yet I'm still suffering under the weight of the expectations he set. I'll just have to tell people that following in the spiritual footsteps of the missing woman was the only way to find her. That sounds plausible, right?"

"Don't try to change the subject, Shawn. You should make an appointment with Dr. Erlich."

"First off, I don't even know if he's a real doctor. Chief Vick might just be blinded by his convincing pipe and sweater vest. And second, we were buried for less than an hour. It's no biggie. I'm just going to wing it for now. Watch a few classic zombie movies, and move on."

Gus crossed his arms and furrowed his brow at Shawn. "Let me just say that I'm against that plan. Your mental health is important. But if you insist." He went to Shawn's shelf of DVDs. "You have the George Romero Collection, but the only zombie movie in it is Dawn of the Dead."

“Great! That’s his best one.”

“I’ll take your word for it. I’m sorry you ever talked me into watching it. I still have that recurring nightmare in which I haven’t studied for my algebra test and Mrs. Cameron rips my intestines out and eats them. So, thank-you, Shawn.”

“The thanks really belong to George.”

Gus handed him the DVD and Shawn put it in the player. He grabbed the remote and threw himself onto his sofa.

“If we ever meet, I’ll tell him,” Gus said.

“I’m sure he gets that all the time.” Shawn started Dawn of The Dead.

“Probably.” Gus sat on the sofa and looked at Shawn rather than the television. “I’m no expert on psychological trauma, but if you need to talk I’m here for you.”

“Thanks, Buddy,” Shawn said, opening a bag of Doritos. “I knew I could count on you.”

“For sure.”

“That’s what friends are for?” He raised an eyebrow and grinned. Gus smiled back, but Shawn could tell he was still feeling wary behind those friendly eyes.

Shawn watched as a helicopter pilot and his technician girlfriend planned to steal their news station’s chopper. Gus pulled a book on pharmaceutical drug absorption out of his bag and began reading it. Several moments passed with only the sound of a heavily armed SWAT team looking for zombies breaking the silence.

Then Shawn spoke. “Listen, there is something I’d like to talk about. Related to the incident.”

“You know you can tell me anything, Shawn.” Gus looked up from his book.

“When we were in the coffin my flirtation with Lassie went to DefCon one.”

“DefCon one?” Gus looked serious. “I know what *I* mean when I say that. Exactly what do *you* mean?” In Gus’ world, DefCon one was used strictly for describing relationships that progressed to the bedroom level. As far as he was concerned, Shawn’s flirtatious teasing of detective Lassiter wasn’t even a proper DefCon 5, which would have been a prearranged meeting for coffee.

Shawn sat up and turned to face Gus, ignoring the television.

“I mean we went through PG right up into R, and I was pretty sure we were headed for triple X

when I realized we actually had a shot at getting out of there alive. After going all Beatrix Kiddo we were going to go back to his place, but we got into an argument in the car and he just kicked me out. I had to walk, like, a whole block. With bad hair.”

“What kind of an argument?” Gus had a gut feeling that Shawn was hiding something from him. After all these years, he had radar for that sort of thing.

“I have no idea.” Shawn’s tone told Gus that Shawn knew *exactly* why he and Lassiter had argued. Gus gave him his best sceptical look. Given enough time, exposure to it always broke Shawn down.

“Okay,” he admitted, looking at the ceiling instead of at Gus. “I *may* have confessed that I wasn’t psychic when I thought we were going to die. And I *may* have tried to take it back in the car ride here. So it’s possible that he’s mad about that.”

Gus slammed his hand onto the arm of the sofa. “I *knew* this was coming. You can’t keep a secret. You’re always pushing boundaries to see how far you can go and how people will react. I knew you’d tell someone eventually, but I kind of hoped it wouldn’t be someone who, one: hates you, two: tried to have you arrested, and three: will ruin our business and send us to jail for fraud.”

“Gus....”

“I knew it, that’s all.” Gus crossed his arms and refused to look at Shawn.

“First off, Lassiter doesn’t hate me. I’m pretty sure that he really likes me. Deep down, beneath the cutting remarks and the latent homoerotic violence. Second of all, he only tried to arrest me that one time. All the other times were just his way of flirting. Maybe a desire to see me in handcuffs....” He shook his head, as if to dislodge the fantasy of him and Lassiter playing with handcuffs. “And third, what was your third objection again?”

“Us going to jail for fraud? Or misrepresentation? Or obstruction of justice? Or lying to the police? They’re all crimes, you know.”

“Call me a romantic, but I don’t think Lassie would do that. He wouldn’t lock up a guy he’s kissed, right? Isn’t that against the Gentleman’s Code?”

“What Gentlemen’s Code?” Gus made a face that indicated Shawn was clearly playing Solitaire with only half a deck.

“You know,” Shawn flailed his hands, searching for the right words. “The code that tells how to be a gentleman. Like putting your jacket over puddles or standing when a woman enters the room.”

“And have you ever seen Lassiter do either of those things?”

“No.” Shawn scrambled for some evidence that would assuage Gus’s anxiety. “Maybe it’s not the gentleman’s code. Maybe it’s a detective’s code. Never shoot a man in cold blood and never arrest someone you’ve kissed. It’s all there in the movies.”

“I don’t know, Shawn. In the Maltese Falcon Sam Spade hands Brigit O’Shaughnessy over to the cops to be hanged, even though he loves her.”

“Yeah, but O’Shaughnessy killed Spade’s partner. If I’d shot Jules then sure, he’d arrest me. But we’re talking a teensy little lie.”

“That you developed into a business and used to defraud the police for four years. I just hope I can get a reduced sentence since I wasn’t the one claiming to be psychic. If this ever goes to court, I’m playing dumb. No one can prove I knew.”

Shawn rolled his eyes.

“I may have also told him that you and Henry already know it’s a sham.”

“Great. You’ve already torpedoed my only defence.” Gus looked at Shawn incredulously and threw his hands up. “I’m going to prison! I may as well start bulking up now.”

“Nobody’s going to prison. I figure, worst-case scenario, we have to move Psych to another city. In another state. Possibly on the east coast. I hear Boston is nice. How do you feel about delicious clam chowder?”

“I’m not talking to you right now, Shawn,” Gus said, sinking down angrily into the sofa. “Except to say,” he sat up straight again, “that you’d better use your newfound intimacy with Lassiter to fix this. I like living in Santa Barbara. I just renewed yearly memberships to the Granada Centre for the Performing Arts and the Museum of Natural History. They’re restoring a blue whale skeleton this year.”

“Okay, okay. I’ll fix it. Trust me.”

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Lassiter’s week had been the most awkward he’d had since his divorce. No one at the station seemed to know what to say. They just kept looking at him with wary sympathy, as if he might have a mental breakdown at any moment.

For what it was worth, he wasn’t so sure he *wasn’t* going to have a breakdown. He hadn’t slept more than a few hours every night, and the exhaustion was getting to him. When he did sleep he was plagued with claustrophobic dreams that left him panicked and soaked in sweat. Even the close confines of his shower stall had freaked him out a few times.

He was pushing paper until Dr. Erlich cleared him for active duty. He still wore his gun to work but the only action it was seeing was at the range every evening, where he tapped into the anger that was still sloshing around inside of him. If he was honest about it, he probably did need some

kind of mental help. But he was getting more out of the range than he was with the shrink. The range gave him time to think and express his feelings, and it enabled him to do it alone, with guns.

Few people ventured into the shooting range when Lassiter was there, and they seemed to be staying away completely this week, which suited him just fine.

He had kissed Spencer.

Bang! He squeezed the trigger on the Glock 17. The recoil pushed pleasantly up into his forearms and biceps. It felt real.

He had thought he was going to die.

Bang! Bang! He squeezed off two more shots into the target. His aim was good. At least something was still fully within his control.

Shawn was a fake.

Bang.

He'd known it all along and it still pissed him off to hear him admit it.

Bang. Bang, bang bang. The Glock spit out empty cartridges in rapid succession.

Lassiter drew in a breath, revelling in the smell of burnt gunpowder and brought the target back. Okay, so technically Shawn hadn't *confessed*. But he'd tacitly agreed when Lassiter had figured out it was all deduction.

*Basically*, Lassiter thought grimly, *Shawn confessed to being the best detective alive whereas I confessed to having a sexual attraction to him. It hardly seemed like a fair trade.* He pulled down the target.

"Nice shooting, Tex. You really killed that nine ring."

Lassiter turned and removed his goggles and ear protection.

"What are you doing down here, Spencer?" Lassiter ran his eyes over Shawn. He looked well-rested and energetic. He probably hadn't lost a moment of sleep.

"Just checking in," he shrugged and leaned casually against the wall. "Seeing how you are. The usual."

"I'm fine." *If the definition of fine includes insomnia, rage, and panic attacks.*

"Yeah. I can tell." Shawn picked absently at a nailhole in the wall, not looking at Lassiter. His

shirt rode up slightly, revealing a flash of skin along his waistline. "I'm fine too. In case you were wondering."

"I wasn't." *That was harsh*, Lassiter berated himself. Then added, "I mean, I'm glad that you're fine."

"I'm fine, you're fine. We're both....fine."

"Listen, Spencer, did you have any particular reason for coming down here? I'm kind of busy."

With everything else on his plate the last thing he needed was Shawn pressuring him to hook up. Being attracted to someone didn't mean he had to sleep with them, especially given the potential repercussions. The double standard on sex annoyed him. He could sleep with dozens of women and no one expected that should entail awkward conversations with his Catholic mother, or his boss, or marching in parades. He had attended a pride parade once, as a rookie cop assigned to crowd control. As far as he could tell, the homosexuals of Santa Barbara were a peaceful people, but that didn't mean he suddenly wanted to be one.

"Actually, I'm here on Gus' behalf."

*Oh*. Lassiter actually felt disappointed. *What the hell did that mean?*

"What about Guster?" Lassiter loaded his Glock and holstered it.

Shawn sighed. "He's all paranoid. I told him you'd figured out the whole psychic angle and now he thinks," Shawn laughed, "he thinks that you're going to arrest us."

Lassiter didn't respond.

"I know, That's silly, isn't it?" Shawn said, smiling. "But you know Gus, always the worrywart. Mayor McFret."

"What makes you think I won't arrest you?" He didn't see how Shawn could be so sure. He hadn't made up his mind what he was going to do yet.

Shawn looked up at Lassiter, his hazel eyes heavy with sexual invitation, and stepped into the firing booth and into his personal space.

"I just don't think you will." Shawn was barely inches away now, leaning in. Lassiter could feel the heat of his breath and smell his hair. It sent a rush through his body, but being this close to Shawn in a small space also brought up the uncomfortably familiar sensations of fear and panic. He wondered if Shawn had showered as much as he had, trying to wash off the gritty reminder of their underground captivity. Shawn's hand ran along his belt line and grazed down the fly of his pants. Lassiter's breath caught in his throat and he heard a moan that might have been his own.

Suddenly Lassiter's thought processes kicked in. He was being manipulated. This gun range

seduction wasn't about Shawn wanting him, it was about not getting charged. He felt his stomach plummet, immediately followed by a hot rush of anger.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa!" Lassiter pushed Shawn backwards, hard. "Back away, Spencer."

"What?" Shawn raised his hands, as if to protest his innocence.

Lassiter pushed Shawn hard on the chest, sending him stumbling back, out of the booth, and causing him to collide against the wall.

"You are a manipulative lying sleazebag," Lassiter said, advancing menacingly. "I must have been crazy to think..."

"To think what?" Shawn raised his head defiantly and licked his lips. The whole effect was incredibly hot. Lassiter knew he had to look away. He turned back to the firing booth and put on his visor.

"To think I could ever be friends with you." His voice was low now, but he knew Shawn heard it anyway.

"What about being more than friends?"

"That," he said, attaching a new target to the zipline and sending it down the range, "is never going to happen." He put his ear muffs on and pulled the Glock from its holster. "I don't even think I like you." Lassiter fired until his clip was empty. When he turned around again Spencer was gone.

### Chapter 4

Lassiter spent all night thinking about Shawn Spencer. His feeling of disappointment was puzzling to him. Spencer had revealed himself to be what Lassiter had always suspected: a lying, manipulative charlatan. *But why did it feel so bad to be proven right?*

In the back of his mind a frightening possibility had begun to assert itself. What if he wanted more from Spencer than just sex? Since he'd first recognized his feelings toward Shawn as sexual, he'd entertained a myriad of fantasies about the fake psychic. They ranged from tender lovemaking scenarios to aggressive sex in the holding cells. He'd come to accept that aspect of himself and he could enjoy it, secure in the knowledge that sexual fantasies didn't need to be acted upon.

Yet over the past week his fantasies had taken on a more domestic bent. He pictured himself eating dinner with Shawn, discussing cases and solving crime together, and watching *Dragnet* before bed. It was one thing to jerk off to raunchy handcuff fantasies, but imagining holding hands with Spencer was a whole other ballgame. That was a relationship fantasy. That thought kept him up almost as much as the recurring fear that he would awaken in a wooden box did.

After a fitful night he took a bath and dressed for work. He had come to a decision of sorts. If he was seriously contemplating having a relationship with Shawn Spencer than something had gone very wrong. The trauma he'd suffered in the Montresor basement had obviously broken something inside his head. His feelings couldn't be trusted. He needed to prevent himself from doing anything he'd regret. And the only way to do that was to make sure Spencer would never want to have a relationship with him. He had to turn him in.

As soon as he arrived at the station he knocked on Chief Vick's office door.

"Good morning Carlton. I'm glad you're here." Vick raised her head, smiling in anticipation. "Dr. Erlich says you're fine to return to active duty. Congratulations, detective. O'Hara has a stack of cases on her desk for you." She looked so happy that Lassiter almost changed his mind. But it had to be done. Now, before he lost his nerve.

"I have some bad news." He took a deep breath and let it out with determination. "While we were trapped in Mrs. Montresor's basement," he still couldn't bring himself to say 'buried alive,' "Shawn Spencer confessed to me that he isn't psychic."

Chief Vick didn't stop smiling. If anything, he thought she smiled a little wider. "I think you must have misunderstood, detective."

"I didn't misunderstand."

"Oh, I think you did." Chief Vick's voice was cold and precise, despite her smile. It was actually kind of eerie. "Because if Shawn Spencer isn't psychic, he can't work for us. And if he can't work for us we can't use his gifts to solve cases. Do you see where I'm going with this?"

"Certainly. But what about our responsibility to...."

"—Carlton," Chief Vick cut in, "do you know how many female police chiefs there are in California?"

"No, I don't." He frowned, unsure what point she was trying to make.

"Nineteen. That's just five percent of all the police chiefs in this state. Do you think I could have possibly attained my position if I was stupid or gullible?"

"No." Now he saw where she was going, and he didn't think he was going to like it.

"And do I seem like the sort of person who believes in the supernatural? I mean, apart from working with Mr. Spencer, do you see any evidence of an interest in fortune-telling, tea leaves, crystals, tarot cards or lucky rabbits feet anywhere in my office?" She gestured around the room with her arm.

"No." Lassiter didn't even need to look.

"Right. I don't even read my horoscope. And just let me add that like you, I worked with Henry Spencer. I know what police work looks like when I see it."

"So you already know..." Lassiter was dumbfounded. *Had she known all the time?*

"—I know that there are nearly four dozen cases that we couldn't have solved without his help. And a significant percentage of those were homicides. Do you know how it feels for a police chief to have open homicides?"

"It feels bad?" His mind was reeling. Vick had just been letting Spencer do his psychic act in order to benefit from his detective work.

"Exactly. And closed cases feel good. I like closed cases. And if I have to pretend that I believe Shawn Spencer speaks to the dead or reads the vibes off of ashtrays or gets messages from aliens then that's what I'll do, as long as these cases get closed. Have I made myself clear?"

"Absolutely." No wonder she had been so tolerant of his bizarre antics.

"Good. Now please, Carlton, get back to work and stop worrying about Shawn Spencer."

He wished it was that easy.

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Shawn sat in the Psych office, watching *My Boyfriend's Back* and hugging a Snoopy and Woodstock throw pillow to his chest. It was his third time watching it today, and if he cried a little more than usual when Johnny and Missy danced together at the prom it wasn't because he was upset about being rejected by Lassiter or about having almost been murdered recently.

The closing credits were rolling when the door opened and Gus came in from his shift at Central Coast Pharmaceuticals. He put his briefcase down on his desk and looked critically at his business partner. It had been three days since Shawn's argument with Lassiter at the gun range. Gus hadn't seen Shawn mope this long over anyone. It was a little alarming.

"Stop watching that movie, Shawn. It's just upsetting you."

"Your concern is touching." Shawn was sullen.

Gus had tried concern. It hadn't worked. It was time for tough love.

"Concern nothing. I'm thinking about me here." Gus grimaced and began gathering up the crumpled tissues, empty Red Vines packages and Pixi Stix that surrounded Shawn. "You know I'm a sympathetic crier. I refuse to sit here blubbering because Lassiter won't sleep with you. It's preposterous. Besides, what if a potential client came in? Crying doesn't make a good first impression."

"I'm recovering from a trauma."

"This doesn't look like you're recovering. You're not sleeping. You're not eating." Gus frowned at the empty Pixi Stix in his fist. "Were these lunch or dinner?" Gus sniffed. "And did you even shower?"

"Recently?"

"Pull yourself together Shawn. You know what they say: Fake it 'til you make it."

"Who says that?"

"People. People who recognize a negative behaviour pattern when they see it. And I see one now."

"This isn't negative behaviour."

"Oh? Then what is it?"

"This is...it." He threw his hands up. "This is our life."

"Whatever you say, Laverne."

"Why am I Laverne? Why am I the cynical one and you're the perky one? I am so the perky one."

"Not lately you're not."

"That's not my fault."

"You can't lay all the blame for your emotional funk on Lassiter's door."

Shawn had to agree. If he was going to blame anyone, it was the fault of that awful woman and her creepy son. He'd been perfectly happy with his unrequited crush on Lassiter. Their underground encounter seemed to have ruined the hot sexual tension they'd had going on.

"You're right," Shawn said. "It's not his fault either."

"Are you saying that No One Is To Blame?" Gus asked. Shawn saw a playful spark in his eye and knew that the gauntlet of a song title challenge had been thrown down.

"Maybe I should give it One Last Try." Shawn smiled.

"Things Can Only Get Better." Gus raised an eyebrow, unimpressed with Shawn's early parry.

"You think I need An Everlasting Love?" he countered, bringing out the big guns.

"What Can I Say?" Gus sat in his chair and entwined his fingers behind his head, resting back. "He might Like to Get To Know You Well. I know you're still Learning How To Love, but it could be A Revolution of the Heart."

"Well played my friend. Well played." Shawn said, admitting defeat. He picked up a rubber stress ball and threw it against the wall, where it failed to bounce back.

"I had an edge," Gus admitted. "I just bought his Greatest Hits compilation."

"I don't see where I went wrong," Shawn said, switching gears. "I mean, one minute it's all kisses and groping and the next it's cold shoulders and cutting remarks."

"There's only one way to find out," Gus said.

"Maybe not. I did a marathon of Max headroom earlier. What we need is a Brice who can break into Lassiter's computer and read his emails. Maybe tap into the station's security cameras and tell us what he's doing. Why don't we hire a computer genius? Someone in high school, who won't know that we're underpaying him." Shawn clapped his hands together. "Hey! How about we call the position an internship, then we don't have to pay him at all."

"Great idea, Shawn. Then we can add cyberstalking to the list of crimes I'm getting an ulcer waiting for us to be charged with. And nothing says 'you can trust me' like breaking into a guy's email and spying on him without his knowledge. I hate to break it to you, but you may just have to man up and talk to Lassiter."

"I tried that. He gave me the cold shoulder, the brush off and the bum's rush." He jumped out of his chair and paced the office. "Lassiter hates me. And I didn't think I'd ever care about that this

much." Shawn looked sadly at his friend. "I hurt, Gus. Inside, where my feelings live."

"Well," Gus looked thoughtful. "Lassiter's behaviour isn't completely inexplicable. He could have post-traumatic stress. It's characterized by anger, irritability, depression..."

"—We're talking about Lassiter here." Shawn cut in. "He's always like that."

"As I was saying," Gus glared at Shawn. "PTSD could explain a lot. If he's having panic attacks, flashbacks, or nightmares, then exploring his sexuality may be low on his to-do list."

"That makes a kind of sense. How do I fix it?"

"Do you really want to pursue this Lassiter romance thing?" Gus stared critically at his partner. "Or is this just something you're doing to entertain yourself while you get past being buried alive?"

"I haven't wanted anything so much since my teenage fantasy of helping Brooke Shields shave her legs."

"I'm serious here, Shawn. I mean, if you're genuinely interested, I'll help. When it comes to unrequited love, believe me, I'm feeling you." He ran his thumb down the bridge of his nose. "I've had some experience in this area."

"Some experience? Dude, when have any of your crushes *not* been unrequited?"

"Oh, I get mine." Gus frowned. He was not going to tell Shawn about the Batgirl/Harley Quinn incident at the Comicon in '08. He'd promised both women he'd never mention it to another living soul. "But we're talking about you here."

"Face it. You can't relate. Lassiter and I have a risky love. A forbidden love. A John Hughes-style crossing social boundaries love. We're Claire and Bender, Andie and Blane, Samantha and Jake. You understand."

"Which one of you is Molly Ringwald?"

"I am, of course. You wouldn't get it. You always go for the safe love. You don't take risks."

"I take risks in love," Gus said defensively. "All the time."

"Oh yeah? When?"

"I talked to the cute clerk at the Apple Store twice last week. There you go."

"Where's the risk in that?"

"There's the risk of rejection," Gus began to count off on his fingers, "the risk that I'll say

something stupid, the risk that she'll see the Psych office and think that I work with a junior high schooler. And of course every romance risks heartbreak, and a host of STIs like herpes, syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhoea, AIDS."

"All STDs aside, there's no physical risk with the girl from the Apple Store."

"One of the reasons I enjoy flirting with the girl at the Apple Store is that I never have to worry that she'll shoot me, or have me arrested." Gus paused for a minute, then added, "Do not tell Juliet I said that."

"Juliet would not shoot you."

"But she could. I doubt the Apple Store clerk—whose name is Rene, by the way—has ever fired a gun in her life."

"She could still kill you. She could stab you, or run you down with her car."

"You're missing my point. So you have the hots for Lassiter. So what? There's more to a relationship than just sexual attraction, Shawn. There's a myriad of factors that have to be taken into account. Like compatibility. Like shared goals and values. Like, what if they have the wrong kind of pillows?"

"Are you kidding me? The wrong kind of pillows? Gus, are you even listening to what you're saying?"

"Pillows aren't all the same, Shawn. And the wrong kind can seriously affect your sleep posture. There's polyester, goose down, latex, memory foam..."

"Don't forget hypoallergenic,"

"Actually, there's no industry standard for the use of that term." He shook his head. "Anyway, my point is, just having chemistry together isn't enough. If you want to date you need more than that. And you can't even talk to the guy, so I don't hold very high hopes for your romance prospects."

Shawn nodded his head. "You're right." He stood and grabbed the keys to his bike. "I'll stake out his place. He's got to go home some time."

"You should shower before you go," Gus said.

Shawn sniffed his armpit tentatively and looked back at Gus.

"You reek, dude. For real. I'm just saying."

## Chapter 5

Shawn was sitting on the steps to Carlton's apartment when the Crown Vic pulled up. His expression was hopeful, but Carlton noted the purple circles under his eyes that suggested maybe he hadn't been sleeping either. It was reassuring to see Shawn be this human. He felt a rush of empathy and protectiveness, which he quickly suppressed. *This is probably just another one of his tricks.*

"What's Guster worried about now?" Carlton asked warily. "If you came to beg me not to turn you in you're too late. Chief Vick already knows." *No need to mention she's probably known for years.*

"So why haven't you come by the office then?" Shawn stood close to Carlton, hands in his pockets. He smelled like soap and cologne. "To put the handcuffs on, I mean."

"She doesn't care." Carlton stepped past Shawn and unlocked his door. "You're more valuable to the department as a fake psychic than you are as a real felon." *Hell, if I'm honest about it, I can't blame her. I'd rather see Spencer in the field getting the work done than languishing in prison.*

"Really?" Shawn sounded as if he was hesitant to believe him. He followed Carlton inside, not waiting for an invitation.

"Yeah." Carlton put his keys on a hook by the door, walked across to the kitchen counter, pulled a bottle of Glenlivet from the cupboard, and poured himself a scotch. "She couldn't care less if you're as phony as Kreskin, so long as you keep closing her homicide cases."

"Kreskin's a phony? What?" Shawn trailed after him and leaned against the dark granite counter. "I suppose you're going to tell me the wrestling on the WWE is fake."

"Real wrestlers don't wear face paint and costumes," Carlton said. He'd wrestled in high school and found the melodrama of professional wrestling intolerable.

"I hear they wear the required uniform."

"Why are you here, Spencer?" *And make it good. You're cutting into my drinking and brooding time.*

"I've had an epiphone."

Carlton looked at him sceptically. "You've had an electric guitar?"

"What? No. An epi...an epi...an idea. I've had a sudden realization."

"An epiphany."

"That too. The good news is, I realized that you're not mad at me."

"I'm not?" Carlton sipped his drink, enjoying the warm burn. He was feeling amused for the first time all week. Watching Spencer try to argue his way out of trouble was always good for a laugh.

"No. You're mad at Mrs. Montresor. You're mad at almost dying. And if I had to guess, you're probably mad about feeling freaked out by claustrophobic spaces. Like phone booths. Not that you really encounter those anymore, what with everyone having cell phones. Although we still see them in the movies, don't we?"

"What makes you think I'm bothered by small spaces?" Carlton looked him in the eyes. Shawn was fishing. He'd done it himself in dozens of interrogations. But Shawn didn't have the experience necessary to break him down, even if what he said was true.

"I know I am," Shawn said. "I'm afraid to shower." He laughed. "It's funny really, because I showered a lot when I first got home, but now suddenly it's disturbing. I washed in the sink today, and I don't think I rinsed properly. I feel all itchy." Shawn walked over to the fireplace and toyed absently with some of the items on the mantle.

"Leave those alone," Carlton said wearily. "Let's suppose all that is true, why do you think I'm not mad at you?" He loosened his tie. It felt reassuring to know he wasn't the only one having issues with the shower. *Unless Spencer had made that up. Could he have guessed it—used that intuition and observation he used on all his cases? Was there something about me that gave it away?* He turned his head to sniff himself in a way he hoped was unobtrusive.

"Because you've been *so* mad at me," Shawn said, abandoning the mantle. He looked at Carlton across the island counter. "And *mean*. You've been meaner than any reasonable man would be. You've been Shannen Doherty on 90210 mean. So, I lied to you. Big whoop. You didn't believe me anyway. But you've been angrier than Klaus Kinski having an argument with Christian Bale. And I don't deserve that."

"You don't." Carlton had meant it to be a question, but as he spoke it had come out as a confession instead.

"It's projection. You're projecting your anger onto me like I'm the side of Rudolph Valentino's mausoleum and you're the Hollywood Forever Cemetery." When Carlton's face betrayed no recognition, Shawn added, "They show movies there. Come on, keep up with me here."

"You've been talking to your mother, haven't you?" Carlton smiled assuredly. *This was just the kind of psychobabble that a psychologist would come up with.* "This is her idea."

"No, actually I'd rather she not know about our little stint under the ground," Shawn said. "I don't need any more people having nightmares."

Carlton furrowed his brow and watched Shawn pace anxiously around his livingroom. *Maybe Shawn wasn't as immune to trauma as I'd assumed.*

“Actually,” Shawn said, “I’ve been watching television—it’s amazing how much you can squeeze into a day when you cut out sleeping. Zombie movies, mostly, but also some Max Headroom and...” he paused dramatically, “wait for it....Arrested Development.”

Carlton put his drink on the counter and crossed his arms. “Spencer, say something relevant or I’m dragging you out the door.”

“It all came together for me when Tobias told White Power Bill that he didn’t hate the government, or his father. He hated White Power Bill. And I realized something.” Shawn had walked around the island and now he stopped in front of Carlton and looked up at him with a wide smile. “You’re my White Power Bill.”

“What kind of drugs are you on, Spencer?” *If Shawn thinks that being compared to a white supremacist is going to get him into my pants he has another think coming.*

“No, run with it. You’re waaaay madder at me than you should be. Why? Because the people you’re really angry at aren’t handy. You can’t very well go say hurtful things to the Montresors. Well, you could, but I doubt your words would cut very deep. Those two...” Shawn twirled a finger next to his temple, “they’ve got something wrong upstairs. So I’ll go out on a limb here and say you’re mad at them, and maybe you’re mad at yourself.”

Carlton’s mind reeled. *He’s right. Of course I’m mad at myself. What cop wouldn’t be? I allowed myself and a civilian consultant to get drugged and almost murdered. And I didn’t even suspect what I was walking into.* Even in retrospect, nothing had warned him she was anything other than an elderly neighbour—a potential witness at most

“You’re right about the Montresors,” Carlton said finally. “There’s no point in being angry at them. They’re as sane as a Bates family reunion.” He took another gulp of scotch. “And maybe I am mad at me.” He looked down into the glass. “I should have seen it coming.”

“Please!” Shawn scoffed. *I didn’t even see it coming. I’ve gone over every inch of that house in my mind a dozen times since, and there’s nothing that should have been a red flag.* Trust me, there’s no way we could have known.”

Carlton appreciated the absolution, even if he couldn’t bring himself to accept it yet.

“Unless I really *was* psychic,” Shawn went on, slowly moving to the other side of the island and sidling up next to him. “That might have come in handy.”

“So you’re saying I’m mad at everyone, but not at you?” He smirked. Why did he find it so difficult to stay angry with Shawn? He liked to think it wasn’t just his libido overriding his brain. At least, he hoped it wasn’t.

“No. You’re cool with me.” Shawn bounced lightly in place, only inches away from the tall detective. “You like me.”

"Maybe." Carlton turned so Shawn wouldn't see his growing smile and poured more whisky into his glass. "Listen, why don't you sit down. Do you want a drink?"

"Has it been helping?" Shawn asked. He moved back and leaned against the granite counter of the island.

"Sort of."

"Then load me up. Lots of ice."

Carlton grimaced but prepared the drink as Shawn asked.

"Listen," Shawn said, "I know they made you talk to the shrink and all, but if you want to talk to someone who actually, you know, gets it, then I'm right here." He accepted the drink and sipped it.

"Thanks, Spencer."

"Shawn. You've had your tongue in my mouth. You can call me Shawn."

"I appreciate the offer, Shawn." He paused, feeling the strangeness of using Spencer's first name out loud. "But just because we were in the same crate doesn't mean we're not still on different planets."

"You think I don't get it?" Shawn's voice was quiet, without any trace of histrionics. It was more alarming than anything he'd done yet. "I have a dream where water pours into the coffin when we break through the wood and we drown. I have one where my mouth fills with dirt and I choke to death. I have one where I'm paralysed and I can't fight my way out and you leave me there. Trust me, I get it."

"I wouldn't have left you there, Shawn."

"I know you wouldn't. The Carlton in my dreams isn't really you." He laughed. "If that were the case we would have hooked up long ago. Dream you is a freak in the sack."

Carlton thought about one of his own nightmares, where he breaks through the wooden crate and begins to dig himself out, but dream-Shawn grabs him and pulls him back. He wasn't sure what that was about, but he was pretty sure it wasn't a reflection on Shawn's character.

"Okay, maybe you do get it, but..."

"—But what? What is eating you up so much?" He stepped forward and leaned in, and for a moment Carlton was positive that Shawn was going to kiss him on the neck. Instead he hovered there and whispered, "It can't be the gay thing. You still want me, I can tell. So what is it?"

Carlton took a breath, set his drink down and steeled himself. "We're alive, Shawn. And you know what? We shouldn't be. We should have died."

Shawn stepped back and looked at him quizzically.

"Only two things got me out of that crate," Carlton went on, "and one was wanting to get my hands around the neck of the woman who put me there." He realized he was mimicking the action with his hands and quickly curled them into fists and dropped them to his sides. "In those minutes, smashing through that box, and digging my way out, in those minutes I was a killer. Do you have any idea how that makes me feel? How am I supposed to go to work and arrest people knowing I'm like that?"

"What, human?" Shawn made a dismissive sound and took a gulp of scotch. It burned and he coughed ineffectually for a few moments. "Yeah," he said sarcastically, when he could speak again. "How can you possibly live with yourself, knowing that you have feelings like everybody else?"

"Wanting to kill people isn't normal, Shawn."

"Hell, I was prepared to bludgeon her with a baseball bat. Given the circumstances, trust me Lassie, it's normal."

"What would you know about normal?" It was a question he'd often mulled over in his head the past week, but when he said it now it came out in a tone of affection.

"I recognize it in others." Shawn smiled and took a very small sip of his whiskey. "But all kidding aside, I do have feelings. Almost dying did a number on my head and I'm not over it yet, no matter how much I joke around."

"I wasn't sure it bothered you at all." Lassiter felt slightly guilty for assuming that Shawn's happy-go-lucky façade was anything less than skin deep.

"I put up a shiny front. I don't like to burden people with all my icky feelings. Plus, they're distracting. The more upset I get the less well I can work. I need a lighthearted atmosphere to be able to focus."

"And here I thought you were somehow above all the stresses that affected us mere mortals. Hell, you didn't even panic when you found out we were," Lassiter took a deep breath and forced himself to say it, "buried alive."

"Didn't panic?" Shawn laughed. "As if! You know what was going through my mind down there? I was trying not to cry in front of you, that's what. Yeah. I was eighty percent sure I was going to die and I was worried what you'd think of me if I cried. How's that for embarrassing?"

"I wouldn't have minded if you'd cried," Carlton said. "I mean, I wouldn't have thought any less of you." *Although if you did then I might have started crying and then we both would have died.*

“What was the other thing?” Shawn asked.

“What?”

“You said there were two things that got you out of the crate. What was the other thing?”

“Oh.” Carlton looked away, hesitant to bring the second factor out in the open. But if not now, then when? “The other thing was you,” he said. “Thinking that there might be something between us, and wanting to live long enough to find out what that was.”

“Well let's scratch that off your to-do list now.” Shawn set his drink down, wrapped his arms around Carlton's waist and nuzzled into his neck. Carlton, surprised, raised his arms slightly and let them fall to rest along Shawn's back. He closed his eyes and revelled in the solid feel of Shawn's body against him and the smell of his hair. He felt a rush of heat course through him stronger than any scotch. Shawn raised his face toward him, and Carlton opened his eyes at the movement and leaned in, almost instinctively. Then they were kissing, and Carlton felt the soft insistence of Shawn's mouth, and the roughness of the stubble on his jaw. He pulled Shawn closer and opened his mouth to him. All his hesitations about Shawn were pushed to the side by the realization that Shawn wanted him—really wanted him—as evidenced clearly by the passion of his kiss and the hardness pressing against his thigh. Suddenly eating dinner and watching Dagnet together didn't seem so far-fetched.

Shawn pulled back and smiled up at him. “Another mystery solved by our fabulous teamwork,” he said, his voice huskier than usual.

“I don't want to have sex with you,” Carlton said abruptly.

Shawn raised an eyebrow at him and glanced down. He didn't even have to say, ‘Really? Because your pants say otherwise.’ It was all in the look.

“I mean I, I do,” Carlton stammered. He took a deep breath and bit the bullet. “But that's not all I want.”

“Whatever you want, Lassie. You just have to ask.”

“I don't do one night stands,” he said virtuously. By which I mean I don't do them any more, since most of them have been dissatisfying and awkward. “If we're going to do this we need to talk about what it is and where it's going.”

Shawn pulled Carlton tighter. “Come on. You like me. I like you. This shouldn't be some complex puzzle here like the Rubiks Cube, or the less popular Missing Link. I solved my Rubiks Cube with a screwdriver and a hammer. Don't tell me we have to resort to that kind of intervention here.”

“I mean it, Shawn. Relationships are more than sex.” *Oh God*, he thought, listening to himself

speak, *I'm the girl.*

"Really? Who says that? Other than you and Gus? And all the girls I went to highschool with."

"I know this. I've had relationships. They take trust and commitment and shared values. We have none of those things." *Of course I had those things with Victoria and it still went all to hell.*

"I trust you," Shawn said. "And we both like fighting crime. We could be the cutest couple since Batman and Robin."

"Batman and Robin weren't a couple." Carlton frowned. "Batman was his legal guardian. He was like a parent to Robin."

"You wouldn't say that if you'd read the stories about them I have. I can send you the links if you like."

"Are you saying you don't want to date?" Carlton felt his stomach churn a little.

"What? No, of course I want to date. I just don't want to do an autopsy on a relationship that hasn't even started yet."

"Fair enough." Carlton kissed Shawn's neck. He really did smell strongly of soap. "Do I need to ask if this is a monogamous relationship?" he asked.

"Please! I'm Captain Monogamous. I'm the mascot for monogamy, the monogamoose. Have you ever seen me show up at a crime scene with more than one date?"

"You do flirt with practically everyone," Carlton grumbled. "I just wanted to be sure."

"I admit, I have sometimes kept people on the back burner of the love stovetop, but if you need the crockpot of exclusivity I'm perfectly content with that."

"That metaphor is dreadful." He pushed Shawn back slightly and glared at him. *I am not a crockpot. What does that even mean?*

"Thanks." Shawn scratched behind his ear. "Listen," he said. "I'm all covered in dried soap or something. Would you mind if I jumped in your shower?"

"No, of course not. Help yourself."

"Can you come with? Talk to me so I don't think about dirt or coffins or anything?"

"Sure. Whatever you need."

Lassiter leaned against the sink while Shawn pulled off his t-shirt, jeans, and underwear. It was impossible to take his eyes off him. Shawn was as unashamed naked as he was clothed.

*My God, Carlton thought, why did I ever try to convince myself that I didn't want this?*

Shawn turned on the water and looked over his shoulder at Carlton. "You could join me, you know."

Carlton hesitated, but only for a moment. He was tired: tired of holding back from what he really felt like doing, not saying what he felt like saying, and of thinking and re-thinking everything instead of just going on instinct. Carlton smiled. He was getting in the damn shower.

"Okay, but if I have a panic attack please don't take it personally."

"Ditto," Shawn said.

The shower was not built for two, and the space was slightly cramped. Despite this, Carlton felt less anxious than when he'd showered alone. As the water ran over them the stress and tension of the past week seemed to drain out of him.

As he ran his mind over the trauma they had shared only a week ago he realized there had been more to it than feeling frightened and trapped. They'd also been brave and taken matters into their own hands. They'd risked their lives to make their escape. *And we found this*, Carlton thought, running a hand through Shawn's hair. *Whatever this was.*

Shawn hugged him and rested his head on his shoulder. Carlton ran his hands over his skin, wiping off the soap residue. Despite the warmth of the water pouring over them, Carlton noticed that Shawn was trembling. It was a few moments before he realized that Shawn was crying. He raised Shawn's face up to his and kissed him tentatively. He could taste the tears on his lips. Carlton had never been much of a crier. It wasn't an appropriate way for boys to express emotions in his family. Once, on a fishing trip with his grandfather, he'd got a fishhook stuck in his hand and cried all the way back to his grandparent's house. His grandmother had called him a sissy girl. She hadn't been much for vulnerability. But seeing Shawn this emotionally naked in front of him acted as a kind of permission for him to let down his own wall of resistance. He'd had few problems tapping into his anger about almost having died, but allowing himself to acknowledge his fear was another matter. Standing there, naked with Shawn, he let himself feel how frightened he'd been, and sometimes, still was. Leaning against the shower wall for support, they clung to each other, shuddering and sobbing. Carlton took comfort in the fact that the water washed away most of the evidence of his breakdown.

When several minutes had gone by with neither of them crying Shawn spoke. "So...I guess we're done in here then."

"Yeah." Carlton cleared his throat. "I think all the, uh, soap's off now."

"Oh yeah. I feel much better. Cleaner."

"Me too." Carlton shut off the water and Shawn stepped out onto the bath mat. He wrapped a

towel around his waist and passed one to Carlton.

“Stay over,” Carlton said.

“Really?” Shawn looked at him with red rimmed eyes. “I wasn’t sure if you’d still be interested after that emotional deluge in there.” He laughed. “I was a total mess.”

“Emotionally messy I can live with,” Carlton said.

“Living together is a big step, Lassie. Let’s try staying overnight first.” Shawn pulled a toothbrush out of the pocket of his crumpled jeans, grabbed Carlton’s cinnamon toothpaste, and began to brush his teeth.

“You brought your toothbrush?” Carlton said, surprised. “How confident were you?”

“You’re a hard fish to land, Lassie. I was hopeful, not confident. There’s a difference. One makes me a sweet lovestruck fool and the other makes me a smug jerk who may also be a slut. I think you’ll prefer lovestruck fool. Unless you want to go for a combo deal and settle on lovestruck slut. That works too.”

Carlton led the way to the bedroom. He pulled the covers back on his bed and crawled between the crisp sheets. Shawn nestled against him, and draped an arm casually across his abdomen.

“Listen, I get the feeling you were hoping this was going to be some kind of booty call,” Carlton began.

“Actually,” Shawn said, “If we could move the celebratory sex to the morning, that would work better for me. I’m pretty wiped right now and I’d really like to be good the first time out.”

“I agree completely,” Carlton said. “Besides, I make excellent after-sex pancakes.”

“Awesome. I was kind of worried you’d be one of those holding out until the third date types.”

“I’m a cop, not a monk.” He turned out the light.

For the first time since the Montresor case began, Carlton slept like a log.

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Lassiter's last line in this chapter is from his twitter page, and was directed at VivreNuit. I only joined Twitter to follow Psych\_Lassie.