

Pineapple of Hospitality

By *tera_gram*

Rating: PG for sexual references.

Pairings: Shawn/Lassiter.

Warning: Shassie slash. Spoilers for *Psy vs. Psy*.

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Summary: After three weeks of sex, Shawn wants to broach the possibility of dating. His plans are complicated by the arrival of Lassiter's brother.

Note: Inspired by Lassiter's blog entry at the USA network website. He mentions having a brother who surfs. I took that ball and ran with it. I really hope I haven't Gary Stued the thing. Much thanks to www.raptionary.com for the slang. Thank-you to **mr_pugh**, who betas all my entries. [Edited to replace Canadian icecream brand Cornetto with US equivalent, King Cone.]

Lassiter blamed the scotch. It had been the end of a particularly annoying week, and he'd been in Tom Blair's Pub, enjoying his third drink. If he'd been sober he might have had a comeback to Shawn Spencer's warning that drinking alone was like boarding the bus to Alcoholicville.

"Sure," Shawn had said, "They've got shrimp and sponge cake, but they also have liver failure and loneliness."

If it hadn't been for the reassuring glow from the booze he'd have rebuffed Spencer's offer to join him. Lassiter rarely saw Spencer drink, and had never seen him drunk, so he hadn't realized that Spencer *had* inhibitions until he'd seen them lowered.

Maybe the abolitionists were right when they argued that alcohol was a demonic influence. He'd certainly felt something close to possession that evening. First had come the close leaning, so they could hear each other speak over the din of the increasingly loud bar. Then there had been Spencer's disconcerting eye contact. He'd felt pinned down by those eyes, green in the light of the mock Tiffany fixture above their table. Trying to counter the discomfort with more scotch had not been an effective tactic. The leaning and the looking had led to touching. His hand rested amicably on Spencer's shoulder. Spencer's unshaven cheek rubbed accidentally against his own five o'clock shadow during a whispered conversation. When Spencer's hand settled itself tentatively on Lassiter's thigh he hadn't even felt surprised. It seemed inevitable by then.

The taxi back to his place had been awkward, as they'd both tried to pretend that Spencer was just coming in for a nightcap. But given the sexual tension between them at that point, Lassiter didn't think the cab driver had been fooled.

Once inside they hadn't bothered with the pretence, but had jumped right to the open mouthed kissing and the shedding of clothes. They'd had sex once that night and twice the next morning. Friday night he could blame on the booze, but by Saturday morning he'd been alarmingly sober. Afterwards, Spencer had mumbled something about meeting Gus for a standing lunch date and left. Lassiter had assumed the incident would be a one-time thing, but they'd been staging re-enactments every three or four days since. It had almost become part of his routine—a release he looked forward to, like his visits to the gun range.

All told, Lassiter probably spent about forty hours of the past three weeks naked with Spencer, but it was forty hours that he was determined to keep separate from the rest of his life. This was not as easy as he had expected it to be. Memories came to him at unexpected moments during his work day – the wetness of Spencer's insistent mouth as he pushed him down onto the couch, the way the muscles on Spencer's chest moved as he pulled off his t-shirt, the musky smell and salty taste of his skin, the way his lips had parted and he'd gasped when Lassiter had slipped a hand down past the waistband of his jeans.

His biggest worry was that someone at the station would sense a shift in their behaviour and put the clues together. To prevent this he'd tried to be less friendly to Spencer, making sure to call him Spencer, and not Shawn. He increased the number of jokes he made at his expense. He thought O'Hara had looked at him funny once or twice, but even she was falling into step now. Great sex and less tolerance of Spencer's interruptive buffoonery; it was a win-win situation.

Shawn Spencer paced back and forth in front of the Santa Barbara Police Station, working up his nerve to go inside. Normally this wasn't a problem, but there wasn't anything normal about today. Despite the cool temperature, his hands were sweating. He wiped his palms on his jeans and took a deep breath. His stomach was in knots.

He knew that asking someone out on a date shouldn't be so gut-wrenching, especially when he'd been sleeping with that person for three weeks now. Considering what they'd been doing together in Lassiter's apartment, asking him a simple question at work shouldn't be a big deal.

Of course Lassiter had been giving him the cold shoulder at the station. Sometimes the shoulder had merely been tepid, but on a few occasions it had dropped to sub-arctic. Shawn hadn't taken it personally. It was a transparent ruse designed to prevent anyone from guessing what they did in their off time. And it worked. Even Jules and Gus hadn't cottoned on to how they really felt.

Except Shawn wasn't sure how Lassiter really felt. When they were alone together, Lassie was affectionate even when they weren't naked. Shawn had begun to wonder what

it would be like to transfer that dynamic outside Lassiter's apartment. He might have continued wondering, but the last two times they'd had sex Lassiter had moaned his name, which in Shawn's book suggested some kind of personal interest. That was why he had decided to see if their booty calls could be supersized into full-on dates. He just had to walk in there and ask.

Which he would do.

Any minute now.

Normally Shawn would have talked his anxieties out with Gus, but as per his agreement with Lassiter, he hadn't told anyone about their evening trysts. Shawn normally wouldn't have felt bound by a promise made when he was wearing only boxer briefs, but Lassiter knew him better than he'd expected. He made him pinky swear. At the time Shawn had figured that his one night stand with Lassie would be in the same category as what happened to Gus' pet rock – a story they could only share in their retirement home, when all parties involved were long since dead. But with each subsequent hook-up Shawn's guilt had multiplied, until he was now keeping far more from Gus than he was comfortable with. If Lassie agreed to dating that would mean he could be honest with Gus again. If you were dating someone, you definitely told your best friend. Lassie would get that. He just needed to have it put to him in such a way that he couldn't possibly refuse.

Baby steps up the stairs, Shawn said to himself as he walked up to the station entryway. *Baby steps through the door*, he entered the station and walked through the reception area, making his way unchallenged to the bullpen. There he stopped under an arch of Spanish-revival ceramic tile and watched Lassiter at his desk. He was wearing his dark blue suit and a red tie that reminded Shawn of Gordon Gekko. He was hunched tensely over his desk and frowning at some papers in a folder.

Baby steps ask Lassie for a date. He took a deep breath and walked purposefully toward the lanky detective.

"Lassie!" Shawn smiled and sat on the edge of Lassiter's desk. "Got a minute?"

"For you? No. I don't. And get off my desk!" What Lassiter really meant was *Meet me in the downstairs bathroom in ten minutes*. But Shawn couldn't wait ten minutes.

He jumped off the desk and stood, hands in his pockets, bouncing lightly on the balls of his feet, trying to burn off some of his nervous energy.

"We should really talk now. I've got a King Cone sitting in the car and if I don't get back to it soon it's going to melt all over Gus' upholstery."

This was a lie. Gus had dropped him off before heading to what he insisted on calling his 'real job.' But only melting icecream could communicate the urgency Shawn felt.

“I’m really busy, Spencer. What’s it about?”

“It’s about eleven-thirty,” Shawn said, glancing at his watch. “Which means the time has come to talk about manly things. About shoes and ships and sealing wax—”

And about whether or not you like me enough to hang out when we’re not sweaty and naked.

“Fine.” Lassiter cut him off. He closed the folder and stood up. “I was going to get a coffee anyway. You can walk with me if you—oof!” Lassiter stopped mid-sentence as the wind was knocked out of him.

“Hola Booker!”

A tall man with shaggy dark hair had embraced Lassiter in a bear hug. Shawn’s eyes widened and he felt as if time had ground to a halt. This man—this stranger—was hugging Lassiter. His Lassiter. And instead of pulling his Glock or judo-flipping him onto the desk, or delivering a sharp elbow to his solar plexus, Lassiter was smiling. Genuinely smiling. Shawn felt his stomach rise.

“Derek?” Lassiter twisted around and returned the hug. His usual look of irritation had disappeared. There was some hesitation though, somewhere behind the eyes. In a flash Shawn imagined the whole backstory—Derek would be Lassiter’s first boyfriend, some crush from university who’d introduced him to the secret world of man-love and then broke his heart. Now he’d returned to sweep Lassiter off his feet just as Shawn had finally got up the nerve to speak his mind.

Damn you, Derek, Shawn thought. I hate you already.

It took a few moments before Shawn’s brain began to work again. Then he looked past the stranger’s freckly tan, blazing white teeth and confident posture, and he saw the blue eyes, the dark hair, and the echo of familiarity around the mouth and jaw. Relief washed over him like a bite of King Cone down a sore throat.

“I’m sensing the two of you have a strong familial bond,” Shawn said. But what he really meant was, *Please tell me this is your brother. Or close cousin. I’d settle for cousin.*

Lassiter stood there immobile, staring at Derek with wide eyes, as if he expected him to disappear any moment. Shawn’s smile went past its natural expiration point and remained frozen on his face.

Lassie’s not going to introduce me, Shawn realized. I’m not someone he’d bother introducing to his family.

“Good guess,” Derek said, smiling warmly. “I’m Derek Lassiter. Carlton’s brother.” He

extended an arm and grasped Shawn's hand in the thumb clasp handshake. Shawn's eyes quickly took in Derek's details: about six foot, tight swimmers build, knee-length navy blue jams, and a grey sweatshirt that said World Core.

Lassiter's brother was a surfer.

"His brother. Wow." Shawn smiled. "I didn't realize any of Lassie's people could tan. It's nice to meet you. I'm Shawn Spencer. I'm—"

"He's the department psychic," Lassiter cut in, as if to prevent Shawn from claiming some other, more intimate title. Lassiter looked at Derek and his usual concentrated scowl returned. "Why are you here?"

"Relax, man. It's cool. Nobody's dead." Derek laughed, but it seemed forced to Shawn.

"He's here for the Rincon Classic," Shawn said. It was an educated guess. The annual surf contest was happening that weekend at Rincon del Mar on the Ventura-Santa Barbara County line.

"Right again," Derek grinned widely and nodded his head. "I don't believe in psychics, but you're good. It's cold reading, right?"

"Maybe," Shawn said slyly. "Or maybe your aura is all full of sand and jellyfish."

"So bro," Derek asked Lassiter, "Can you take a break and grab a bite to eat with me?"

"No *bro*, I can't. This isn't Dairy Queen," Lassiter said, using what Shawn easily recognized as his annoyed voice. "I can't just take off whenever I feel like it."

"Actually," Shawn cut in. "I worked at a Dairy Queen, and you can't just take off in mid-shift there either." Both men turned to look at him. "In case you were wondering," he added.

"Okay," Derek said, raising his hands in mock surrender. "I don't need the responsibility lecture. How about dinner tonight? I've got my cell. Give me a call." He leaned down and wrote his phone number on a notepad on Lassiter's desk. Shawn checked out his ass, just for scientific interest.

"Okay." Lassiter looked mollified. "That'd be nice."

"Just don't tell Mother I'm in town," Derek said. "I don't want to have to visit her."

"No problem," Lassiter said. "I try not to tell her much of anything."

Then it occurred to Shawn that before he threw his heart under the love train he could pump Derek for insight into Lassiter. He had questioned O'Hara discreetly on numerous

occasions, and concluded that she didn't know much about her partner at all. His brother, on the other hand, would have stories of childhood incidents that had formed Lassiter's psyche. Grilling Derek would require a deft interweaving of his dad's investigative skills and his mom's psychological insight. And he was pretty eye candy, so the interrogation process wouldn't be boring or painful.

"I'm free for lunch," Shawn offered. "And I can divine which places would give you indigestion or food poisoning and steer you away."

"Okay," Derek said, surprised. "Do you like Indian food?"

"Do I? I'm coo-coo for curry puffs."

"Curry puffs are Malaysian," Derek said.

"I've heard it both ways. There's a great Indian food place on State Street."

"Okay. Let's grind."

"He'll meet you out front," Lassiter said, grabbing Shawn firmly by the forearm. "We need to finish something work-related first."

"See you out front then," Derek waved his goodbye and strolled slowly out.

"I like your brother" Shawn said, once Derek was out of earshot.

"Of course you like him." Lassiter's jaw tightened and his mouth turned down at the edges. "Listen Spencer, under no circumstances will you to tell him anything about my sex life. Are we clear on that?"

"Crystal." Shawn smiled. His lunch with Derek was intended to be more of a one-way conversation anyway, with Derek spilling his guts about Lassiter and Shawn memorizing every helpful detail.

Chapter 2

Lassiter watched Spencer hurry out of the station and a cold block of ice formed in his chest. Spencer would fall for Derek's friendly demeanour and tell him everything. He just knew it. Derek could tell when people were hiding something. And his skills as an interrogator had probably developed past the point of striking you with your own fists while asking "why are you hitting yourself?"

Lassiter sat heavily into his chair. Even if his intentions were good, Spencer could barely keep quiet from moment to moment as it was. He would break. And then the news would spread to his sister and her husband and eventually to his mother, who would come down on him with the mighty hammer of Irish Catholicism. He could just see her booking him in for meetings with Father Barica, or signing him up for some kind of counselling. His sister was cut from a different cloth, but that didn't necessarily mean she'd be marching in the PFLAG contingent of the Pride Parade.

Oh God, Lassiter thought suddenly, *What if she doesn't want to let me see Peter anymore?* He didn't get to see his nephew often, and the last thing he wanted was to endanger any future visits. The thought that his continued relationship with his family, however strained, may now hinge on the discretion of a fake psychic and a professional beach bum gave him a pounding headache.

In addition to this new worry, Lassiter still had the issue that had been chewing at his insides for the past week—the sense that any day now Spencer was going to say that he didn't want to see him anymore. The man had the attention span of a speed freak on a sugar binge. Inevitably he'd find someone else and just stop showing up.

Knowing their time was limited he tried to keep himself from becoming emotionally involved. But that was easier said than done. He liked Spencer. When they were together, it was easy to imagine that Spencer liked him. He'd never been the popular kid. Calls to the house were inevitably for Derek, not for him. But being the focus of Spencer's attention felt kind of like he imagined popularity might feel. And he liked that feeling, even if it was all in his mind. And if his heart happened to ache for a few hours after Spencer left then that was just something he'd have to deal with.

They were three weeks in now and he hadn't even tried having a "where is this going?" talk. It wasn't that he had trouble talking to Spencer. If it had been a work related question he'd have pinned him against the wall and demanded answers. But he was afraid that even broaching the subject of commitment would precipitate Spencer calling it quits. So he was stuck. Lassiter felt like Lenny in *Of Mice and Men*, imagining a future that would never happen and waiting to be shot in the back of the head.

Of course he had known it wouldn't last when he'd started...whatever it was he had started with Spencer. It couldn't be called dating exactly, since they didn't leave the house. It wasn't like he wanted to stroll hand in hand along the boardwalk, or have candlelit dinners in romantic bistros, but there were places they could go without being

immediately pegged as dating. A false moustache, a fake nose, a rented car, and they could easily be having dinner together somewhere in Ventura County.

In his more negative moments, Lassiter wondered if Spencer was ashamed to be seen with him. He wasn't exactly the type of person the psychic usually showed up with. That FBI woman had been gorgeous. Evil, but gorgeous. Abigail Lytar had been pretty in a delicate flower sort of way. Hell, even Guster had been able to pass as a model. If the bar for friendship was that high he'd have no chance as...what? Lover? Boyfriend? Lassiter had no illusions about himself. As a partner, Spencer was out of his league.

With the looks he'd been giving him lately, Lassiter could tell Spencer was coming to some kind of decision. It was just a matter of time before he moved on to someone more interesting. He could see it in the way Spencer looked at Derek—that roving eye.

Of course Spencer likes Derek, Lassiter reflected. They were both irresponsible people magnets coasting through life on their good looks. What wouldn't he like about that?

At least Spencer has a skill, he admitted. If what he does can be considered a skill.

O'Hara interrupted his thoughts by placing a thick folder on his desk.

“Vick wants us on that swarming case. They're looking at prosecuting the attackers under the gang statutes. She needs us to put together a report for the DA's office by tomorrow.”

Terrific! As if I didn't have enough to do.

Lassiter sighed. He frowned at the phone number Derek had written on his notepad. He'd have to cancel dinner. He picked up the receiver. He should know just what to say by now. It was the same call he'd been making to Victoria for years.

And look how great that turned out.

He put the receiver back in its cradle. If he was going to be at his desk going through six months of assault reports he'd need some food. Maybe he should just grab some takeout he could bring back to his desk. Hadn't Spencer said they were going to an Indian place on State? Indian sounded good.

Lassiter spotted them in Asuyilas restaurant, leaning toward one another and talking. Lassiter clenched his jaw. They looked more like a couple than he and Spencer did. At least they were out in public together. He went inside, ordered his food to go, and then walked to their booth, near the window. Spencer was laughing at something Derek had said. The remains of their lunch were scattered messily across the table. Only their drinks and a basket of samosas remained.

“Hey Lassie,” Spencer greeted him. “Derek was just telling me about your grandmother. Did she really make you write a book report a week every summer?”

“Yes.” Lassiter’s eyes narrowed at Derek. “On the plus side I have a sound knowledge of American literature and excellent penmanship.”

“Join us.” Spencer made space on the bench beside him and Lassiter perched on the edge of the seat, willing himself not to get too intimate in front of Derek.

“I sense that you come bearing bad news,” Derek put his index fingers to his temples as he spoke, and Spencer laughed, as if it were some in-joke between the two of them.

“Yeah,” Lassiter said. “I can’t make dinner tonight. I’ve got to work late.”

“Bummer,” Derek said. “I was hoping we could catch up.” He sounded genuinely sorry.

But then, Lassiter reminded himself, Derek always sounded genuine.

“Can we reschedule?” Lassiter asked.

“I’m free and easy until Saturday,” Derek said, leaning back in his seat. “I’ve got Rincon all weekend.”

“I’m sure I can scrape up some free time before then,” Lassiter said, hoping it was true. The smell of the food was reminding him how long it had been since he’d had more than a cup of coffee. He grabbed one of the samosas from the basket and popped it in his mouth. Spencer and Derek looked at him with wide-eyed alarm. It took only two seconds for him to realize why. The samosas burned with a spicy intensity unlike anything he’d ever eaten before. He grimaced and swallowed the piquant chunks. His eyes were burning, his nose was running, his body was sweating and his tongue felt as if it had been dipped into a bucket of fire ants.

He grabbed Spencer’s mango lassi and took a long suck. It cooled the burn, but only slightly. He sucked at the straw again, draining half the cup.

“What in the name of Santa Barbara is in that thing?” he demanded when he could speak again.

“Samosas with chillies and habaneros,” Spencer said. “They’re like a fireball wrapped in a deceptively delicious batter. You have to eat them in very small portions. That’s why there are still so many of them left in the basket.”

“We’re treating them like a game of chicken,” Derek said. “The one who can eat the most wins the title of Spice King. I thought I’d have an edge but Shawn’s pretty stubborn and his pain tolerance is surprisingly high.” He looked forlornly at the basket. “Oh, who am I kidding? We’re both totally wimping out.”

“I’ve been crying on the inside,” Spencer said. Then, after a short pause added, “And on the outside.”

Lassiter’s phone rang.

“Lassiter.” He listened to the caller, frowning. “I didn’t leave. I’m just getting some food. Yes. Of course I am.” He ended the call, exhaled heavily, and looked at Spencer. “I’m sorry. I really have to go.”

“Go.” Spencer said. “Have fun solving crime. I’ll entertain your brother.”

“So, Derek,” Shawn said after lunch. “What do you want to do? Baseball game? Museum? Stock Exchange? Von Steuben Day Parade?”

“You do know I grew up here, right?” Derek asked. “I don’t need to be entertained.”

“Great!” Shawn clapped his hands together. “Then we can play X-box and eat ice cream all evening, like locals. Let’s go to my office.”

Derek walked over to a white van with rental plates and unlocked the passenger door for Shawn.

“Shawn, can you swim?” he asked suddenly, tilting his head and looking at him with those blue eyes, alarmingly like Lassie’s.

“Sure I can swim.” Shawn said as he climbed into the van. “I’m practically Patrick Duffy. Man From Atlantis Duffy, not Dallas Duffy. Although I think even Bobby Ewing swam sometimes.”

“Ever surfed?” Derek climbed into the drivers seat and started the engine. The cd player kicked in and began to blare Ministry’s Jesus Built My Hotrod. Derek reached forward and turned the volume down.

“Just the internet and satellite cable. But the spirits know where you’re going with this.”

“I thought they might.” As they pulled out of the police station parking lot Shawn’s phone began to play Baby Got Back, meaning it was Gus calling. He had been using The Offspring’s Pretty Fly (For A White Guy) as Gus’ ringtone, but Gus had threatened to cut his hair when he fell asleep in the office unless he changed it.

“Gus, buddy, how’s it going?” Shawn bit his lip. He’d gotten so caught up in using Derek as his conduit to Lassiter love that he’d forgotten that he and Gus had tentative plans to enter the Scrabble tournament at Glorious Pines Retirement Home that evening.

This is going to be tricky, Shawn thought. He couldn't very well tell Gus that he was hanging out with Lassie's brother without explaining why. And if he invited Gus along then he wouldn't be able to grill Derek about Lassie.

"It's going," Gus said. He sounded tired. "I couldn't finish my demonstration of our medicated handwipes because four doctors on my route are home with the flu. Which is too bad, because handwashing is generally touted as the best way to prevent flu transmission. But I digress. Are we still on for Scrabble tonight?"

"I'll have to get back to you on that one," Shawn said. "Call me after work." He signed off with Gus as quickly as he could. With any luck his plan to cross-examine Derek could be finished in time.

"You know," Derek said as he navigated toward the coast, "I appreciate the company and all, but you don't have to cancel your plans on my account. I can entertain myself."

"No, it's cool." Shawn waved a hand. "A friend and I volunteer at a retirement home sometimes. But I'm still in the bad books with some of the guys there for my political views on Wilford Brimley."

Derek drove them to a surf shop where Shawn rented a wetsuit and a board. From there they went to Ledbetter beach. It was bright and sunny, although Shawn knew that the water would be cold at this time of year, despite the wetsuit.

"Rincon's going to be a zoo this week," Derek explained. "Ledbetter's good for your first time." He slapped Shawn on the back. "She'll be gentle with you."

Derek gave him some lessons on the beach first, with Shawn practicing moving from his stomach to a standing position. Once in the water it was more difficult. Shawn had been right about the water temperature. The little Shaws objected to their initial submersion and he suspected that if it weren't for the added warmth of the wetsuit his penis might have become indistinguishable from his bellybutton. But his body soon adjusted, just as it had to wearing bootcut jeans. He spent some time in the foamy whitewash, riding the waves on his stomach and then practicing his stance on the smaller waves to get his confidence up.

"I think you're ready," Derek said. "Let's join the lineup."

Shawn paddled after Derek and the two of them headed out past the breakers. Shawn straddled his board and watched the other surfers, to get a handle on what they did and how. Derek stayed with him, and kept his eye on the waves coming in.

"Get ready. You're up!" Derek shouted over the light offshore wind.

Shawn turned his board toward the shore, lay down and started to paddle, trying to match

the speed of the wave. The wave caught up with him, pushing and carrying him forward. He pulled himself up into the stance he'd practiced, but he was too eager and fell off the back of the wave and hit the water. Shawn wrapped his arms around his head to prevent an injury, as Derek had warned him to, but took in a mouthful of sea water. He felt the power of the water tug on his leash and he scrambled to surface. When he came up, coughing and gasping for air, Derek was there.

"You okay?" he asked. "Looks like you got a little Maytagged there."

"I'm good." Shawn coughed again. "Although I think I have Ariel's Grotto setting up shop in my sinus cavities. This looked much easier in the Gidget movies!"

"Everything looks easier with rear projection." Derek laughed. "Next time, wait until you're sliding down the face of the wave before you pop up." They paddled back out to the lineup.

"Did you ever do this with Lassie?" Shawn asked as they waited.

"No." Derek shook his head and little droplets sprayed from the ends of his hair. "Booker doesn't do surfing. He hates the water, hates the sand, hates the sun, hates the crowds. Hell, I've been going to Rincon since I was fifteen and Booker's never even watched me compete. I think he hates fun."

"Lassie's fun," Shawn said. "You've just got to ease him into it. He's like the Travelocity Gnome. He's stern, but put a grass skirt and a lei on him and he looks quite festive."

"How about giving it another shot?" Derek nodded toward the incoming waves. "I think this one's got your name on it."

Shawn lay flat and paddled like mad. Suddenly he felt the water surge beneath him.

Wait for it...wait for it...

Once he passed the lip of the wave he stood. For fifteen glorious seconds, Shawn was surfing, his knees bent slightly and his arms out for balance.

I wish Gus could see this, Shawn thought, exhilarated. I wish Lassie could see this. Hell, I wish I could see this.

Shawn glided into the whitewater, started to wobble, and went back onto his stomach. He turned to watch Derek surf in after him.

"Did you see?" Shawn called to him. "I was surfing! I stood. And stayed."

"I saw." Derek smiled. "Congratulations."

“That totally makes up for the gallon of salt water I must have swallowed today.”

“You wanna go again?” Derek asked.

“Hell yeah.”

Later that evening Shawn and Derek were sitting on a bench outside the Psych office eating Chinese takeout. Shawn ribs were killing him and his arms felt like he'd done a few hundred pushups, but he was relaxed and happy.

“The best surf movie cast has to be Big Wednesday.” Derek said. “It's the Stand By Me of surfing. It's got Gary Busey, Jan Michael Vincent, *and* William ‘Greatest American Hero’ Katt *and* Robert Englund narrates.” He used his chopsticks to pull a tangle of shanghai noodles from a takeout carton and deftly stuffed them into his mouth.

“I concede you a point for that, on the strength of Robert Englund and William Katt,” Shawn said. He scooped fried rice into his mouth and then gestured with his chopsticks before swallowing. “But a scantily clad Gary Busey, on the other hand, isn't even permitted within 100 yards of my mind's eye. My turn. In Gods Hands has Bret Michaels.”

“Ack!” Derek winced. “The dude from Poison? No points for that one. Try again.” He poked through the container and pulled another bunch of noodles free.

“Fine,” he said. “Big Bounce has Charlie Sheen, Morgan Freeman, and Willie Nelson. Point.”

“It's not really a surf movie, plus it's a remake,” Derek objected. “And if you're angling for points I'm surprised you don't mention Vinnie Jones and Gary Sinise. They're hella good.”

“Okay,” Shawn said. “North Shore has Nia Peeples, the party machine. Say whaaat!”

Derek groaned. “North Shore was awful. The only good things about that movie were Laird Hamilton, Gerry Lopez, Mark Occoluppo, and Alex Rogers. But if you're assigning points based on female beauty, Blue Crush has Michelle Rodriguez. She's a betty.” He pointed his chopsticks at Shawn. “Point.”

“Okay, okay. You win.” Shawn smiled and leaned back on the bench, breathing in the salty night air. He'd enjoyed himself today, but he knew that one of the reasons he was having such a good time was because of Derek's resemblance to Lassie. Except Derek's nose was too straight, and he smiled too easily. Shawn preferred a challenge. And judging by his form-fitting clothes, Shawn doubted that Derek was packing heat.

“So, Derek, what do you do for a living?” Shawn put down his rice and picked up his sweet and sour vegetables.

“My crew and I rob banks so we can underwrite our surfing.”

“Dude! No points for that.” Shawn groaned. “That was the worst movie ever! And Keanu Reeves sucks as an undercover cop. Lassie would have shot Swayze full of holes before he even made it to that fence.”

“What movie is that?” Derek feigned ignorance for a few moments than broke into a smile. “You’re right. That film bit. Seriously, I run a surf store in Punta Hermosa, Peru. I rent equipment, teach lessons to tourists, occasionally do some tow-in.”

“Not law enforcement, then?”

“Hell no. When Booker and I used to play cops and robbers, I always played the robber.”

“Excellent. Then on behalf of the fraternal order of badguys I think it’s your brotherly duty to dish the dirt on Lassie. Embarrassing childhood incidents, awkward adolescence, I want the lot.”

“Booker’s always been pretty much the same as he is now,” Derek said. “I think he was born forty-five.”

“Maybe, but if you play him at 72 rpms he sounds like a chipmunk.”

“Booker’s in the wrong time period,” Derek said. “He’d have made a great pioneer. He likes to fish and shoot things.”

“Dude,” Shawn wheedled, “the purpose of grilling you is to get dirt I don’t already have. Work with me here.”

“I’d like to help you out, but our family’s not exactly close-knit. Every time I try to bond they start in on the Wasting Your Life speech. I’ve got the damn thing memorized.” He finished off the noodles and set the empty container on the bench between them. “I sometimes consider putting it to music.”

“I get that,” Shawn said. “My dad’s not exactly crazy that I went with Psychic Detective as a career choice.”

“At least you have a career.” Derek laughed. “Booker’s a cop and my sister’s a photographer. As far as they’re concerned, I’m unemployed. They don’t count surfing as a real job.”

“Speaking of surfing,” Shawn said, “today was awesome.”

“Call me if you want to give it another go. I’m always up for surfing.”

“I’d love to wrangle Lassie into going,” Shawn said. “I think that you and me together could do it.”

Derek looked sideways at Shawn, studying him thoughtfully. Just then Shawn’s phone rang. It was Gus. He stared at the screen for a few moments. Gus was calling back about the Scrabble.

“Hey, Gus,” Shawn said. “I was just about to call you.”

“I’ll be done work in another half hour,” Gus said. “Are we still on for Scrabble?”

“Actually, something’s come up. I’ll have to bail.”

“Have we got a case?” Gus asked eagerly. “I can meet you at the office.”

“No, it’s not a case. It’s...it’s more of a personal thing that came up.” Shawn scrambled for an excuse but the only ones he could think of involved faking serious injuries or forging signatures from the cast of *The Facts of Life*.

“Is it a date?” Gus asked.

“Yes! Exactly.” Shawn was so grateful that he could have kissed Gus on the top of his perfectly rounded head. “So, rain check on that Scrabble thing, okay?”

“Well, they don’t play it every week,” Gus said. “I’ll have to check with Oswald and see when their next tournament is happening.”

“Sounds good. With your vocabulary and my creative smartwordery we can’t lose.”

“You know that’s right.”

Shawn leaned back on the wooden seat. He hated lying to Gus, although he didn’t mind missing out on Scrabble. Those seniors were always challenging his word choices and then adding whipper to snapper for a triple word score. He was still bitter about having his use of quickerpickerrupper challenged.

“Dude, you’re not mad, are you?” Shawn asked tentatively.

“Hell no!” Gus said. “I’m glad. Since things ended with Abigail you’ve been kind of weird.”

“Weird? Shawn laughed nervously. “Weird like how?”

“You’ve been a bit...off. Frankly, I was starting to worry you were depressed. I was waiting for the right time to bring up the idea of seeing a psychiatrist. I even made a list of medications I thought you might want to ask about. I’m glad you’re ready to start

dating again. Scrabble can wait.”

After Shawn hung up Derek turned on the bench and settled his full gaze on him.

“Tell me something Shawn,”

“Yeah, sure. What?”

“Why are you and Booker friends?”

“I’m sorry?”

“You seem like a cool guy. What do you get out of hanging out with Booker? I grew up with the guy. He’s kind of a pill.”

“Lassie’s plenty of fun,” Shawn said. “He’s just an acquired taste. I’m sensing that you weren’t really close growing up.”

“We shared a room, but we lived on different planets. I had a life and he had a future.”

“So are you staying with Lassie while you’re here?” Shawn asked. He’d need to know if he was planning to stop over anytime soon. He didn’t want to accidentally out Lassie to his brother.

“No. The last time I stayed with Booker I got in trouble for taking eggs from the wrong side of the carton or some such nonsense. It’s either stay at my mother’s place or sleep in the van. So I’m crashing in the van.”

“The van? No way!” Shawn protested. “You could be towed, or eaten by mosquitoes or attacked by that ghost from *Scream*.” Derek raised a questioning eyebrow. “Ghostface loves vans,” Shawn explained. “You can stay at my place.”

“Is that a good idea? I could be some kind of psycho.”

“You’re Lassie’s brother,” Shawn said. “How psycho can you be? On second thought, don’t answer that. It’s no problem. Really. I extend my pineapple of hospitality to you.”

“Pineapple of hospitality?”

“The pineapple is the international symbol of hospitality. It would have made more sense if I had an actual pineapple with me. Think of it as a metaphorical pineapple for now.”

“Thanks, man.”

Shawn and Derek watched people stroll along the boardwalk and the beach. Nearby, a sun-bleached blonde was buying an icecream cone from a stand and casting flirty glances

in their direction.

“I think she likes you,” Shawn said.

“You think?” Derek smiled. “Would I be a total asshole if I went over to talk to her?”

“No. But you’d be a total asshole if you didn’t pick me up a chocolate dip cone while you do it.” Shawn fumbled in his jeans pocket and pulled out a crumpled five dollar bill.

“FYI, my psychic gift tells me she loves dancing.” With the calluses revealed by her flip-flops she had to be a dancer or a gymnast, and based on her posture and relative lack of upper body muscle development, Shawn was going with dancer.

“Do you mean dancing like the tango or dancing like poles and dollar bills?” Derek asked.

“Dancing like ballet. Or maybe like Flashdance. Perhaps a little Martha Graham.”

“Thanks for the tip. Should I ask if she’s got a friend?”

“Appreciated, but no.” Shawn began to gather up the takeout containers. “I’m seeing someone. Sort of. It’s all there on my Facebook page—relationship status: It’s complicated.”

“That’s cool. You can tell me all about it later tonight.” Derek took the bill and hurried over to the ice cream stand. Shawn ditched the takeout in the trash and then watched Derek chat up the blonde while waiting for his cone. It was some of the fastest flirting Shawn had ever seen, outside of his own. Derek returned with the cone and the blonde.

“Shawn, this is Siggie. We’re just gonna go for a walk, see the sights.” Derek tilted his head in the direction of the setting sun.

“Okay,” Shawn mumbled around his ice cream cone, “But if you’re not back in an hour you’re sleeping in a van tonight.”

“I’ll be back.” Derek disappeared down the beach with Siggie. Shawn went inside the office and played Time Crisis for a while. True to his word Derek was back on time.

“So, Shawn. Up for some x-box with a former local?”

Chapter 3

Lassiter arrived at the door to Spencer's apartment, clutching a take-out container from IHOP. He'd gotten the New York Cheesecake pancakes for Spencer and the more reasonable Harvest Grain and Nut for himself. The smell alone was making his stomach rumble.

His knock was answered promptly, but not by Spencer. Instead, Derek stood there, filling the doorway with his tanned body, clad only in a pair of boxers.

"Oh, hey Booker. 'Sup?" Derek yawned and scratched his head. He'd clearly only just woken up. His hair was a mess and he reeked of sweat. Then Lassiter saw the marks—four purple hickeys across his chest. Suddenly he wasn't hungry. In fact, he felt nauseated.

"I brought you pancakes." Lassiter passed Derek the IHOP bag.

"Really?" Derek opened the bag and plunged a hand inside, pulling it back to lick the sugary powder from his fingers. "Hey, do you want to come in? Shawn's just getting up."

"No," Lassiter said. "I can't stay. I've got work to do." He bit his tongue and took a step back. The last thing he wanted to do was watch Spencer and Derek being all comfortably intimate with one another. "I'll see you later, maybe."

"We're doing dinner, right?" Derek called to his retreating back.

Lassiter's brain was boiling. He'd had no idea that Derek was interested in men. They hadn't exactly spent a lot of time hanging out together or sharing their personal feelings, but he'd never seen him with men (at least, not romantically) and Derek hadn't come out to him at any point. Of course he wasn't exactly falling over himself to tell Derek about his own orientation issues either.

Lassiter drove to work and sat at his desk plotting ways to destroy Derek's life. His best plans involved Homeland Security, the airport, and a body cavity search. Three hours and six ignored phone calls from Shawn later Lassiter realized that none of this situation was Derek's fault. It was Shawn who had the whole picture and chose to go ahead anyway.

His phone rang again. Shawn was calling. He wished he could turn the damn thing off, but that wasn't a luxury homicide detectives had. He considered letting it go to voicemail then decided he'd become angry enough to answer it. He stepped into the interrogation observation room. There was no need for everyone to overhear them fight.

"Fuck off, Shawn," Lassiter said and hung up. A few seconds later Shawn called back.

"Fuck off Shawn. I mean it. I don't want to talk to you." He sat on a metal chair and put his head in his hands. He hated that part of him really wanted to hear Shawn apologize,

come up with some lame excuse, and ask for forgiveness. He hated it even more that part of him wanted to accept the excuses just so everything could go back to the way it was. Lassiter knew he'd just have to override that impulse for his own good.

Three minutes later his phone rang again, but this time he didn't recognize the number.

"Lassiter," he answered in his professional voice.

"Dude, why are you being such an asshole?"

Shawn. He should have known.

"What is it, Shawn?" he demanded, not bothering to lower his voice now. "Are you working your way through the family? Is that it? I have a sister who lives in New Jersey if you still swing that way."

There was silence on the other end.

"You know what?" Lassiter said, pouring out all his frustration now, "I'm glad. You and Derek deserve each other. Neither one of you thinks of anyone but himself. I hope you'll be very happy together."

Then finally Shawn spoke, "You think I'd sleep with your brother?" He sounded hurt, but Lassiter was pretty sure it was all just an act.

Shawn was a great actor when he wanted to be.

Like when I thought he actually gave a damn about me.

"I think you'd sleep with anyone who stood still long enough. Don't call me again." Lassiter hung up.

It wasn't until he'd returned to his desk that he realized he'd stopped thinking of Shawn as Spencer and started thinking of him as Shawn.

Great! Just in time for our messy break-up.

It's not stalking, Lassiter assured himself. Under section 646.9 of the California Penal Code a stalker was defined as a person who willfully, maliciously, and repeatedly followed or harassed someone and who made a credible threat that placed the victim in fear for their safety. Sure, he'd been trailing Shawn and Derek for the past hour, watching them go from Shawn's apartment to a coffee shop, where they were now drinking lattes or mochas or something. If he were honest about it, this was not the first time he had tailed Shawn somewhere. Back when he'd been hoping to reveal him as a fraud he'd

followed him quite a bit. He had a notebook filled with details about Spencer's trips to the 7-11, the Starbucks, Henry's house, Gus' office, and the laundromat. So what he was doing now could count as "repeated" following. But he certainly hadn't threatened anyone, and he was pretty sure Shawn wouldn't have felt fearful, even if he'd known Lassiter was tailing him.

Watching from his vantage point in a bookstore across the street Lassiter wished he could read lips. His binoculars gave him a pretty good view of Shawn and Derek, talking and laughing. His mind began to play devils advocate with itself.

That's a date. I know a date when I see it.

They're just talking.

They're probably talking about all the sex they're having.

Maybe they're just talking.

Shawn's sitting close to him. Too close to just be a friend.

Shawn sits close to everyone.

It could be a date. It looks like a date.

It's not a date.

The trouble was, all the clues were open to interpretation. Shawn had placed his hand casually on Derek's shoulder as they walked to their seats on the patio. Twice Derek had playfully punched Shawn in the shoulder. Lassiter frowned. It could absolutely be a date.

"Detective Lassiter?"

Lassiter started so suddenly that he almost threw the binoculars over the potted plant he was using as cover. Panicked, he wheeled around to face his accuser.

"Guster." *The best defence is a good offence.* "Get lost. I'm working."

"Are you spying on Shawn?" Gus asked in a hushed tone.

"What makes you think that?"

Gus looked slowly from Lassiter's face to the pair of binoculars clutched in his hands and back to his face again. His lower lip protruded slightly and he raised an eyebrow. "What do you think?"

It was then that Lassiter noticed that Gus was also holding a pair of binoculars, albeit

smaller and less expensive than his own. The kind one got with a year's subscription to Sports Illustrated.

"What are you doing here?" He asked Gus.

"I'm spying on Shawn." Gus stepped forward and put the binoculars to his eyes without any sign of embarrassment.

"May I ask why?" Lassiter asked, moving to a better position behind the fern.

"The Santa Barbara Zoo has a new baby Golden Lion Tamarin monkey."

"The zoo has a new monkey." Lassiter wasn't sure if what Gus had said was a complete non sequitur or if his mind had simply turned to mush under the influence of his obsession with Shawn.

"Not exactly," Gus said. "They've had monkeys since 1983 but this is the zoo's first viable birth in captivity." When Lassiter's face failed to look impressed, he added. "It's a big deal. They're endangered."

"So then why are you here?"

"Because Shawn and I were supposed to go see it today but he bailed on me. He said he had a prior engagement." Gus raised a finger. "But, that's what he said the day before, when we were going to be in the Scrabble tournament at Glorious Pines. Instead I got paired up with a man who kept trying to use hyphenated words and insisted on showing me his new dentures."

"And ruining your Scrabble evening justifies stalking how?"

"First off," Gus said, "it's not just a game. It's a tournament. It gets written up in the Scrabble newsletter. Second, Shawn claimed he had a date, but on my way there I drove past him and this guy walking together."

"Don't you think that maybe he just didn't want to play geriatric Scrabble?"

"I think you mean Scrabble with geriatrics." Gus ignored Lassiter's glare and continued. "The way I see it there are two possibilities. One, he's replacing me. I hate to think so, but it makes a kind of sense. My sister warned me that working together could ruin our friendship. I didn't think so, but he's never lied to me before."

"Uh, I hate to break it to you Guster, but Spencer has lied to you lots of times."

"Not like this. Shawn lies to get me to accompany him on stupid missions that he knows I'd never agree to. I do it to him, too. That's justifiable deception. It's lying for the friendship and for the business. But he's never lied to get rid of me. It stings like a

grapefruit in the eye.” Gus moved to a better vantage point behind a stack of books featuring shirtless men holding women with flowing blonde hair. “Why are you spying on Shawn?”

“I’m not.”

“Uh-huh. You just happen to be lurking here in the historical romance section with a pair of binoculars.”

“I’m spying on Derek.”

“Who the hell is Derek?” Gus asked.

“The guy Shawn’s with.” Lassiter nodded toward the coffee shop.

“Is this a case? Is Shawn working with you on something?” Gus sounded so relieved that Lassiter almost hated to answer his question.

“No, Derek is my brother.” Lassiter looked through his binoculars again so Gus wouldn’t see the look in his eyes.

“Oh. Are you close?” Gus asked.

“Not really.” The last time he’d seen Derek was years ago when he had shown up unexpectedly for Christmas and then hopped into a van on Boxing Day, headed for Mexico. But that was Derek—one day he’s sitting in your kitchen eating cake and the next day he’s sending you a postcard from Brazil. “We never had much in common.” Lassiter remembered Derek answering the door to Shawn’s apartment and the lines in his forehead deepened.

At least, we didn’t used to.

“What was the other possibility?” Lassiter asked.

“I beg your pardon?” Gus looked up from his binoculars.

“You said there were two possible explanations for Shawn’s behaviour. You only told me one.”

“Oh. The second one doesn’t really matter now.”

“Spill, Guster.” Lassiter tried to sound as menacing as possible, despite their ridiculous predicament.

“When I called about our Scrabble game, Shawn said he had a date. The second possibility was that he wasn’t lying, and that he was dating this guy I’d seen him with.

But now that I know he's your brother, that's probably not a viable theory."

Lassiter swallowed. "I wouldn't be so sure."

"Really?" Gus turned and looked at Lassiter. "You're taking it pretty well. Aside from stalking him, I mean. I figured you might be kind of homophobic."

"Homophobic? Me?" Lassiter spoke louder than he'd intended and some people had turned to look crossly at them. "I'm not. Really. I'm not. Derek can date whomever he likes. I'm completely fine with it."

"Right. You sound fine."

"Well what about you? I'm not the only one acting weird here."

"I'm surprised, but I'm not weirded out. If Shawn likes guys he likes guys. I'm more upset that he didn't think he could tell me. I shouldn't have to be doing this." He shook the binoculars at Lassiter. "Friends get told things."

"Well maybe he didn't think he could." *Like, maybe his stupid paranoid boyfriend swore him to secrecy.*

"I think they're finishing their drinks," Gus said. "Shall we move to the front door so we can tail them easier?"

"Definitely."

Gus stepped aside. "After you, detective." Keeping a discrete distance they followed Shawn and Derek to a rep cinema that was showing a print of Ghostbusters. Lassiter and Gus sat hunched down in the back row and watched for any movements that were unambiguously amorous. There wasn't any kissing, but they did share a box of Maltesers. Afterwards they trailed the pair to dinner at a seafood restaurant.

"I've seen enough." Gus said finally from their vantage point by the garbage bins. "This garbage reeks and these pants are new. I'm ready to put my money on date."

"Don't you want to see if they share a dessert?" Lassiter asked.

"No," Gus said. "You go ahead. I've seen all that I need to."

Lassiter hunched his shoulders and leaned against the concrete wall behind him. Using his binoculars strongest magnification, he could just make out the plates on their table. Dessert should clinch it. People who were dating shared dessert.

Lassiter had removed his tie and was pouring his first drink of the evening when the bell rang. He wanted to ignore it, but if it was Shawn he knew it would just keep ringing. He strode over to the door and flung it wide, ready for a confrontation. It was Derek, and he was holding a pineapple.

“We need to talk.” Derek took a step over the threshold and Lassiter moved to block his entry.

“I’m busy right now. Stop by when you’re in town again. Maybe in another twenty years.”

“Okay then.” Derek set the pineapple down on the floor. “Can we at least part on friendly terms?” He smiled at his brother in a disarming way and reached forward, hand outstretched. Lassiter nodded solemnly and reached out. Swiftly Derek grabbed Lassiter’s hand, twisted his wrist and pulled up, putting him into an arm lock.

“Wanna talk now?” Derek’s voice now had an undercurrent of gleeful triumph in it. Just like when they were kids. But childhood was a long time ago now.

High school wrestling moves. Lassiter almost laughed. Derek might have stood a chance in his teens, when he had the advantage of height, weight, and experience on his side. But Lassiter had learned a lot since high school.

“No, I don’t!” Lassiter bent and rolled forward, tossing Derek onto the floor of the foyer. Derek expelled a lungful of air and lay there wincing for a few moments, trying to get his breath back.

“Ow.” He curled into a ball and cradled his arm gently. “That hurt, man! You could have made me pull a muscle before the competition.”

“It could have been worse.” Lassiter reached out a hand and helped pull his brother upright. “I could have broken your nose.”

“I’ve always been sorry about that,” Derek said.

“It’s not a big deal.” Lassiter ran a finger across the bridge of his nose. He didn’t mind it now, although it had hurt like hell at the time.

Derek grabbed his pineapple and limped painfully into the apartment. Lassiter let him go. Derek slumped onto the couch and set the spiny fruit on the coffee table.

“You win. I call uncle. Got any beer?”

Lassiter grabbed a beer from his fridge and passed it to Derek, who took a deep gulp from the bottle. Lassiter grabbed his scotch and sat in an armchair facing him.

“What’s with the pineapple?” Lassiter asked.

“It’s for hospitality.”

“Is that why you’re here? You want hospitality? Why, has Shawn kicked you out already for what you do with eggs?”

“No. Shawn and I are fine. Which is more than I can say for you and Shawn. What’s with the big drama? He says you just blew up at him.”

“It’s none of your business,” Lassiter said. As an afterthought he added, “It’s work related.”

“You’re sleeping with him, aren’t you?” Derek had phrased it as a question, but there wasn’t any sense of doubt in his voice. Lassiter was reminded of interrogations where he’d done the same thing—asking the question when he already knew the answer, watching the suspect squirm, his lies just as telling as the truth.

Damn! Lassiter thought, *How does he know?*

“What?” He hoped his tone of shocked outrage sounded more convincing to Derek than it did to him. “Absolutely not. No. What gave you that crazy idea?”

Too much protesting. You sound guilty. He took a sip of his scotch.

“You never were a very good liar, Booker.”

The two men sat there in silence for several moments.

“How did you know?” Lassiter asked.

“I’ve gotten laid in countries where I only knew ten words in the local dialect,” Derek explained. “I know sexual attraction when I see it. And the two of you are hot for each other.”

“What’s that prove?” Lassiter demanded. “I’m hot for Sandra Bullock too, but that doesn’t mean we’re sleeping together.”

“How’s this for evidence? You drank some of his mango lassi. The brother I remember was never that laid back about other people’s germs. Hell, growing up, you never even drank from my cup.”

“I thought I was the only detective in the family.”

“You’re not the only one with any brains.” Derek said. He scratched his head. “I thought the thing with the drink was odd. And then there were some things Shawn said.”

“I knew Shawn would spill his guts to you.” Lassiter looked grimly into his drink.

“Actually, he didn’t. That’s what was suspicious. He kept saying it was complicated. The most I could wrangle out of him was that he liked someone who didn’t like him.”

“Shawn didn’t tell you about us?” Lassiter asked. He wanted to believe Derek, but he didn’t dare.

“Nope. I figured it out. And of course you tailing us just clinched it for me.”

“There’s no way you spotted me. Gus maybe, but not me.”

“Actually, Shawn spotted you both. He thought it was hilarious.”

“I’m glad I could be so amusing to you both.” Lassiter stood, preparing to escort Derek to the door even if he had to break an arm to do it—preferably not one of his own.

“Just so you know,” Derek said, “nothing happened between me and Shawn. He’s a nice guy, but I don’t date men. Not that there’s anything wrong with that. I mean, I’m cool if you want to date men.”

Lassiter walked over to the island and leaned against it, drink in hand. “We’re not dating. We’re just...sleeping together.”

“I think Shawn thinks you’re dating.”

“I don’t see how he could,” Lassiter frowned. “We haven’t actually been on a date. We hardly ever leave the apartment.”

“How 2 Live Crew of you.” Derek took another swig of beer. “Let me put it another way. I think Shawn would *like* to be dating.”

“Why? Did he say something?” Lassiter felt like an idiot, but he had to know.

“His inability to go more than ten minutes without mentioning you was a bit of a giveaway,” Derek said. “It was kind of sweet, actually. Annoying, but sweet. How long have you been, uh, together?”

“Three weeks.”

Derek narrowed his eyes at his brother. “And you really haven’t gone on a real date yet?” he shook his head. “Man, that’s cold. You may as well tell him he’s just a sex toy and be done with it. And it’s too bad. The guy’s fun.”

“I know he’s fun.” Lassiter felt both shamed and angry.

“Then what’s wrong with you? I thought you were supposed to be the one with all the character and responsibility. Man, you’ve changed.”

Lassiter clenched his jaw. Sure he’d changed. He wasn’t that skinny fearful kid he’d been in highschool, eager to please any authority figure that might show him some affection. He wasn’t even that optimistic openhearted guy he’d been when he got married. Life, police work, and divorce had left him wary, hesitant and pessimistic. Maybe too much so. He’d changed all right. Derek just hadn’t been there to see any of it.

“What makes you the relationship expert?” Lassiter demanded. “Anytime I’ve ever seen you, all you had were hook ups. I’ve been married.”

Don’t mention the divorce. That part’s not very convincing.

“This isn’t about me, bro. It’s about you. Grow a pair, Booker. Ask the man on a date.”

“It’s a complicated situation.” Lassiter ran a hand through his hair. “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Let me use a surfing metaphor if I may,” Derek said. He downed the rest of his beer and set the empty bottle on the coffee table. “When your wave comes along, you know it. But you have to paddle like hell and catch it or some kook will swoop in and steal it out from under you.” He gestured with his hands in what Lassiter assumed was meant to be waves. Lassiter gave him a glare. “I’m not that kook,” Derek added quickly, showing his palms. “But there’s one on every beach.”

Lassiter sighed. Derek didn’t seem to be quite the obnoxious narcissist he remembered. Maybe they’d both changed a bit. And maybe Derek was right. Maybe it was time to find out if Shawn was willing to put more on the line than just his ass.

“Fine. I’ll ask Shawn out. Happy now?”

“Sure. But I get to be there when you tell Mother. After having heard all about how perfect Booker is all my life I’ve earned a front row seat to that conversation.” He clapped his hands together. “Beer me!”

Lassiter laughed and retrieved another beer from the fridge.

“As if I’m going to tell Mother,” he said as he passed him the drink.

“You’re not?” Derek screwed off the cap and took a gulp.

“Would you, if you were in my place?”

“Probably not.” Derek stretched out and put his feet up on Lassiter’s coffee table. “You

remember how thrilled she was when she found out Peggy was marrying Raul. She didn't exactly mince words on her opinion of our Spanish American population. I think your news might give her a stroke."

Lassiter sat on the sofa and put his own feet up. "I'd hate to be responsible for turning us into orphans."

"Face it, Booker, we've been orphans for a long time now."

Chapter 4

Lassiter sat on the edge of his bed and stared at his phone. He could hear Derek watching Hawaii Five-O in the livingroom. He reached out and pushed the door closed with his foot, then looked at his phone again and began dialing Shawn's number. Unlike the previous times, he let it actually ring.

Fourth time's the charm.

Shawn picked up right away.

"Hello?"

"Hi Shawn. It's me. Carlton."

God, did you actually have to tell him who's calling? That was stupid.

"Calling to tell me off again?"

Okay, so he's still holding a grudge then.

"I'm calling to apologize."

"Will this apology explain why you and Gus have been following me?"

"Gus thought you were dating Derek."

Never mind what I thought you were doing with Derek.

"See!" Shawn said, raising his voice, "This is what comes when you misuse the pinky swear. I have to lie to my best friend and then he follows me around town, jumping to conclusions."

"Well I absolve you of it. The pinky swear, I mean. You can tell Gus."

"Tell him what exactly? That we had sex for three weeks and then you dumped me? Even Kim Basinger got nine and a half."

"I...I...I..." Lassiter felt bewildered for a moment. "I didn't dump you."

"Really? 'Cause it sure seems like it, what with you telling me off every time I call. That kind of verbal smackdown isn't cool." He paused. "Unless it's part of a prearranged scenario involving you dressed in a leather cop uniform."

"Give me a break," Lassiter said defensively. "I thought you slept with my brother. I was angry."

We'll go with angry. It sounds better than hurt, betrayed or rejected.

“Let’s leave Nell Carter and her spunky wisdom aside for the moment. Instead, riddle me this. Why didn’t you introduce me to your brother when we were at the station?”

“That’s not relevant.”

Why did every conversation have to work its way back to Derek?

“I need to know. It’s a dealbreaker. Spill.”

“Okay. Fine.” Lassiter checked to make sure the bedroom door was securely shut. “I didn’t introduce you to Derek because I like you.”

“No *comprenez*, Lassitero. Try making up an excuse that makes sense.”

Lassiter leaned forward and covered his eyes with his hand. “I was afraid he’d steal you.”

Shawn was silent on the other end. Finally he said, “What, am I like your lunch money here?”

“It’s what Derek does. Or did. All through high school. I’d make a friend and bring them home and then they’d meet Derek.” Lassiter picked absently at the bedspread. “The next thing I know they’re calling to talk to him and they’re going places without me. He’s a friend stealer. And I didn’t want him to get you too.”

“Fair enough. I’m ready to accept my apology now, and any apology presents that might accompany it.”

Apology presents?

“Well, I noticed that they’re showing High Noon at the rep cinema this weekend. I’d like to go, and I was hoping you’d go. With me.” He cleared his throat. “And maybe we could go out and grab dinner beforehand.”

There. I did it. I asked Shawn on a date.

“Are you saying you want to take me to an intimate restaurant, then to a suggestive movie?” Shawn asked. Lassiter could hear his smile through the phone.

“High Noon isn’t suggestive. It’s a western with Gary Cooper and Grace Kelly.”

“Still, let’s do it. Although if I go all Olivia Newton John on you afterward you have only yourself to blame.”

“Great. I’ll pick you up at six?”

“Sounds good. Wear your holster. Ever since I saw *The Dark Knight* I’ve had an irrational fear of being shot as I exit a movie theatre. I was getting over it but then I watched *Public Enemies* and it came back again.”

“Not a problem.”

As if I’d consider leaving the house without a gun.

Lassiter ended the call and stood staring at his phone for a few moments. He was going to go on a date with a man. More than the fantasies he’d harboured about Shawn, more than the sex they’d been having, more than the things they’d whispered to one another in the heat of passion, this—this date—felt gay. He walked back into the livingroom, and looked at Derek.

“He said yes. We’re going out this weekend”

“It’s about time,” Derek said as he changed the channel. “Oooh! *CSI New York* is on.”

“Oooh!” Lassiter joined his brother on the sofa. “I like Sinese.” He sat down next to Derek, who looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

“Like-like?” Derek asked.

“He’s a good actor,” Lassiter smirked at him. “And Melina Kanakaredes is a hottie.”

“I agree,” Derek said. “About Kanakaredes, anyway. She was nominated for an Emmy for her work on *Guiding Light*.”

Lassiter frowned at his brother. “Do you really think I ever watched *Guiding Light*? I’m not *that* Gay.”

Yet.

“Probably not.” Derek laughed. They watched television in silence for a few minutes. “This is a repeat,” he added. “She’s being replaced by Sela Ward in the new season.”

“The murder victim from *The Fugitive*?”

“Do you see everything like a cop?” Derek shook his head and then gestured at the television. “She was a swimsuit model on *Frasier*. She was the ex-girlfriend on *House*. She was on *Sisters*.”

“I liked her in *The Fugitive*,” Lassiter said defensively. “She played a woman with a catastrophic head wound very convincingly.”

“Riiiiight. Let’s just enjoy watching Sinese squint angrily at all the injustice in the world.”

“Twist my rubber arm.”

The two men sat and watched television together.

It was a sunny and windy Saturday. Derek stepped out of the surf onto the rocky beach at Rincon. Half a dozen fellow competitors stepped forward to shake his hand and congratulate him on his ranking. He worked his way up the beach, tired but exhilarated. He shook the water from his ears and caught what sounded like someone calling his name. Derek scanned the crowded beach, heard his name again, and narrowed the caller to an area just off to this left. Then he saw something that made him wipe the water from his lashes and take a second look. There, nestled amidst the onlookers, was Carlton, dressed in a pair of slacks and a windbreaker, sitting awkwardly on a large piece of driftwood. Derek walked over to him and set his board carefully on the beach.

“When did you get here?” he asked breathlessly.

“We’ve been here since your pre-heat warm-up,” Lassiter said. He was wearing a pair of binoculars around his neck.

“We?” Derek scanned the beach for Shawn and but seeing him among the thousand or so people milling about the beach was impossible. He’d been lucky to spot Lassiter as it was.

“Shawn went to find a porta-potty,” Lassiter said. “I told him not to get that Big Gulp.” He looked up at Derek and adjusted his sunglasses against the glare. “You’re very good,” he said. “I mean, as far as I can tell.”

“Thanks.” Derek laughed. “I appreciate you guys coming here. I know this isn’t your thing.”

“It’s about time I did.”

“Did Shawn talk you into it?”

“Of course not.”

Shawn *had* talked him into it. First he’d insisted on going to the matinee showing of High Noon and then in between arguing that Gary Cooper’s tie made him look like Colonel Sanders and that Grace Kelly should have ditched him and hooked up with Katy Jurado, Shawn had talked him into swinging over to Rincon. But oddly, Lassiter didn’t mind being there. Sure they’d had to park way back on Bailard Ave., and the crowd was unruly and annoying, and the sand was everywhere, but the weather was good and the people

next to him had been impressed when Shawn had identified him as Derek Lassiter's brother.

Shawn stepped out of the crowd and slapped Derek on the shoulder.

"Nice work, man," he said. "I've been talking to some folks and the buzz is you're probably going to win the division."

"I'd love to," Derek said. "I could use the money."

"You get money for this?" Lassiter's mouth hung open slightly.

"Yeah." Derek smiled and shook the water out of his hair. "That's what professional usually means, man."

"So...are you done here?" Lassiter motioned to the water.

"I'm done." Derek stretched. As the adrenaline waned he began to feel every ache in his muscles. Although he planned to surf until he died, there were certainly days when he felt his age more than others.

"Then do you want to come with us and grab something to eat?" Lassiter stood and wiped his hands down his pants to remove the sand and wood particles. "We can take my car. You'll have to sit on a towel of course."

"Thanks," Derek said. "Just let me store my stuff in the van. I know an Indian place on State street that has these great samosas." The three men began the long walk to the parking lot.

"So, Lassiter asked, "How much do you make at something like this?"

"Don't ask," Derek said. "I don't wanna jinx it. Besides, if I told you, you'd make me pay for dinner."