

Lassiter Rides the Pineapple Express

By **tera_gram**

Rating: R for male nudity, sexual situations, drug consumption and drug references.

Pairings: Shawn/Lassiter. Foreshadowing of Gus/Juliet. Tiny wisp of Shawn/Buzz.

Warning: Shassie. Hurt/comfort (if you construe being high as a form of hurt).

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Summary: Lassiter has eaten the wrong brownies. Shawn steps in to help a very stoned Lassie solve a murder at the Cancer Run.

Carlton Lassiter first noticed something was amiss when the air around him started to breathe. By the time he noticed that his body was floating he knew he was in serious trouble. At first he thought he might have sunstroke. It was a hot day, but he'd been slathering on sunscreen and staying hydrated. Despite this, he was definitely having dizziness and mental confusion, two key signs of sunstroke. He moved to the shade and finished the remains of his bottled water and tried not to think about what other medical emergencies might have the same symptoms.

It could be stroke or a heart attack. You need to see a doctor.

It was when he'd finally decided to make his way to the paramedic tent that he'd remembered the brownies.

Lassiter had been participating in the Cancer Centre Run every year since he'd first joined the force. Chief John Fenich had impressed upon him that a police officer had a calling to serve the community, and it didn't stop at the end of his shift. Lassiter had run in the 5-mile race that morning with The Flying Pigs, a running group organized by officers from the SBPD. Lassiter thought the name was ridiculous and unprofessional, but everyone else seemed to think it was cute and clever.

Despite the name on the registration sheet, he had enjoyed the run. His time had been good; a little over 35 minutes. It had also been his best fundraising year. Instead of the usual Cancer Run sweatshirt his pledge numbers meant he would receive a one-month membership to the Santa Barbara Athletic Club. He was already looking forward to checking out their cardio boxing classes.

His own achievement was overshadowed since one of the runners this year was celebrity chef Vince Gabriel. Lassiter wasn't impressed.

The man's an attention sponge, he thought.

Vince Gabriel's television show was all about healthy eating but what he was really selling was himself. With his blonde hair and veneered teeth he was as photogenic as an active lifestyle and millions of dollars could make him, and his happy tanned face smiled out from every magazine cover and newspaper. This week alone he'd been on three radio stations and a breakfast television show in addition to his own timeslot.

The guy was shameless.

Vince Gabriel was known as the Pickle King because his father and grandfather had made a fortune in the pickling business. He often finished his recipes off with a pickle, waxing enthusiastic about their low fat and calorie content, and their antioxidant qualities. To make things worse, Lassiter couldn't even feel good about disliking him. Vince Gabriel was also famous for being a philanthropist. He donated to hospitals and schools, but he also swooped down like a cash-wielding superhero to save the unfortunate and reward the deserving. He'd bought a new house for a family who'd lost theirs to an arsonist. He'd bought a new car for a man who dived into a river to save a drowning child.

Where was he when I got stuck with an outrageous hotel bill while investigating Grand Larceny and Homicide? Lassiter wondered.

This year Vince Gabriel was running the 10-mile race, doing interviews about cancer-fighting foods, and generally hogging the spotlight. He'd probably cross the finish line and pull a gigantic cheque out of his shorts. Lassiter couldn't fault him for being generous, but he hated the smug way he played up to the camera.

The Cancer Run isn't about self-promotion, Lassiter grumbled to himself. It's about raising money and awareness and morale.

That sounds like jealousy talking, his superego chided.

I am not jealous, he added defensively.

While the runners in the 10-mile race continued their route he hung around the refreshment tables drinking water and looking glumly at the food. It wasn't a bad spread. The sandwiches looked good. There were some interesting salads. But as he often did after a run, he really wanted something sweet. Lassiter examined the dessert table critically.

Great. Half a dozen kids are putting their germy fingers all over it.

A freckle faced boy licked the top of a lemon square and then ran around trying to touch the other kids with it before putting it back on the table. He watched another kid wipe his

nose on his arm then touch all the cookies to select the one with the most chocolate chips.

Oh for crying out loud! He thought. *That's it.*

To quote one of his favourite movies, "If you're afraid of getting a rotten apple, don't go to the barrel. Get it off the tree."

Lassiter turned and made his way to the catering tent. It was deserted. Everyone was out watching the Pickle King run. A long table held trays of savoury edibles covered in plastic wrap. Along one canvas wall a small refrigerator was plugged into a park outlet. Lassiter opened it and looked inside. There were trays of hors d'oeuvres, and Nanaimo bars.

Stupid Canadian squares. He still remembered how a Nanaimo bar had ruined the end of the Police Benevolent Fund Dinner for him two years ago. His lips had swollen up like balloons before he'd reached the hospital. Although Burton Guster had tried to convince him that an authentic Nanaimo bar recipe doesn't use mint, Lassiter wasn't about to risk it.

Is it too much to find a classic old-fashioned brownie around that hadn't been groped or licked by half a dozen children?

Lassiter spied a small foil-wrapped package down in the crisper. It had a white label stuck to it that said "P. McSweeny" in a loopy feminine hand. He unwrapped it and looked inside. It was brownies. Beautiful dark chocolately fudge brownies. He hesitated, and his conscience had an argument with itself.

This feels like stealing.

No, this isn't stealing. They're all going out to the refreshment table after the second race finishes. We're just getting to them early.

That argument doesn't apply to Christmas and it shouldn't apply to food.

But there are extenuating circumstances. Those kids have touched all the food.

These brownies have someone's name on them. You wouldn't take something from the fridge at work with someone's name on it, would you?

That's ridiculous. Who has brownies for lunch? P. McSweeny is probably a fluffy haired elderly woman who baked them from scratch and donated them to the Cancer Run.

He was about to take an appreciative sniff when he heard someone pulling back the tent flap. Panic made the decision for him. He pulled off a square and quickly stuffed it into his mouth. Frantically chewing, he re-wrapped the foil and dropped the package back in the crisper. As three women in aprons entered the tent Lassiter left through the back door

flap. He wandered through the park, killing time waiting for the race to finish. O'Hara was running the 10-mile for the first time. They had agreed to go to Willie's Crab Shack afterwards with some of the other Flying Pigs.

Looking back, the brownie had tasted off. But he'd been so preoccupied with exiting the tent that he hadn't really thought about what that meant. Now, as he examined the strange floating sensation and the suddenly living condition of the air around him, it all became disturbingly clear. He had been dosed with something—probably marijuana. He quickly manoeuvred away from the crowd and down a trail past some large evergreens to a secluded area and sat at a picnic table. The plan, if he could be said to have one, was to sit quietly and wait for the effects to pass. He was in no shape to walk, and he certainly couldn't drive anywhere. He clung to the rough wood of the picnic table. The world seemed to be spinning slowly in a circle around him.

Is it possible, he wondered, that I'm feeling the rotation of the planet?

That's ridiculous, he assured himself. You're just high and imagining things.

He reviewed what he remembered reading about marijuana in university. Effects could include auditory and visual hallucinations, confusion, amnesia and paranoid delusions.

Great. How can I tell the difference between paranoia caused by the drug and the paranoia I'd naturally feel about being caught high as a kite at the Cancer Run? He'd just have to be on his guard.

Suddenly he became aware that someone was standing behind him. He turned on the seat, forced his head up and willed his eyes to focus. The sun had emerged from behind the clouds and framed whoever it was as a dark shadow against a bright burst of light. Even with his sunglasses on, it was impossible to make an ID. He shielded his eyes with a hand and waited for the brightness to fade. When it did he saw the smiling face of Shawn Spencer.

Spencer. Great. Now my day is perfect. I hope this is a hallucination.

Lassiter wondered how long Spencer had been standing there. He was having trouble judging the passage of time. He seemed to be trapped in an everlasting present tense.

"Hey Lassie. Nice race this morning. You made good time." Shawn was drinking a smoothie and bouncing slightly in place. He just radiated suppressed energy.

Was he always like this? Lassiter wondered.

"Thanks, Spencer." He hoped that he had responded in a timely fashion and sounded less panicked than he felt. "You didn't run?"

"Naw. I've got a highschool football injury that prevents me from doing marathons."

“I didn’t know you played football in highschool.” *I thought you just put the uniform on to prance around trying to impress O’Hara.*

“I didn’t. I was hit by a football while trying to rewire the scoreboard to display a picture of B.J. and the Bear.”

“I remember that show. The Bear was a monkey.” Lassiter laughed at the memory.

Shawn looked at him quizzically and took a sip from his smoothie.

“Those are some short shorts, Lassie. You’re breaking my brain. It’s like seeing the Queen in a bathing suit.”

Is it my imagination, Lassiter wondered, or did Spencer’s gaze linger on my legs? He shook his head. Ridiculous.

Lassiter looked at Shawn. He was wearing jeans and a green plaid shirt over a light brown t-shirt. It made him look like rumpled laundry. *Did the man even own an iron? He was also wearing some kind of a small beaded necklace. Is it significant or merely decorative? Spencer doesn’t wear it all the time.* Then he wondered why any part of his brain remembered how often Spencer wore jewellery.

“I didn’t know you could go this long out of uniform,” Shawn said. “I thought you’d have been home, showered and back here in the suit and holster by now.”

“No such luck.” Lassiter said. “I’m supposed to meet up with O’Hara and…” He paused. He could not say the ridiculous name of the SBPD’s running group in front of Shawn Spencer but his brain couldn’t think of a suitable substitute for the term Flying Pigs.

“—and…the Flash?” Shawn jumped in to complete the sentence when Lassiter paused.

“No.”

“—and the Muffins?”

“What? No.” Lassiter looked at Shawn and furrowed his brow. *Was Spencer even making sense?*

“—and then there’s Maude? Come on Lassie, throw me a bone here.”

“…and the rest of the SBPD runners. We were supposed to meet for dinner.” Lassiter clenched his jaw. He’d have to find some excuse for getting out of that commitment. Ideally an excuse that didn’t mention the words ‘high’ or ‘stoned.’

“That sounds like fun.”

“I’m not going to go.” He turned a sour look in the direction of the catering tent, although it wasn’t visible from their location. “Something came up.”

Like I don’t know if I’ll still be breaking Penal Code 647F, Being intoxicated in a public place. Although I may have a good argument that I don’t meet the “willingly ingested” requirement.

“Gus is running the 10 mile. We’re going to go get dinner afterwards. Wanna come with?”

“No thank-you. I’m fine.”

“Delicious jerk chicken.” Shawn made the disturbing orgasmic sounds that Lassiter assumed were meant to imitate the enjoyment of jerk chicken.

Lassiter licked his lips. He had eaten pasta for breakfast, in preparation for the race, but that seemed like a long time ago now. Jerk chicken sounded really good.

No! Lassiter shook his head to clear his drug-addled mind. I am not going for chicken. I am going to go home as quickly as possible. And if I make it home without humiliating myself or ruining my career then I’ll order pizza.

“I said no, Spencer. Now turn around and walk away.” He illustrated the order with a twirl of his finger.

Lassiter felt a pang of guilt for being so mean without the usual provocation, but this was an emergency. He needed to get rid of him before he...did whatever it was that he did that enabled him to know things...and revealed it all to everyone within shouting distance. His gut clenched at the thought of it.

Shawn cocked his head curiously. Lassie wasn’t usually this abrupt, even when he was annoyed. Something was definitely up. He walked over to Lassiter and pulled the sunglasses from his face.

“Hey!” Lassiter protested and made a half-hearted swipe at him, but Shawn jumped back, just out of reach.

Then Shawn looked, and he saw. Lassiter was licking his lips, beneath his heavy lids his pupils were dilated and his eyes were bloodshot. Also, he looked like he was having a panic attack.

“Whoa...you been smoking a little Pineapple Express there, Lassie?” Shawn was half joking. While the symptoms were there, he knew Lassiter wasn’t the type to get high recreationally, particularly in a public park during a cancer fundraiser.

“I haven’t smoked anything, Spencer. Go away.” Lassiter crossed his arms defensively, realized how Spencer might interpret that, then uncrossed them and tightly gripped the edge of the picnic table seat to keep his arms from moving. This did not communicate tranquillity and composure.

“I used to work at a Ben and Jerry’s, Lassie. I can spot someone who’s high when I see them.” He waved a hand, “Or at least when I see them cleaning out the entire stock of Half Baked.”

Shawn closed the space between them and placed a hand, palm downward, onto Lassiter’s chest. His heartbeat was pounding.

“Come on. Level with me. You look like you’re having a serious meltdown.”

Shawn had switched to his rarely seen serious face. He also hadn’t removed his hand. Lassiter could feel the heat from it radiating through him. He was suddenly aware that his whole body seemed to be tingling. He grabbed his sunglasses and put them back on. He wanted to yell at Shawn to go away. But it had also occurred to him that Shawn might actually be able to help.

You can’t ask Shawn for help. He’s irresponsible and unreliable and can’t keep his mouth shut. All of Santa Barbara would know about this within an hour.

He’s been helpful before. He trusted us when that whole Drimmer situation went down.

Fine. Tell Spencer. But don’t say I didn’t warn you when it all goes to hell.

Spencer’s not so bad. It could have been worse. Chief Vick could have found me.

He looked around to ensure they were still alone, then motioned Shawn closer. Shawn sprang lightly off the ground, sat on the picnic tabletop and loomed over him. Lassiter could smell his cologne, hair paste, and a hint of fresh sweat. His breath smelled like pineapple.

“What’s up? Did your ceramic elephant lamp not light when you pulled the trunk?” Shawn’s seriousness was gone again. Lassiter wondered if he had imagined it.

“I ate some brownies from the catering tent.” Lassiter took a deep breath and steeled himself for the onslaught of teasing he knew would come. “And I’m pretty sure they were dosed with marijuana.”

“Oh.”

Here comes the mocking, Lassiter thought. But Shawn didn’t say anything. The lack of response was almost worse. Lassiter felt like he should fill in the silence, but everything he thought of to say was transparently defensive.

They were just there in the fridge without any kind of warning on them. Just out where innocent people could accidentally eat them. And the other desserts were all being manhandled by grubby kids. And what kind of a person brings pot brownies to a Cancer fundraiser?

“Oh oh oh! I know this one.” Shawn flailed his arms excitedly. “What is a person with Cancer?”

Lassiter looked at Shawn with a confused stare, which was almost invisible behind the sunglasses. Only his furrowed brow gave him away. He hadn’t realized that he’d spoken out loud until Shawn responded. Oddly enough the knowledge that he was speaking without meaning to was less disturbing than the other possibility—that Shawn had somehow read his thoughts. Even stoned, Lassiter didn’t believe Shawn’s psychic act.

“You did want the answer in the form of a question, Jeopardy style, didn’t you?” Shawn asked.

“How long do I have to wait before this stops?” Lassiter asked him.

“When did you eat it?” Shawn was smiling.

“Just after the 5-mile race.” Lassiter decided he preferred the amused look to the serious look. If his predicament was bad enough to wipe the smile off Shawn’s face then he was really in trouble.

“You’ll probably be fine again in four hours or so.” Shawn put his arm around Lassiter’s back and clapped his hand on the detective’s shoulder reassuringly. It sent a warm vibration throughout his body that meshed with the tingling.

This would almost be sort of pleasant, Lassiter thought, if I wasn’t stuck in a public park surrounded by co-workers and members of the public.

Then the meaning of what Shawn had said sunk down into his consciousness.

“Four hours?” Lassiter almost yelled it. “I can’t just sit here for four hours.” *No wonder drug addicts never get anything accomplished.*

“That’s for sure.” Shawn laughed. “It’ll probably feel like four days. Still, it could be worse. You could have eaten brownies laced with acid. Or shrooms. Can you put those in brownies?”

“How would I know?” Lassiter grumbled.

“Well, Spicoli, you are the only one of us who’s stoned.”

“I need to go home.” Lassiter fumbled in his pocket for his car keys and looked at them with resignation. “I hate to ask, Spencer, but can you drive me home?”

“No problemo. I’ll plunk you down on the sofa and we’ll watch Zoolander. You’ll like it. It’s very colourful. And then I’ll do your makeup so you can hook up with the captain of the wrestling team.”

So much of what Shawn said on a normal day made no sense to him, so the fact that he had no idea what Shawn was talking about now seemed almost reassuringly normal.

“I...don’t think I can move.”

“Sure you can, Lassie.” Shawn jumped to the ground. He grabbed Lassiter by the arm and pulled him to a standing position. Clinging to Shawn’s arm in what he hoped was a casual fashion, Lassiter moved as swiftly as possible toward his car. They hadn’t gotten far before the sound of shouts and people running sounded nearby.

“That’s odd,” Shawn said. “It’s too early for the run to be over.”

Just then Juliet O’Hara came around the corner. She was still wearing shorts and a t-shirt but now also had her badge and gun. She was looking around frantically and making a call on her cellphone.

“Lassiter! Thank God.” She approached them breathless and flushed and put her phone away. “I’ve been trying to reach you.” She looked curiously at Lassiter’s hold on Shawn. Lassiter dropped the arm and tried to act nonchalant.

“My cell’s in the car,” he said. “What’s up?” *Please oh please don’t let this be something that will interfere with my going home.*

“Vince Gabriel collapsed partway through the run. He’s been rushed to hospital. We just got word he’s been poisoned.”

“Poisoned?” *Oh what wonderful timing! What have I done to deserve this?*

“Yeah,” O’Hara said. “It looks like one of the water volunteers might have tried to kill him.”

Lassiter thought back. Remembering the run was almost like reliving it. He could recall the hot sun, the feel of the pavement under his runners, and the cooling breeze. He remembered feeling excited about the time he had shaved off his previous years run. Every half-mile there were tables where volunteers filled paper cups with water and passed them to the runners. The poison could have come from anywhere.

“Has anyone else been poisoned?” he asked, bringing himself sharply back to the present. *This could get very nasty*, he thought. Staying hydrated during a race was essential, and

volunteers had been providing water for years. If this poisoner wasn't caught people might be afraid to enter future marathons.

"No, it doesn't look like it," O'Hara said. "Two other people collapsed but the paramedics have confirmed they had sunstroke. One woman was taken to hospital but she was hit by an ice truck. No sign of other poisonings."

"So it looks like Vince Gabriel was targeted," Lassiter said. *This was good news. A suspect with a grudge would be easier to find than one who simply poisoned at random.*

"That's crazy," Shawn said. "Who'd want to hurt the Pickle King?"

Anyone with a television or a radio, Lassiter thought. Out loud he asked, "Is he conscious?" *If he lived, Gabriel would be their best witness.*

"Not yet," O'Hara said. "But they've promised to call me the minute he's awake."

"Good." Lassiter tried to ignore the sensations that were coursing through him. The breeze hitting his skin felt like it had a texture. If he could just get through this conversation, he could get home.

"In the meantime," he said, "we need to get the footage from every station that was covering the race. We need to see everyone who passed Gabriel a cup of water. Chances are good that our poisoner was caught on tape." Lassiter hoped his words had come out properly. He was having trouble remembering the beginning of his sentence by the time he reached the end of it.

"Already on it," O'Hara said. "I've got Buzz and some unis gathering all the reporters and anyone with a camera. He's corralling them into the press tent by the park entrance."

"Good work, O'Hara. You go on ahead," he said. "I'll catch up with you in a bit."

"Okay." She looked confused, but turned and ran off.

Lassiter grabbed Shawn by the arm and pointed a finger at him.

"You know what I'd like, Spencer?"

"Yes, I do. You'd like a package of Ding Dongs and a bag of Funyuns. Maybe order a pizza to be delivered to your U.S. History class."

"No." Although now that he mentioned it, a Ding Dong did sound pretty good. "I'd like..." He had forgotten what he was going to say.

Quick, he thought, *say something.*

“I’d like to get a drink of water.” This was true. His mouth was dry and parched. He felt like he’d been eating newsprint for a week. He looked around the park desperately. *Didn’t the city have water fountains anymore?*

“Pineapple slurpee?” Shawn held out his bright yellow drink. The air had condensed on the cup and was slowly dripping down the sides.

It must be ice cold, Lassiter thought. He grabbed the drink and took a hard suck. It tasted sweet and soothing and was indeed very cold.

“Don’t worry about backwash,” Shawn said, bouncing in place again. “I have a low quantity of saliva production. So drinking my slurpee isn’t at all like French kissing me. It’s more like a chaste peck on the lips.”

Lassiter finished the slurpee and dropped the container into a refuse bin.

“And now I’d like to go home,” he said, pulling the keys from his pocket and dangling them in front of Shawn.

“No,” Shawn said, laughing up at him. “You can’t go home. You need to stay here and solve this thing.” He grabbed Lassiter by the arm and tried to pull him in the direction of the press tent.

“I can’t lead an investigation, Spencer,” he hissed. “I’m high as a kite. I’m in no condition to solve a crime.” *Maybe I could fake an accident. I could call O’Hara from home and claim to have sunstroke or say I’ve been hit by an ice truck.*

“You can do it. I’ll help you.”

“You will? Why?” The paranoid part of him suspected that Shawn just wanted him to be exposed in front of his co-workers. He could almost see Shawn flopping around in that infuriating attention-seeking way he did, having a ‘vision’ that Lassiter was high.

“We’re friends,” Shawn said. “Amigos. Buds. You be Cheech and I’ll be Chong.”

“I don’t want to be Chong.” Although the idea that Shawn thought of them as friends did fill him with a warm fuzzy feeling. Or that feeling might be the weed.

“Why not? He’s a musician, you know. He had a top 40 hit in the ‘60s.”

“He’s a felon.” Lassiter suddenly noticed that they were walking again, arm in arm, toward the press tent. He felt like a balloon floating on a string held by Shawn.

“Yeah. The Justice Department spent twelve million bucks on Operation Pipe Dreams and all they did was arrest Tommy Chong. I’d seriously suggest someone audit those books. Do you have any connections at the IRS?”

“Are you babbling, Spencer?” he asked, irritated. “Because I’m too high to tell.”

“You’re right. Forget about the political persecution of Tommy Chong.” Shawn fluttered a hand to clear the air of the topic. “Let’s focus on this poison case first. You can do this.”

“No. I can’t,” Lassiter said, stopping and digging in his heels. “I need to pass this off to O’Hara. Or at least someone who isn’t under the influence of a controlled substance.”

“Are you going to let a little THC kick your ass? No! You’re SBPD’s head detective.”

More like pothead detective. Did Spencer even realize what would happen if it came out that he resumed duty while high? That wasn’t wacky hi-jinks funny. That was career-ending serious.

“I’ve totally got your back on this.” Shawn pulled him along again and Lassiter’s body went with him although his mind really wished it wouldn’t. They would be at the press tent in minutes. “Unless of course you want to tell Jules that you’re high from stolen pot brownies.” He looked expectantly at Lassiter. “And if you choose that second option I want to be there when you tell her.”

“I can’t have anyone knowing about this,” Lassiter said in what he hoped was coming across as a stern tone.

“I’m like a vault of secrets, Lassie. Did I tell anyone about Gus’ tangerine incident?”

“What tangerine incident?”

“Exactly. See? I’m a great secret keeper.”

Shawn’s phone rang, playing Freaky Behaviour by the Bar-Kays.

“Gus! Dude! I was just talking about you. Where are you?” He wrapped his arm tighter around Lassiter’s to prevent him from wandering away. “Okay. We’re heading there now.” He laughed at whatever Gus was saying on the other end. “I know. I know.” He shut the phone. “Gus is meeting us at the press tent.”

“Do not tell him about this, Spencer, or so help me I’ll dump your body in the water and claim it was a shark attack.”

“Lassie! You’re so sexy when you’re homicidal.”

Lassiter relinquished Shawn’s arm and walked in what he hoped was a sober and serious manner toward the press tent. The area was a mass of reporters, media techs, spectators and runners. Officer Buzz McNab was guarding the door of the tent.

“Buzz! Buddy!” Shawn greeted him and performed a complicated handshake. “You made great time in the 5-mile today.”

“Thanks Shawn. I got a sweatshirt too.” Buzz grinned proudly and thrust out his chest to display the Cancer Run shirt handed out to participants who raised over \$300.

“That’s awesome.” Shawn punched Buzz playfully on the shoulder and the big cop blushed.

Carlton rolled his eyes. *Does McNab always act like a teenaged girl around Spencer? I’ve never noticed it before.*

“Shame about this thing with Vince Gabriel,” Shawn was saying. “Is Jules inside?”

“She is. Gus is there too. The 10-mile finished up a few minutes ago.”

“If you’re about finished flirting could we please solve this crime?” Lassiter grabbed Shawn by the shirt at the back of his neck and pushed him inside the tent.

I am not jealous.

O’Hara was at a table with a stack of papers and evidence bags containing video tapes, video discs and memory cards. She looked up as they entered.

“You’re here!” she said.

Lassiter was pretty sure she meant ‘Where the hell have you two been?’ He groaned inwardly. *Why did I think I would possibly be able to keep this situation from O’Hara? She’s a detective. In fact, he looked around the tent at the milling uniforms, I’ve just walked into a space filled with people who made a living spotting clues and drawing conclusions. I am doomed.*

A petite dark haired woman with a clipboard pushed herself in front of him. She reminded him strongly of his third grade teacher, Mrs. Pilgrim, a demanding and critical woman who smacked kids with a ruler for slouching or passing in messy work. On the positive side, he had developed good posture and penmanship.

“Are you Head Detective Carlton Lassiter?”

“Yes.” Lassiter had never been more tempted to lie.

“I am Mr. Gabriel’s personal assistant. I want assurances that none of the poisoning footage is going to be leaked to the press.”

The best defence is a good offence.

“Right now all footage of the run is evidence in an attempted murder investigation,” he said loudly. “So none of it should be going anywhere except with us. Anyone who doesn’t cooperate will be charged with obstruction.” He looked meaningfully around the tent and a few people came forward with tapes and put them on the table in front of O’Hara. “In case you don’t know how serious that is, it carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.” Several more people handed their tapes to O’Hara.

He turned back to the Mrs. Pilgrim look-alike.

“After the investigation is closed you can fight it out with the media and the spectators over who owns the content of the tapes. But it’s all footage of a public event and I don’t like your chances.”

“We have very good lawyers, Detective Lassiter.” She pulled out her cell phone and stepped out of the tent.

O’Hara was talking. “I’ve heard back from the hospital,” she said. “Vince Gabriel was poisoned with cyanide. They administered hydroxocobalamin.”

“Hydroxycut?” Shawn looked at Gus. “That makes no sense. The guy’s 5’10” and he only weighs what, 160lbs? How much skinnier do they want him to get?”

“She said hydroxocobalamin,” Gus said. “It’s a form of vitamin B-12. It binds to the cyanide molecules and is then excreted in the urine.”

“Okay,” Shawn said, raising his hands to his ears, “Could the scientific explanations not include the word ‘urine’ from now on?”

“They think he’s going to be okay,” O’Hara continued. “He’s still asleep. It’ll take a while for him to ur...for his system to clean out the cyanide.”

“So in the meantime we watch all this footage looking for our poisoner,” Gus said.

Lassiter noticed that when he wasn’t looking at Shawn, Guster was looking at O’Hara. The man was obviously infatuated with her. He had to admire the way he had insinuated himself into the investigation with the judicial use of the word ‘we.’

“Must you be so sexist, Gus?” Shawn interjected. “It could be a poisoneress.”

“Poisoner is a gender neutral term, Shawn.”

“I’ve heard it both ways.” He walked over and placed an arm on his friend’s shoulder. “Actually, Gus, I need you at the hospital.”

“What? Why?” Gus looked as if he’d just been told that not only was he not going for ice

cream, but also he'd have to stay home and do math problems while everyone else went.

"Come on buddy," Shawn begged, bouncing in place again and tugging on Gus' t-shirt sleeve. "I need your pharmaceutical know-how. You understand all the technical lingo and can explain it to me. Just try not to sound condescending when you dumb it down."

"I do not sound condescending," Gus said angrily.

Shawn pulled Gus aside and spoke in quick, hushed tones. The din in the tent was too loud for Lassiter to overhear, but Shawn kept looking over at him in a peculiar way.

I knew he couldn't keep his mouth shut, Lassiter fumed. They were probably laughing about it. Although Gus didn't look amused. He looked annoyed, and kind of exasperated. How that man puts up with Spencer is a total mystery.

When they returned to the table Gus gave Lassiter a glare.

What the hell was that look about? Lassiter wondered. He hadn't seen Gus make that face since he'd caught Lassiter talking to his sister.

"I'm glad to go to the hospital," Gus said in a tone that wasn't convincing anyone. "I'll let you know if anything vital comes up."

O'Hara cut in. "Since Shawn's here maybe he can help me interview some of the water volunteers. Read them for guilt."

"No." Lassiter cut in, hoping his voice didn't express the panic he was feeling. "I need Spencer with me. He's...uh..." His mind blanked and he could feel a sweat breaking out on the back of his neck as his panic level began to rise.

"I'm detoxifying his aura. It's all gummed up." Shawn made motions with his hands like spiders shampooing his hair.

Juliet made a face that even Lassiter could read as sceptical.

Maybe she doesn't buy every word that comes out of Spencer's mouth, he thought.

"Gummed auras can have serious side effects." Gus said solemnly. He looked at Shawn. "It could lead to life altering consequences."

"Relax, I know what I'm doing," Shawn said.

"I hope so," Gus said. "We wouldn't want anyone to get hurt, would we?"

"Okay. Fine." O'Hara said. "I'll interview the spectators and volunteers by myself." She began to pack up the stack of papers with short, aggressive movements.

“Before you go all Little Red Hen here,” Shawn said, “I can assure you that the spectators and volunteers don’t know anything.”

“Really?” O’Hara and Lassiter both responded at once.

“Really.” Shawn put his fingers to his temples and closed his eyes for a moment. “They know zip. Nada. Zilch. Zero. Big waste of time talking to them.”

“Are you sure?” O’Hara asked. She wrinkled her forehead.

Lassiter felt proud of O’Hara for not letting Shawn steamroll her police instincts with his psycho-babble. *Of course if they did have to interview all the volunteers they might be there all day and night.*

“Do we have their names and addresses?” Lassiter asked her.

“Absolutely. But I thought since they’re here, we might as well screen them for suspects or witnesses.”

Shawn put a hand to the side of his head and tapped the evidence bags on the table with the other hand. “I have a strong psychic impression that what you need will be in the footage.”

“These tapes are from a spectator’s camcorder,” O’Hara explained. “We’ve got more footage coming from the television stations. They’ll courier it over as soon as it’s been transferred.”

“Great.” Shawn stood next to Lassiter, well within his hula hoop of personal space. “I’ll accompany Lassipants here home to change into something less comfortable. I’ll quickly detox his aura. Then we’ll meet you at the station for videos and crime solving.” He clapped his hands together as if the matter were now settled.

Lassiter wondered why anyone ever believed a word Shawn said. *It must be the hair, he thought. It distracts people while he talks, hypnotizing them with its wild spiky abandon.*

Wild spiky abandon? Lassiter reflected lucidly on his thoughts, realizing how bizarre they were becoming.

He walked around the table and pulled O’Hara aside to speak privately.

“Spencer is probably right. But just in case, have the unis screen them before they go and make note of anything important.” He might be high, but he wasn’t stupid.

Chapter 2

Shawn slid behind the wheel of the red Crown Vic and adjusted the seat forward. Lassiter looked around anxiously before climbing into the passenger seat.

This feels entirely wrong, he thought as Shawn started the car and pulled out of the park. But the only thing worse than the thought of Shawn driving his car was what he could imagine happening if he tried to drive home by himself.

The detective closed his eyes and leaned against the window. He realized that his muscles had been tense for some time and were beginning to relax now that he was headed homeward. It felt as if the energy was draining from every muscle in his body. Even his eyelids felt heavy. He closed his eyes momentarily but quickly opened them again. He actually could fall asleep, and if this awful day was going to end with his career intact that couldn't happen. He sat upright, opened the window and focussed on remembering to be angry at Shawn for telling Guster everything at the press tent.

Finally as they neared the apartment he spoke.

“So much for you being a vault of secrets. You obviously told Guster everything.”

“What makes you say that?”

“How else could you have convinced him to go to the hospital while you ferry me around? I mean, gummed auras? Not believable. Unless you think Guster and O'Hara are high as well.”

“Seriously, Lassie. The subject of your reefer madness never came up. I told him I wanted some quality Lassiter time. Gus understands.”

“Yeah. Right. Did he laugh when you told him how I accidentally dosed myself?”

Shawn pulled the car to a stop outside Lassiter's apartment. He turned off the ignition and leaned in toward him.

“You want the truth?”

“Of course I do.” *Although judging from the intense look on Spencer's face, maybe I don't.*

“I told him I wanted to get you alone so I could put the moves on you.” Shawn raised an eyebrow and leaned in toward him. Lassiter could feel the blood rushing through his body, flushing his face. Just when he had concluded that Shawn actually expected them to kiss, the fake psychic broke out in a smile and jumped out of the car.

It was a joke. Of course it was. Spencer wasn't actually...didn't really mean...wouldn't want...

The very idea of Spencer trying to 'put the moves on him' was preposterous. He laughed at the absurdity of the situation. It was ridiculous to think that he would have kissed Spencer, despite having finished the remains of his slurpee. He was infuriating and exasperating and attention-seeking and strangely touchy-feely. Just imagining it made him laugh.

Spencer came around to the passenger side of the Crown Vic and opened the door.

"It'll be easier to pass you off as not-high if you can cut down on the hysterical giggling there, Lassiface."

Lassiter swung his legs out. It felt like he was wearing iron shoes. Shawn grabbed his arms and pulled him out and upright. Lassiter was suddenly aware of how close Shawn's body was, and of the heat that was radiating off of him. *Or is that my imagination?*

Shawn shut the car door then guided Lassiter up to the apartment and let them inside.

"Okay Lassie, we need to get you out of these clothes, showered and back into your detective costume, quick like Batman."

"There's no we for this part, Spencer. I can undress and shower all by myself." *At least I hope I can.*

"Are you sure you don't want me to scrub your back or stand by with towels? We don't want a nasty accident, do we? What if you fell and slipped into a coma?"

Lassiter laughed.

"If I slip into a coma, I'll call you."

Lassiter walked slowly to the bathroom, focussing on being as unhigh as possible. Getting to the bathroom unaided would prove his competence to shower alone, but was more difficult than he had expected. It was as if there was a switch in his head that kept getting flicked. One moment he was sure that the drug had worn off and he was now fine. In the next moment he felt too intoxicated to move or speak.

He turned on the light, entered the bathroom and then started the water running in the shower. He didn't shut the door because it occurred to him that if he did fall he'd want Shawn to be able to save him, however humiliating that would be.

He leaned against the sink and pulled off his socks and shorts.

So far so good. We're half way there.

He began to pull off his t-shirt. He pulled and pulled, his head trapped in a seemingly endless swath of fabric, his arms bound and failing to bend where he thought they should. He was lost in his shirt. He felt short of breath and struggled harder to free himself, which only made it tighter and more constricting. At the same time the room seemed to be spinning and he had a distinct sensation that he was now falling through the floor. His attempts to counterbalance only made him unsteady on his feet and he knew he was moments away from falling.

Great, he thought. I'm freaking out.

Lassiter felt as if he were two people. One of him was trapped, claustrophobic, and clearly going to die. The second was rational, understood that he was just tangled in a t-shirt, and not in actual danger except from the panic. This second person could only watch helplessly as he fought against the dark suffocating mass constricting around him.

I'm going to die in my bathroom, he thought glumly, and they're going to test my blood and find the drugs and they'll all remember me as the cop who died because he was too high to remember how a t-shirt worked.

Although he hadn't called for help, he must have been making noise, because suddenly Shawn was there. He spoke in soft reassuring tones, and wrapped an arm around Lassiter's waist to hold him upright.

"Reeeelax," he said. "I've got you."

Lassiter couldn't remember having felt so relieved. Shawn slowly untangled the attacking shirt from his arms and head, and then tossed it to the floor. Lassiter grabbed Shawn's shoulders to steady himself and gasped for air. The sinking, spinning feeling was still there, but the sense of certain doom was gone. Shawn cupped Lassiter's jaw in his hands and looked into his eyes for an indication that the panic was subsiding.

Lassiter was not what anyone would have described as touchy-feely. Being this close to someone usually meant he was subduing them prior to arrest, or he was having sex. Standing there naked, with Shawn's hands on his face, felt a lot more like the latter situation. He breathed slowly and deliberately, feeling what he could only call excitement buzzing through his blood.

Lassiter's mind wandered to his relationships. So many of them were based on how well he played the role people wanted—perfect cop, partner, or husband. He had put a lot of work into excelling in all these areas of his life. But how many people really knew him for who he was? How much of himself did he hold back from O'Hara? They'd developed a sense of respect and even camaraderie, but she really didn't know the first thing about him as a person. That birthday fiasco was a prime example. It was the same with Victoria. In a way, she hadn't even divorced *him*; she'd divorced the husband he'd tried to be—the man he thought she wanted him to be.

Obviously, he thought, I was wrong about that.

“Are you still in there, Lassie?” Shawn asked nervously.

Lassiter realized that there was someone who saw through all his protective facades and seemed to like him anyway. Now, standing there together, he felt like Shawn was really seeing him. He assumed it must be an effect of the drug, but instead of feeling terrifying and exposed it felt reassuringly intimate. He relaxed and allowed himself to dwell in the experience. It seemed as if it was going on forever, and always had been.

I'm standing naked in front of him, he thought, and all he wants to look at is my eyes?

In that moment Lassiter realized that on some level he wanted to do more than just look Shawn in the eyes. Tightening his grip on Shawn's shoulders, he pulled him forward and tentatively pressed his lips to Shawn's. Aside from the rough stubble, it wasn't all that strange. Shawn's lips were soft and hesitant. They kissed cautiously at first, and then Lassiter gently urged his mouth open with his tongue. Suddenly Shawn was responding and the kiss deepened to something intense, wet, and achingly sexual. Lassiter groaned at the rush of exhilaration and lust that coursed through him. The feel of Shawn's fully clothed body pressed against his bare skin was powerfully arousing and vaguely kinky. Shawn tasted faintly of pineapple smoothie and Lassiter recalled his earlier remarks. He'd been right. Sharing his drink was nothing like French kissing. Just when he began to wonder what he was supposed to do next Shawn pulled back, pushing gently but firmly on Lassiter's chest.

“Well,” Shawn said, looking away and laughing. “I guess it's true what they say about skinny guys and penis size. Maybe you can use that thing for leverage and we'll try to get you into the shower. ” He motioned to the bedroom, "I'll just go grab you some clothes. You know what they say...no shirt, no shoes, no service weapon.” Shawn quickly backed out of the bathroom.

And now he's running away.

Lassiter stood gasping and shaking, trying to slow his breathing and adjust to the adrenaline coursing through his system.

What the hell were you thinking? Lassiter went over the past ten minutes in his mind. He'd clearly misinterpreted the signals and taken Spencer's bizarre sense of humour and complete lack of personal space as a sign of interest. *Bolting from the room is not a good sign.*

He ran a hand over his face and sighed. He definitely felt like he needed a shower; he reeked of guilt and stupidity. He stepped into the shower stall and tried to direct his mind to non-sexual topics like preparing his taxes, his ex father-in-law, or cleaning his gun. *Although that last one now sounds like a euphemism.*

Maybe I can blame the drugs.

And say what? Sorry, Spencer, drugs made me gay but I'm better now?

This doesn't need to make things awkward between us forever.

You're kidding, right?

As the warm water washed over him Lassiter had a realization. He had been flirting with Spencer. Not only had he permitted him to pass even the most liberal boundaries of personal space, but he'd been pursuing contact. Bearhugging him in the parking lot of the McCallum house...wrestling him in the kitchen of the Hotel De La Cruz...slamming him against walls at the station. It was classic sublimation. And the things he'd said to him in Tom Blair's Pub after all that scotch—he remembered more than he cared to admit. And now he'd just played some kind of game of vulnerability chicken with him and Spencer had blinked first.

Shawn came into the bathroom carrying a folded stack of clothes, which he sat on the counter by the sink.

“Okay, I've got you a lovely dark suit and a blue tie, to compliment the hair and the eyes” he said. “Frankly I'm surprised a guy like you has boxers. I expected Superman Underoos.”

Lassiter shut off the water and stood there, dripping behind the frosted glass of the shower door. After a few seconds he realized that he was afraid to come out of the shower.

Of course! It's not enough that I'm having drug-induced paranoia, my brain needs to dredge up some heterosexual panic just to spice things up.

“Can you pass me some towels, please?” he asked, motioning to a stack on a silver metal shelf.

“Sure.” Shawn passed two towels over the shower door but didn't make eye contact.

Lassiter wrapped one towel tightly around his waist and opened the shower door. He stepped out onto the bath mat and used the second towel to dry his hair.

Shawn stepped toward him, but kept out of kissing distance.

“Listen Lassie, I want to acknowledge this thing going on here,” he moved his hands back and forth between them.

“Spencer, I— ”

“You know what I’m talking about,” Shawn cut him off. “But I’m not going to try to jump you, so you can just relax, okay?”

“I didn’t think that,” Lassiter said. He avoided looking at Shawn, instead focussing on towelling off his arms and chest. Obviously Spencer was trying to diffuse things by pretending that what had happened was just their usual competitive roughhousing taken to its extreme. It was a relief in a way. It was definitely better than having the ‘I like you as a friend’ talk. He was tired of those.

Shawn laughed. “Give me a call when you’re no longer stoned and we’ll do paintball or something. But I warn you, I only put out on the third date. Or on special occasions, like birthdays. Or if it gets dark at all.”

Lassiter froze momentarily. His heart was pounding and he thought he could hear the blood in his veins. A new thought came to him with alarming certainty. Spencer had been coming on to him. Not just now, but since the beginning. He could see all their interactions in an entirely new light. Spencer, constantly remarking on his physical appearance...offering him hugs...touching his legs, his arms, his head...slapping his ass at the Monarch Lodge...sitting in his lap.

“You...really mean that, don’t you?” he asked. His guts clenched anxiously as he waited for the answer.

Shawn smiled, wide and relaxed, and looked up at him, with no trace of guile discernable in his hazel eyes.

“I do. I really do.” He laughed and shrugged expressively. “I’d like nothing better than to play the Bender to your Claire and give you the hot beef injection past eleven on a school night. You’re tall, pale and handsome in a Hill Street Blues kind of way. But you’ve ingested an intoxicating substance, Lassie. I wouldn’t want to break California Penal Code 261A3. So let’s put this whole sexual tension thing on the back burner and get you to the station.”

The station! He was supposed to be working on a case and he had no idea how long he’d been standing in his bathroom.

He walked over to the stack of clothes. One of his kitchen chairs stood nearby.

“I thought the chair might make it easier for you to dress,” Shawn said. Lassiter sat and dressed as swiftly as he could, relying on muscle memory for most of it.

“I don’t feel good about carrying a gun in this condition, Spencer.”

“Come on Lassie,” Shawn said. “If you left your gun at home everyone would think you were high or something.”

Shawn held the suit jacket for him then walked around to the front and looked at him critically. “Does this look right?” Lassiter asked, motioning to the clothes.

“Yes. Perfectly normal. In no way do these clothes say ‘I’m tripping.’ Now if you went to work wearing an aviators helmet and footy pajamas that’d be a different story.”

He stepped in close and adjusted his tie and picked a few pieces of lint off the sleeve.

“There. Now you look just as great as you always do.” Shawn ran his hands lightly down the lapels and looking up at Lassiter from under his lashes. “You know what I’d like to do with you right now?”

“Uh, no. I don’t.” *Although I can think of a few things that are suddenly on my list.*

“What I’d really like to do right now...is put you in a competitive eating contest.”

Lassiter looked down at him with his serious face.

“Come on,” Shawn said, laughing. “Pot is like the steroids of competitive eating. Just consider it. For next time, maybe.”

“Funny,” Lassiter said seriously. “Let’s get to the station.”

“I call shotgun! Oh wait. I call...what’s the drivers seat called? Stagecoach?”

“Shut up, Spencer.”

On the way to the station Shawn pulled into the parking lot of the Las Pamas Quick Stop.

“Why are we stopping here?” Lassiter asked. If the clock on the dashboard was to be believed, they’d already spent half an hour at his apartment.

“Stay in the car,” Shawn said. “I’ve just got to grab something. You’ll thank me later.”

Shawn returned to the car with a plastic bag bulging at the seams.

“Here.” He pulled a bag of French Onion flavoured Sunchips out of the bag and passed them to Lassiter. “Enjoy.”

Although sceptical, Lassiter opened the bag and began to eat. It was magical. They were easily the creamiest most flavourful chips he had ever eaten.

“My God Spencer, these are incredible.”

“I know. Being bad feels pretty good, huh?”

“What’s the fat content of these things?” Lassiter squinted at the nutritional information on the back of the bag but had trouble focussing on the small print.

“A bazillion. But pot makes you immune. Also, if you eat five bags of them you have your total recommended dosage of potassium.”

By the time they had arrived at the station he had finished the Sunchips and was now enjoying the smooth milk chocolate and chewy coconutiness of an Almond Joy. Holding the Quick Stop bag possessively to his chest, Lassiter followed Shawn towards the room where the AV equipment was set up.

“Oh! That’s rough! Play it again.” Buzz’s voice and O’Hara’s laughter echoed down the hall.

As they entered O’Hara and Buzz looked up with guilty expressions. O’Hara’s hair was wet.

She’s been home to shower and change as well, Lassiter thought. I bet she didn’t take forty minutes and stop off for snacks.

“What in the hell is going on here?” Lassiter asked. He was still Head Detective, even if he wasn’t very useful at the moment.

“We’re sorting through the footage from the race,” Buzz said, trying unsuccessfully to look serious.

“What’s so funny?” *Could they be laughing at me, Lassiter wondered. Did they know?*

“It’s the footage of the woman who was hit by the ice truck.” O’Hara said nervously.

“What’s funny about being hit by a truck?” Lassiter asked.

“It’s not really a truck,” Buzz said. “It’s just a little vehicle that delivers ice. It’s like a golf cart. Maybe it is a golf cart. Or made by the same company that makes golf carts.”

“Oh just watch it.” O’Hara grabbed the remote and pressed the play button.

The scene was a wide shot of a section of the 10-mile race. Spectators clapped as the runners went by and water volunteers hurried up to them, passing out cups. Vince Gabriel entered the shot from screen left, but it was clear that he was already having trouble. He stumbled, fell, then lay on the ground gasping and panting. People began to shout and run toward him.

“What’s funny about this?” Lassiter demanded. Even if the guy was a media hound that didn’t mean he wanted to see him poisoned.

“Wait for it...” Buzz said.

From the left side of the screen a young blonde woman wearing a grey backpack ran into view. Like the other spectators she was focussed on the fallen television star.

“Wait for it...” Buzz and O’Hara both smiled and cringed in anticipation.

Suddenly a golf cart drove in from screen right. The driver was looking over toward the throng around Vince Gabriel. The little ice truck and the running woman collided, hard. She flipped over it in dramatic Johnny Knoxville style.

“Ow!” Lassiter and Shawn winced and O’Hara and Buzz laughed.

“That’s gotta hurt!” Shawn laughed.

“So help me,” Lassiter said, pointing his finger menacingly at each of them in turn, “if one of you posts this to Youtube I will be so pissed. Is that understood?”

“Yes sir.” O’Hara and Buzz looked at one another and stifled their smiles.

“Good.” Lassiter pulled up a chair and sank gratefully into it, opening a bag of Miss Vickie’s Sea Salt and Vinegar chips. “Let’s see that again.” He offered the bag to Buzz and O’Hara. “Chip?”

Having had their fill of slapstick they settled down to watch the earlier footage, looking for signs of anyone handing Vince Gabriel poisoned water. It was a hopeless task. Dozens of people were passing out little paper cups of water. More people were pouring the water into the little cups. Any one of them could have had the opportunity to poison him.

Spencer swore we’d find the evidence we needed in this footage. I guess I’m not the only one who’d going to look a fool today, he thought. Instead of the warm glow of superiority this normally would have given him he kind of felt bad for the guy. Well, he can’t be right all the time.

Lassiter cracked the top on a bottle of water and took a long gulp. Then he began devouring a bag of Cheetos. Their cheesy crunchiness was like eating sunshine.

O’Hara’s cell phone rang and she answered it anxiously. After a brief conversation she turned to Lassiter.

“That was the hospital. Vince Gabriel is awake, but he doesn’t remember who passed him water. He barely even remembers being in the marathon.”

“Great!” Lassiter sighed. “There goes our best witness.” He turned back to the footage. Their only chance now was to find someone suspicious in the footage, drag them in for

questioning, and hope that they broke. He spotted three of the kids from the dessert table, and the ice truck woman, oblivious to her future starring role in her own Jackass video. Vince Gabriel's personal assistant was in several of the shots giving orders to volunteers and yelling into her Bluetooth headset phone.

I should haul her in on principle, he thought. Of course Gabriel's assistant wouldn't need an event like this if she wanted to poison him. But then it was an ideal opportunity if she wanted to make it look like it had been a member of the public. Assuming, of course, that we're correct in thinking that Gabriel was targeted, and that this isn't a random thing. Or that he wasn't poisoned earlier with some kind of time-release capsule.

Lassiter yawned. This task was boring and probably hopeless. He crunched his Cheetos and allowed his mind to wander.

Each person on the screen was the subject of their own personal drama. It was as if he could see their intentions stretching out like little vectors into their future. But it didn't always go as we planned, did it? His vector, for instance, had been deflected from its path first by dessert licking children and then by laced brownies. He looked at his watch. He should have been eating crab legs and drinking beer with Buzz, O'Hara, Dobson and Garcia by now. Spencer's plans for jerk chicken had been derailed as their two vectors had collided in ways they hadn't expected. He flashed back briefly to their kiss in the bathroom.

Collided. Collision.

The image of the woman and the ice truck came vividly back to him. Only this time it wasn't funny. Lassiter sat upright in his seat and looked at O'Hara.

"We have to go to the hospital," he stood up and shut off the video.

"Are you feeling okay?" O'Hara asked, concern furrowing her brow. "You've been a little...off all day."

"I'm fine. Our would-be killer is at the hospital. You drive." He tossed her the keys.

Juliet was almost frozen with surprise. The last time Lassiter had allowed her to drive he'd had his arm in a sling. She hurried after him.

With O'Hara and Lassiter in the front of the Crown Vic, Shawn hopped into the back and leaned forward with his arms around the headrests.

"I usually ride shotgun," he said to O'Hara. "But the back is nice too. Very roomy and soft. Hey, do you want me to drive and you can sit in the back?"

"Buzz is following us in the squad car," O'Hara told him. "You could ride shotgun with him."

“No thanks. I really do need to be near Lassie. I’ve still got some aura scrubbing left to do.” He placed a hand on Lassiter’s head and slowly began to mess up his hair.

“My aura is getting much better, thanks.” Lassiter grabbed Shawn’s wrist and twisted it as he pulled it free of his hair. Just because they’d had some kind of a moment earlier didn’t mean he was going to get free rein during working hours.

“Ow. Ow. Okay,” Shawn was grinning as he rubbed his wrist. “If you don’t mind risking an aura collapse. I’ve seen it happen and it’s not pretty. You know what? I’m glad I’m sitting back here. Outside the spray zone.” He motioned to the front with his index fingers and leaned back.

Lassiter rushed into the hospital and flashed his badge at the nurse behind the reception desk.

“You have a woman brought in from the Cancer Run with a broken leg today. I need to speak with her. Now.”

The patient was lying in her hospital bed with her leg in a cast suspended from a metal rigging. Gus was sitting in a chair by the bed, reading to her from a Redbook magazine with Vince Gabriel’s face on the cover.

“Shawn. It’s about time.” He motioned to the woman in the bed. “This is Miss Martin. She was the lady hit by the ice truck at the park today.”

“Vince Gabriel is dead,” Lassiter lied. “He died an hour ago from cyanide poisoning.”

“Oh my God. No. No!” Miss Martin covered her face with her hands and her breath was a series of gasping sobs.

“Is there something you want to tell us?” O’Hara asked her gently.

“I think she wants to tell us about how she put cyanide in Vince Gabriel’s water today.” Lassiter said grimly.

“I didn’t mean to kill him,” Miss Martin said between sobs.

“What did you think would happen when you gave him cyanide?” O’Hara asked, all trace of good-cop gone from her voice.

“She didn’t try to kill him,” Lassiter said. “She tried to poison him.”

“Poison him, kill him. Isn’t that just semantics?” O’Hara asked.

“No, it’s motive. She poisoned him so she could save him.”

“It makes sense,” Gus said. “Vice Gabriel is notorious for rewarding people for their good deeds. Just imagine how he’d thank someone who saved his life.” O’Hara looked admiringly at him. He and Shawn did an unobtrusive fist bump.

“As plans go,” Shawn said, “it is pretty solid.”

“It still makes her one sick puppy,” Lassiter said.

“Maybe she has Munchausen’s Syndrome by proxy,” Gus said.

Shawn looked at her critically and shook his head. “I don’t think so. She looks normal size to me,”

“You’re thinking of Munchkins, Shawn. I’m talking about the drive to make someone sick so you can get attention by helping them.”

“Like that woman in Misery,” Shawn said, “with the..the..foot...thing.” He made sledgehammer motions with his arms.

“That movie was messed up.”

“Agreed.”

Lassiter walked to the closet and returned with the grey backpack she’d been wearing in the footage from her collision with the ice truck.

“I bet when we search this bag we’ll find a cyanide antidote kit, won’t we?” he asked her.

“You can’t look in there.” Martin struggled to bend far enough to wrestle the backpack out of Lassiter’s hands, but was stymied by the rigging for her leg. “You need a warrant or something.”

“Actually,” Lassiter said, “your statement that you ‘didn’t mean to kill him’ gives me probable cause. I can search your bag whenever I like.” He unzipped the bag and pulled out the antidote kit, which was sitting right on top. Buzz passed him an evidence bag and Lassiter sealed it inside. He turned to O’Hara. “Place her under arrest. I’ll go check this into evidence and get started on the paperwork.”

O’Hara held out the keys to the Crown Vic.

“You hang onto them,” he said. “I’ll grab a cab.”

As they walked down the hall Shawn patted him on the back.

“Nice Job, Detective. And giving Jules the collar. That’s so sweet of you.”

Lassiter’s smile made a brief appearance then sank beneath his usual stern expression. “I figured O’Hara should be the arresting officer...just in case.”

“You seem to be feeling better though. Am I right?” Shawn looked up at him hopefully.

“I’m actually able to think in past, present and future, so yeah, I must be getting better.” It had been twenty minutes or so without any hallucinations, vibrations or weird bodily sensations. He was pretty sure it was over now.

“I knew you’d figure out it was the ice truck girl,” Shawn said.

“Thanks.” Lassiter said, smiling again. “Wait.” He stopped in the middle of the hospital corridor and turned to face Shawn. “You knew it was her? Since when?”

“Do you really want to know?” Shawn took a step back and raised his hands to chest level in mock surrender.

Lassiter sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose with his free hand. “Yes. I really want to know.”

“Since O’Hara said someone had been hit by an ice truck.”

“While we were in the park?” Lassiter shouted. A few nurses looked toward them with disapproval.

“Yeah. I had a strong... psychic impression...that she’d been planning something,” Shawn said. “It made sense. You saw the video. She was running with purpose toward Vince Gabriel. No one wants to kill the Pickle King. It was all a set-up so she could be the hero. But she didn’t get a chance to, because of the ice truck.”

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Lassiter demanded. “We could have solved it then and there and I could have gone home.” *I could have been safely at home, sitting in my boxers, eating pizza and watching Zoolander...whatever that was.*

“But then we would have missed out on this special bonding time,” Shawn said. “And I think we reached a new level of understanding between us, didn’t we?” He stepped closer to Lassiter and looked up at him expectantly.

“And what if the killer had escaped while we were...” *...flirting...kissing...making out... ...showering and eating candy?*

Shawn shrugged. “She had a broken leg. She wasn’t going anywhere. Besides, I put Gus on it. He wasn’t going to let her out of his sight.”

Lassiter pushed Shawn up against the wall and leaned in menacingly. He slammed his hand against the wall next to Shawn's head and left it there, pinning him in on one side. In the back of his mind he noticed that these little clashes had taken on a whole new dimension.

"Let me get this straight," Lassiter said through gritted teeth. "You dragged me all over Santa Barbara, feeding me chips, investigating a crime you'd already solved? I should charge you with obstruction, Spencer."

"You could do that," Shawn said, smiling up at him. "And I could suggest that Chief Vick do a surprise drug screening. I could say I'd had a vision that someone who carries a gun was trapped inside a giant bong." Shawn raised his hands and did his best impression of Marcel Marceau in a glass box.

Lassiter stepped back and sighed. He didn't think Spencer would do that, especially given their new 'understanding.' But a dose of prevention was worth a pound of cure. He had a 10-30 day window before urine or blood tests would come back negative. *Of course they might do a hair test. Maybe I should shave my head.* He'd always wanted an excuse to go shorter, but Victoria had always been against it. He had nothing to lose now.

"I'm going back to work." He turned and walked down the hall.

"Call me." Shawn made the telephone signal with his hand. "We'll do paintball."

Two hours later Lassiter looked up from his desk to see a short woman in her 60s glaring down at him.

"Do you work here? Are you a cop?" she demanded.

"That's right, ma'am, I'm a police officer." Lassiter looked around. People weren't supposed to just wander in here. Where was that officer from reception?

"Well I want to report a theft," the elderly woman said, sitting heavily in the chair by Lassiter's desk.

"Okay." Lassiter picked up a pen and grabbed a report sheet. "What's been stolen?"

"Someone took my pot brownies out of the catering fridge at the Cancer Marathon today."

"Your pot brownies." He put down the pen. Was this a joke? Had Shawn hired some elderly woman to pull a prank on him?

“For my leukemia. It’s all legal. I’ve got a licence for it.” She began to rummage around in the large purse she was carrying. Lassiter stayed her search with a light touch on her arm.

“We’ll look into it,” he assured her. He pulled out his wallet. “Uh, what would you estimate is the monetary value of the stolen item?”

“The whole batch cost fifty bucks.”

“They didn’t take the whole batch,” Lassiter said defensively. “I mean, did they?”

“No. But I wasn’t about to eat the ones that were left” she said in a shocked voice. “Not after some stranger had their germy hands all over them.”

She had a good point.

“Look, police investigations are slow and there’s a lot of red tape involved.” Lassiter pulled fifty dollars out of his wallet and passed it to her. “Why don’t you just take this now and we’ll call it even?”

“What a sweet young man you are.” She put the money into her purse and stood. “You’re like Vince Gabriel.”

Lassiter groaned. He could really use a drink.