

## Undercover and Overwhelmed

By **tera\_gram**

**Rating:** NC-17 for M/M oral, anal, rough sex, kink.

**Pairings:** Shawn/Lassiter, shades of Gus/Juliet.

**Warning:** Shassie slash, drug references, BDSM.

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**Summary:** Lassiter and O'Hara go undercover at a gay resort and run into some unexpected friends. Sequel to Lassiter Rides the Pineapple Express.

**Note:** At the time of this writing the real mayor of Santa Barbara is Helene Schneider, but I needed a fictional mayor to fit my plot. As far as I can tell, having seen seasons 1-3, the Psychverse hasn't named their Mayor, although they do mention he's a man. I've taken the liberty of naming him after Roday (Rodriguez). Also, according to the wisdom of the interwebs, Lassiter's buzz cut wouldn't actually have helped him pass drug testing, but I used it anyway.

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Carlton Lassiter opened his copy of *The Courier*. His arrest of jewel thief Rodney Gibson had made page three. A smile broke across his pale face. Gibson would rot in a holding cell until his trial or until he made the \$50,000 cash bond, whichever came first.

*Good, Lassiter thought, that creep won't see a piece of furniture that isn't bolted to the floor until the trial.*

He pulled a pair of scissors from his desk drawer and cut out the article, 'Mayor Rodriguez Praises Quick Actions of Top Cop.' It even had a picture—a stock photo *The Courier* had taken of him a few years ago. He'd have to add that one to his scrapbook.

Lassiter was on a roll. He'd wrapped up a forgery case, solved a hit and run and stopped a jewel robbery in progress. Sometimes, immersed in his paperwork, entire minutes would go by in which he didn't think about brownies, Shawn Spencer or the intimacy that had occurred between them in his bathroom. He was trying very hard to forget it all—especially the kissing in the bathroom part. But every morning, when he went in to shower, it played through his mind in screaming Technicolour.

*I can't even be legitimately angry at him, he thought, since I was the one who kissed him.* Spencer had refused to go any further. He was a perfect gentleman, Lassiter thought grimly. Although it aptly described Lassiter's own approach to dating—a man should be a gentleman—he felt uncomfortable being on the receiving end of it. Every way he

looked at the situation, it was his own fault. Shawn's behaviour was exactly the same as it had always been—outrageous and flamboyantly sexual—but still normal for him. It was Lassiter's own behaviour that was the anomaly.

*It was the marijuana, he'd told himself firmly. I wouldn't have done any of that if it hadn't been for that.*

Lassiter knew this was true. If he hadn't been high he wouldn't have been mesmerized by his eye contact with Spencer. And the pot had caused the weird time warp that seemed to prolong and deepen the feeling of intimacy. And if the drug hadn't lowered his inhibitions, he definitely would not have kissed Spencer. He could still feel his soft lips, tasting vaguely of pineapple slurpee.

*And if Spencer hadn't kissed me back, he thought, I wouldn't be wondering if I'd be willing to do it again, without the drug.*

Lassiter wasn't sure he was ready to find out the answer to that question.

His paperwork on the Gibson case completed, Lassiter considered making a trip to the gun range. He loved the range. Emptying a few clips was relaxing and helped him think. The fact that civilians couldn't get in unless accompanied by a police officer was an added bonus. He wasn't consciously avoiding Spencer. Except when he was.

He'd spent the first few days after the brownie incident sitting at his desk with a knot in his stomach, waiting for Spencer to walk in. He'd imagined dozens of ways the fake psychic might reveal the events surrounding the Vince Gabriel case to the station. His most frequent fantasy involved Spencer bursting into songs from *Reefer Madness, the Musical*. When Spencer hadn't shown up Lassiter had begun to dread their meeting even more.

He tried to think of Spencer's absence as a positive development. *If I'd known it would make him stay away, Lassiter joked to himself, I'd have kissed him years ago.* Sure, he was puzzled as to why Spencer hadn't visited, texted, or even called. And he may have dialled his own cellphone from work a few times to make sure it was still functioning properly, but that didn't mean he missed Spencer.

He'd spent the past two weeks following up on leads and tailing suspects—anything to get him away from his desk. When a woman had called with an anonymous tip about a burglary he'd spent hours staking out the targeted jewellery store. His fieldwork had netted Gibson. Despite this success, his mind seemed to cycle inevitably back to Shawn Spencer, and why he wasn't barging into the station and going into one of his acrobatic 'visions.'

When Lassiter wasn't at work he was often at the Santa Barbara Athletic Club. His pledge numbers in the Cancer Run had gotten him a free month-long membership and he was taking full advantage of it. He went to cardio boxing classes on Tuesday and

Thursday. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday he did weight training and swimming. He'd dropped some body fat and gained some muscle mass and he was feeling more energetic. And best of all it provided two hours every day when he was not only blissfully Spencer free but had no anxiety that he would suddenly stroll in. By contrast, every moment at the station was torn between worrying when Spencer would show and wondering why he hadn't.

Detective O'Hara was particularly upset by Spencer's absence. The day before she'd accused him of having done something to upset Shawn and make him stay away. He didn't think he'd scared him off with his awkward advances, but he couldn't tell her that.

Chief Karen Vick stepped out of her office. Her brow was creased, indicating deep stress being held in check. He'd seen it on her before, and lately he'd seen the same expression in his own mirror. Chief Vick caught the eye of detective O'Hara at her desk.

"O'Hara, I need to see you in my office in two minutes. It's about that undercover assignment." Vick hurried off down the corridor.

"Undercover?" Lassiter stood and looked at O'Hara where she sat writing up paperwork on a blood sample from a smash and grab downtown. "You're going undercover?"

"Yeah. I'm on special assignment next week. I was going to tell you about it over lunch. How do you feel about going to that Indian place over on State Street?"

Lassiter loved undercover work. And the fact that it would remove him from the station was certainly a bonus.

"O'Hara," he said in a friendly tone, "let me give you the wisdom of my twelve years as head detective. Going undercover requires a certain...strength." Lassiter warmed to his subject, oblivious to Juliet's pursed lips and unreceptive eyes. "The ability to become the character without losing yourself in the role—that's the product of experience. And you don't have undercover experience."

"And what exactly would you call my stint as Mary Lou Baumgartner?"

"You mean the case where a little girl almost murdered you with an axe and Spencer and I had to rescue you?"

"That is completely unfair. I would have taken her even if you hadn't shown." She glared at him through narrowed eyes. "But if you want to go along that's fine with me." A smile creased her lips and was quickly quashed. "Quite honestly, I didn't think you'd agree to do it. I figured I'd have to team up with McNab."

"McNab? What undercover experience has he got?"

"I wasn't thinking of him for his experience." She spotted Chief Vick returning. "But

now that you're offering, I won't need Buzz. Let's go." She led the way across the bullpen to Vick's office. The chief was sitting at her desk looking over the contents of an open folder.

"Good news, Chief. Carlton wants in on the undercover assignment."

"He does?" Vick's look of surprise might have warned a less enthusiastic man that something was amiss.

"I do." He smiled down at Vick. "I've got a clear desk and I'm happy to provide O'Hara with the benefit of my experience. You may remember that my undercover work broke the Sunnyside Mall Gang."

"I read about that case," O'Hara said. "Wasn't that a gang of shoplifters that turned out to be junior high students?"

"Yes." Lassiter's clamped his lips into an eerie smile. "But we wouldn't have known that if I hadn't gone undercover at the mall."

*Not every assignment can take down a hardened jewel thief, he reassured himself. At least some of those kids had been sentenced to mandatory counselling.*

"And I heard that you were quite convincing during your stint with Mrs. Fields," Chief Vick said quickly, lowering her face so Lassiter couldn't see the amusement in her eyes. "Now if we could turn to the case at hand...."

"Of course." Lassiter stood straight and put his shoulders back, ready to serve the public good. "I can play any role you need, Chief—car thief, drug addict, pimp, fence. I've also got a pretty good European kingpin. I do an accent." Lassiter gave a moment's thought to his recent buzz cut. Whereas this might have been a barrier to undercover work in the past, criminals of all types now wore buzz cuts as well. He blamed Dominic Purcell. Add a few fake tattoos and he'd pass just fine.

Lassiter ran a hand ponderously down his cheek and neck. "If you need me to grow a scruffy beard or a handlebar moustache I'll need some advance notice. Although I have a good collection of face wigs for my Civil War re-enactments." He pointed a long finger at Vick, "Oh! Maybe an imperial." He raised an eyebrow and waited for approval.

Chief Vick looked at Lassiter warily.

"Does he know the details?" she asked Juliet.

"Oh that won't matter to Carlton," O'Hara said. "A true detective just becomes the character. Isn't that so?" She turned her sunniest smile on her partner.

"Absolutely," he assured them.

“Well, I can honestly say that I’m looking forward to seeing that,” Vick said. She pressed a button and spoke into the intercom. “Officer Allen, please tell Mr. Rodriguez that we’re ready for him.”

Moments later the door opened and a stocky blonde man in his mid thirties wearing jeans and a dress shirt entered the office.

“Detectives Lassiter, O’Hara, this is Timothy Rodriguez.” Lassiter stepped forward to shake his hand.

“Rodriguez. Like the Mayor,” he said.

“Just like the Mayor,” Rodriguez said, his voice tinged with amusement. “But please, call me Tim.”

“Mr. Rodriguez owns a resort, Casa de Orgullo, on Cachuma Lake, twenty miles northeast of the city.”

“Valuables have been going missing for about three weeks now,” Rodriguez said. “Most people misplace a few things on vacation. But some of the items that went missing recently were fairly valuable and we got suspicious.” He sat in one of the chairs and hung his head. “This week a Patek Philippe watch was stolen from one of the cabins. The owner is a personal friend of mine. I’ve talked him into keeping a lid on it for now, but he only agreed to on the condition that I bring in the police.”

“Mr. Rodriguez is hoping we can send two officers to the resort, one posing as a guest and one posing as an employee,” Vick said.

Lassiter’s brow furrowed. As much as he might enjoy the getaway, the assignment didn’t make sense. Sending two of the city’s best detectives to catch a petty thief wasn’t his idea of effective use of police resources and he didn’t think it was Chief Vick’s either.

“Twenty miles northeast. That’s outside of our jurisdiction, Chief. Why not hand this off to the Sheriff’s Department?”

Vick’s eyes flicked quickly to Mr. Rodriguez before answering.

“Mr. Rodriguez is the Mayor’s son. We’ve been asked to help out as a personal favour.”

Lassiter nodded. *If Chief Vick needs to stay tight with the Mayor’s office, so be it.*

“I hate to think it’s one of my employees,” Rodriguez said. “Most of my staff has been with me for years. But it’s the only conclusion that makes any sense.”

“Don’t worry,” Lassiter said. “O’Hara and I have our share of experience with

interrogation. Load them all into a bus or a van and bring them here. We'll find your thief."

"I need a quiet investigation," Mr. Rodriguez said. "Casa de Orgullo is a resort for gays, lesbians and bisexuals. My clients come for a romantic getaway in a natural setting. A scandal would be bad for business."

"Oh." Lassiter's stomach dropped. So that was why O'Hara was so amused. *It was as if the universe was conspiring against him.*

"There's another issue as well," Vick said. "Which makes it more desirable that this assignment be done with discretion."

Rodriguez looked at the floor and rubbed the back of his neck.

"I'm not out to my dad. He knows I run a resort but he doesn't know the details. I'd like to keep it that way if I can."

"I assure you that our officers will do their best to solve this crime quickly with a minimum of publicity." Chief Vick walked Rodriguez to the door and said goodbye. O'Hara left but Vick held Lassiter back with a hand on his arm.

"Can I speak with you a moment?" she asked.

"Sure." Lassiter suddenly felt like he was being called to the principal's office.

"Listen Carlton," Karen Vick said softly, "You've made no secret about wanting my job."

"Oh I do." He brightened. "Why, are you thinking of retiring? Spending more time with Iris?"

"No." Vick smiled. "And try to rein in your enthusiasm when you discuss my retirement. I'm not there quite yet, thanks."

"Of course." Lassiter tried to backtrack. "You're still a...vital woman with all your faculties. You're not even menopausal yet, are you?"

"What? No. Jesus, Carlton." She gave him the look. "Given that you'd like this office someday I shouldn't need to tell you that not outing the mayor's son can only help you reach that goal."

"Oh. I see." He could already imagine it: the mayor at home, expressing his frustration at trying to find a suitable replacement for Vick. Then his son saying, "What about this Carlton Lassiter I've heard so much about? He seems like a good choice."

“You’re absolutely right, Chief. I need to bring my A game to this thing. Solve it in a couple of days and win the political support that will help me down the line.”

“I’m glad we understand each other.”

Lassiter nodded and returned to his desk. *I’ll just have to put my sexual issues on the back burner, and get the job done, he thought. It’s not like it’ll take very long. A couple of days, really. Two weeks, tops.*

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Later, in a booth at the Asuylas Restaurant, O’Hara looked thoughtfully at Lassiter over her aloo gobi. As amusing as it had been to watch him push his way into her case, she was having regrets.

“Listen, Carlton,” she said hesitantly. “While I appreciate that you have more experience with undercover work, I don’t think this is the right assignment for you. You’re kind of....” She paused.

*Kind of what?* Lassiter wondered.

“...naïve about gay culture. Casa de Orgullo isn’t like other assignments.”

“Well, I can’t say that I know much about homosexuals, but that’s nothing that a few hours with Wikipedia can’t solve.” He tore off a piece of garlic naan and dipped it into his bharta.

“Here’s a tip, Carlton. Don’t call them homosexuals. You sound like you just arrived in a time machine from the fifties.”

“Oh, and I suppose you’re an expert?”

“I’m passable. I’ve got a gay cousin and we’ve been to Pride Week in San Francisco three times and to the Pacific Pride Festival twice. I’ve done the AIDS walk several years running. I watched all five seasons of Queer As Folk and I’ve been to a Celine Dion concert.”

“And if you were going undercover as a gay man that would be really useful,” he said sourly. “Hey—maybe you could go undercover as a drag queen.”

“Very funny. I don’t think it’ll be so hard. Everyone has some same-sex attractions. I’ll just use that as the basis for building my cover.”

“You really think that?”

“Sure, we’re all a little gay, somewhere in the back of our psyche. Freud posited that we

all start—“

“—But what does that mean?” Lassiter interrupted. “Do you think we can just shift gears like that? Change horses mid-race? I just don’t see it happening.”

“I’m not talking about marrying Ellen here, Carlton. I’m talking about drawing on personal experience to build a convincing cover identity. Isn’t that what you do?”

“Of course. I’m just saying that imagining being gay, or having fantasies, or experimenting a little under exceptional circumstances...that’s all well and good.” He took a deep breath and continued. “But actually having a relationship is a whole other thing. A relationship ...that’s—What I’m saying is that acting gay and actually being gay are two very different things.”

“You know what? You’re right. I don’t know what dating a woman would be like. You win. You’re the expert on lesbians.”

“I’m not saying that. Although now that you mention it, I have watched Personal Best and I met Janet Reno at a golf tournament once.”

“Janet Reno isn’t a lesbian.”

“Now who’s being naïve?”

“I don’t know how we got off on this tangent,” she said, frowning. “I’m just saying, if you want to back out of the assignment I’m sure Vick will understand.”

“Oh, I see what’s going on here.” Lassiter narrowed his eyes and smiled at his partner. “You’re hoping I’ll drop out so you can go with McNab. The two of you, off together in a secluded cabin, away from the station and prying eyes...”

“What? Buzz? No. No! He’s not my type.”

“Take my advice, O’Hara. Workplace romance is a bad idea. Trust me, I know.”

Suddenly Shawn’s head popped up over the back of the booth.

“I couldn’t help but overhear your conversation there, Lassie, and I have to disagree about workplace romances. I think they add a lemony twist to the cool iced tea of crime fighting.”

Lassiter’s body tensed. *How long had Spencer been there? How much had he heard?*

“What are you doing here?” He didn’t believe for a minute that this was a chance meeting.

“What? A guy can’t like channa masala? Also, I have it on good authority that they do samosas with a great red chutney sauce.”

Lassiter’s mind raced. *Spencer had chosen this moment to finally show for a reason. He’d selected a time when O’Hara was present. Was he planning to tell her about the kiss? Or the pot? Oh God, was he going to sing?*

“Like I said,” Shawn continued, “I heard about your new assignment. If you need a crash course in gayness then look no further than yours truly.”

Lassiter tried not to read that statement as a sexual invitation.

“Having watched Less Than Zero does not make you an aficionado of gay culture.”

“Ouch. Lassie! That hurts. It was Threesome and I saw it like, five times.”

Lassiter turned and gave Shawn the stare that had broken dozens of hardened criminals in the interrogation room.

“Okay, fine, it was Mannequin and I saw it a bazillion times. Happy now?”

“Spencer! What did I tell you about trying to hone in on every case we do. If the Chief thinks your ‘skills’ are required she’ll call you. Until then, keep your nose out of police business.”

“Come on, what’s with this us-and-them talk?” Shawn draped an arm casually across Lassiter’s shoulder. “At least let me loan you my DVD of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert. Maybe take you out for a mani-pedi. My treat.”

Lassiter stood and put some distance between them.

“Spencer, we don’t have time to be wasting with mani-pedis. We have work to do.”

“Fine, but don’t come crying to me if your rough cuticles blow the whole operation.”

## Chapter 2

The next day Lassiter stood in the lobby of the Pacific Pride Foundation in the Plaza Industria. He perused the bulletin boards, reading the announcements for the Pride BBQ, transgender support group, HIV-positive speaker's bureau, and a workshop on financial planning for same-sex couples. He took a brochure for an event at the Montecito Country Club called Get Out and Golf. As he read about the event he suddenly became aware that someone was standing very close behind him.

"Hey Lassipants," Shawn's voice rang out. "We do keep running into each other, don't we? It's like fate!"

*Or like stalking.*

"So what brings you to this oasis of gayness?" Shawn asked, smiling up at him. Lassiter sighed. Spencer obviously wanted to talk and wasn't about to stop following him until they had. He was pretty sure there was a "let's just be friends" conversation in their future, although he didn't know if he was supposed to be on the giving or the receiving end of it.

"If you must know," he said, "I'm here to sign up for GORN."

"Gorn? Wasn't that the big lizard guy that Kirk fought on Star Trek? Here's a tip: that collar they make you wear is really a translator. Gorn hears everything you say. Also, don't try to make a rocket launcher. Mythbusters already proved that you'd get hurt more than he would."

"GORN stands for Gay Outdoor Recreation Network. They're doing a weekend retreat at Casa de Orgullo. I'm joining so I can investigate some thefts. It's called building a cover. If you were a real detective you'd know that."

"Are you sure that fighting to the death isn't one of the activities. Have you asked?"

"Why are you here, Spencer?"

"I was hoping we could talk."

"Talk."

"Yes. About this thing," he moved his hands back and forth, "between us."

Lassiter furrowed his brow for a moment and thought. *Maybe it would be better to get this conversation over now. Otherwise there was no telling where Spencer would show up.*

“Okay,” he capitulated. “Let’s talk.”

“Sweet! There’s a bar around the corner,” Shawn said. “Let’s have a few drinks and clear the air.”

The lounge had white stucco walls blending smoothly into molded seating. It was lit by low watt bulbs and candles in glass cubes. It was almost deserted, so early in the day.

“I like this place,” Shawn said. “It’s like someone hollowed out a gigantic Mentos.”

Lassiter bought them two exorbitantly priced cranberry juices. There was no way he was going to be intoxicated around Spencer again any time soon. He led the way to a plush padded bench in a dim corner. Shawn crowded in close to him and put an arm along the bench behind Lassiter’s back. It was one of the car seat seduction moves Lassiter had learned in high school, and it felt strange to be on the other side of it.

“Relax,” Shawn said, seeing the look of alarm on his face. “I’m not going to try to undress you here in the bar.”

“As long as we’re clear on that.” Lassiter let Shawn’s arm stay where it was.

“Hey, for the record, you were the one who kissed me.”

“I was high.” Lassiter whispered it, feeling both ashamed and apologetic.

“Yeah, well, I wasn’t.” Shawn took a belt of his cranberry juice, as if to fortify his courage.

“You were the one who wanted to go on a date.” Lassiter thought about Shawn’s suggestion that they go to paintball. *As much fun as the idea sounded, it would have been a date. A date-date. With a man. And that opened a whole other can of worms: giant, career-eating worms.*

“And how do you think it felt when you didn’t call?” Shawn asked. “If my self esteem wasn’t as healthy as it is I’d have been home all week listening to White Town and crying.” The tone of his voice was light, but he suspected that Shawn wasn’t entirely joking.

“Can’t it just go back to how it was?” Lassiter looked into his drink instead of at Shawn.

“You mean with me coming on to you and your repressed homosexuality responding with violence and threats? I was really hoping we could move forward a little.”

Lassiter couldn’t help but wonder how seriously he should take Shawn’s apparent sexual interest. *What if this is this all some kind of a prank on Spencer’s part?*

“What’s the deal with you, Spencer?” he asked in his best serious voice. “You date girls. I’ve seen them. Hell, you’ve been all over O’Hara since the day you met. But now you’re acting like I’ve stood you up for the senior prom.”

“I’m pretty sure the richies just pressured you into that,” Shawn said, grinning at him. “You believed in me, you just didn’t believe in you.”

“Be serious here, Spencer.”

“I suppose it could be worse. You could have compared me to Duckie. Although he does get Kristy Swanson at the end. I thought she got a raw deal from the critics over *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. That movie wasn’t so bad.”

“Try to stay on topic here, Spencer. What’s the deal with you? Are you gay? Have the women just been some kind of smokescreen?”

“I don’t flirt with people I don’t like, Lassie. I’m not crazy about labels, but if I had to pick one I’d say I’m queer.”

“You’ll get no argument from me.” As far as Lassiter was concerned, there was something extremely queer about Spencer. “Just so we’re clear, I’m not gay.” Although he agreed with the statement he was becoming painfully aware that his definition of ‘not gay’ was getting more and more flexible as time went on, and had begun to include things that he suspected were, if viewed objectively, extremely gay.

“I don’t care if you like boys or girls, Lassie. I only care if you like me. Although if we start dating I’ll probably think of you as gay by proxy.”

“That makes no sense, Spencer.”

“Sure it does.”

“I don’t think you understand what proxy means.”

“Of course I do. It’s how Lori Beth married Ritchie without having to go to Greenland. But enough about that. Let’s talk about us again.”

Shawn shifted on the bench and his leg touched Lassiter’s and stayed there. Even this minimal contact of arm and thigh seemed to fill Lassiter’s brain, blocking out all other thought. He didn’t know if he should pull away or enjoy it while it lasted. Lassiter sighed. When he’d been high, the sexual component of their physical interactions had seemed so obvious. Since the pot had worn off he’d been second-guessing everything. Yet part of him still held a lingering certainty that he and Spencer had been coming on to one another since the beginning.

“What is it you want from me, Shawn? Because if you want us to be dating, it’s not going

to happen.”

“Is that why you haven’t been around the station?” Shawn shifted gears.

“How would you know?” Lassiter asked. “You haven’t been there at all.” Even to his ears, it sounded like an accusation.

“See, there’s this little invention called the telephone. I called Jules and she told me that you’d hardly been there all week. She’s working that smash and grab all alone.”

“I’ve been out on cases.” It was true, even if it was a lie. Lassiter could feel Shawn’s eyes drilling into him, but he fought the urge to meet his gaze. That led to...things. And while his body seemed enthusiastic, his mind wasn’t anywhere near comfortable with it.

“So if I said you’d been avoiding me, you would deny it?”

“I’m not avoiding you,” he lied again.

*How can I avoid you? You’re there every time I close my eyes.* He couldn’t forget how intimate it had felt, standing naked in his bathroom, just looking at Spencer. There was no denying that Shawn saw him in a way other people didn’t.

“Is it about the brownies? Because I was just kidding about telling Vick.”

“Really?” Lassiter asked. His voice was cold, but his body felt flushed. “Because it seems like just the kind of thing you’d do. You’ve been undermining me at work since I met you.”

“Well to be fair,” Shawn said, “you did try to have me arrested.” He smiled his best carefree grin. “Did you see those guys in holding? They looked ready to practice their prison dating skills. And frankly, I prefer my men in blue rather than orange.”

“I’m sorry about that,” Lassiter said. He stirred his drink with the tiny plastic straw. “I didn’t know you then.”

“And you know me now, but you still think I’d get you fired?” Shawn shifted on the bench so he was facing him. He took another gulp of cranberry.

“No, I guess not.” Lassiter set the glass down on the table and leaned back on the bench. Sitting there now, the idea seemed ridiculous. Spencer had helped him hide the incident from O’Hara and McNabb. He was 99% sure that he wasn’t going to tell anyone. But if he were honest about it, his Spencer-related fears didn’t have much to do with work.

Shawn gently lifted Lassiter’s jaw up so that their eyes met. Lassiter tried to shut him out, but found his resolve melting.

“I would never hurt you, Lassie.” Shawn’s hand, which had been resting behind Lassiter’s back, came up and ran lightly over the short hairs on the back of his head. Lassiter could smell Shawn’s musky scent, and feel the strength in his arm and the heat from his leg. The invitation to take it further was clear, but Lassiter held back.

*We can’t always have what we want, he reminded himself. Especially when what we want would ruin everything we already have.*

Shawn, sensing that the other man wasn’t going to meet him half way, pulled back slightly, and his hand dropped from Lassiter’s head. For a brief moment, Lassiter felt overwhelmed with disappointment. As if he had read his mind, Shawn muttered something that sounded suspiciously like “fuck it,” and surged forward. He grabbed Lassiter’s head in both hands, and kissed him, hard and fast and wet. Shawn’s lips were soft and he tasted like cranberry juice. Immediately, their kiss in his bathroom returned to Lassiter’s mind with razor sharp detail. He raised a hand and cupped Shawn’s unshaven jaw. He pulled back just enough to look Shawn in the eyes. It was still there, pot or no pot. The arousal, coupled with the intense intimacy, was overwhelming. All his anxieties and fears were being drowned. He could see himself taking this further. Maybe further than Shawn expected.

*That can’t happen.*

Lassiter pulled back.

“This can’t happen,” he said, his voice rough and breaking.

“Sure it can. Look, it’s happening now.” Shawn leaned in again and put a hand on Lassiter’s thigh. Lassiter turned his head away and tried to catch his breath.

*Escape!* His brain screamed at him. *Get far, far away, before it’s too late.* And if Shawn’s hand were to move a few more inches to the right it would definitely be too late.

“Look Shawn,” he said. “I’m not going to pretend there isn’t something here.” His voice felt like it was speaking without him as his words over-rode all his feelings for his own good. “But it can’t happen between us. This...it’s not who I am.” He stood, then grabbed his glass and downed the remainder of his drink, trying to wash away the memory of Spencer’s mouth.

“Carlton—” Shawn said his name, and Lassiter could feel a torrent rising in his chest.

“I’ve got to go. I’m really sorry.” He turned to leave.

“Let me give you some advice,” Shawn, smiling, put a hand on his arm.

Lassiter hardened his voice, trying to recapture the emotional distance they’d had before drugged brownies and kisses in bathrooms and dim bars.

“Advice is on the list of things I will not accept from you, Spencer.” He turned and walked across the empty dance floor, toward the exit.

“What about head?” Shawn called out loudly after him. “Is that on the list too?”

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Shawn and Gus were sitting at their desks in the Psych office, each staring at a computer screen. Gus was reading an article about prescription drug interactions with herbal remedies in transplant patients and Shawn was looking at the webpage for the Casa de Orgullo.

“I am not going to a gay resort,” Gus said. “You can forget about that plan.” He refused to look up from his computer, but he knew that Shawn was making the wistful puppy face.

“Come on! It’ll be fun. Remember how great Camp Tiki-hama was? It’ll be like that but with better décor, more interesting craft projects and fewer fart-lighting accidents.”

“I never engaged in fart lighting,” Gus said, defensively. “And that fire wasn’t my fault.” He turned back to his computer. “I’d rather not talk about it.”

“And I’d rather be solving mysteries with a glamorous fashion model, but we can’t all be Bruce Willis.”

“Bruce Willis? Please. I remember high school. You wanted to wear a white sport coat, live on a sailboat and have a pet alligator. Besides, you know you never watched Moonlighting.”

“I caught a few episodes in Brazil. There they call it *A Gata e o Rato*.”

“You didn’t miss much. It went downhill after they slept together. And it really jumped the shark when she got pregnant in season four.”

“You’re right. Let’s focus on our trip to Casa de Orrrrrgullo.” He rolled his Rs. “You can’t say no. Jules is going to be there.”

“She is?” Gus looked up from his article.

“Yep. And she’s pretending to be a lesbian. Say it with me. Lezzzzbian. Maybe she’ll have to kiss a girl to keep her cover. Could you really forgive yourself if you missed it? Does your phone have the ability to shoot video? Cause mine just takes pictures.”

“You’re not fooling anybody, Shawn.” Gus turned back to his article. “I’m on to you.”

“No, see, you don’t get it.”

“Oh I get it,” Gus interjected. “This has nothing to do with Juliet. You just want to see Lassiter undercover as a gay guy. It’s not going to happen between you two. The sooner you accept that the sooner we can go back to normal.”

“Things are perfectly normal now.” *Perfectly normal, that is, if you didn’t count the kissing and Lassiter’s heterosexual panic attacks.* But Shawn was pretty certain that Gus didn’t want to hear those details.

Gus chuckled.

“Oh really? Then maybe you can explain why you’ve been avoiding the station for the last two weeks. You’re normally there every couple of days. Instead you’ve been running around town watching Lassiter stake out a jewellery store and go to the gym. It’s not normal, Shawn. This idea about Casa De Orgullo is just the latest step along a path that leads directly to a restraining order. Frankly, I’m surprised he hasn’t got one on you already.”

“He didn’t know I was following him. I’m very stealthy.”

“Whatever. I’m just saying. You should leave it be.”

“You’re right. You’re absolutely right. I’ll try to forget about it.” He sat still for three seconds, a thoughtful look on his face. “Nope. Not working. So about our trip: I’ve signed us up for the Gay Outdoor Recreation Network retreat and I booked our rooms and facials.”

“I’m not interested. And you better not be paying any membership dues or booking any cabins with my MasterCard.”

“Technically I’m using your MasterCard *number*, which I memorized while you were sleeping. And speaking of which, I thought Sandra Bullock’s performance was a little flat in that movie, didn’t you?”

“Don’t try to distract me with Ms. Bullock’s filmography. I’m not going to gay camp with you.”

“Don’t make me pull out the big guns, Gus.”

“Big guns?” He looked at Shawn suspiciously. Shawn began to hum a tune. It took a few moments before the song dawned on Gus.

“No, Shawn. No! Don’t you dare.”

“Wait for it....Are you ready for the summer?”

“No.”

“Are you ready for the good times?”

“Stop it Shawn. You know how that songs repeats in my head.”

“Are you ready for the birds and bees, the apple trees, and a whole lot of foolin’ around?”

Gus sighed and closed his laptop.

“Fine. I’ll go along, but you owe me big time. What’s the case?”

“Mayor Rodriguez’ closeted gay son has an employee with sticky fingers. We have to find the thief and arrest him or her without outing the son or bringing any bad publicity on the resort.”

“That’s some pretty good nutshelling,” Gus said. “What’s been stolen?”

“According to Jules, some jewellery, cash, sporting equipment, and the latest item is a Ryan Phillippe Astronaut watch.”

“I think you mean a Patek Philippe Aquanaut watch.”

“I’ve heard it both ways.”

“Shawn, a Patak Philippe Aquanaut watch is water resistant to 120 metres. It has a centre sweep second hand, a sapphire crystal case back and a forty-five hour power reserve. It retails for over \$17,000.”

“Really? Who needs that kind of a watch? I mean 120 metres? Are we raising the Titanic? Plus, it’s especially cruel to the watch-wearing monkeys they shot into the ocean to test it.”

“The Titanic is 3821 metres below the surface,” Gus said. “And they don’t test watches on monkeys.”

“That’s not what PETA says. I’m pretty sure I’ve seen the video on their website. Oh! That reminds me. We need to go shopping. We need new clothes for our undercover role.” He looked at Gus critically. “Or at least, I will.”

“My clothes aren’t gay, Shawn. They’re fashion forward.”

“Whatever. You own pink shirts.”

“You own a pink shirt.”

“With a pineapple on it. Besides, it’s a golf shirt. It’s supposed to be gay.”

“Golf isn’t gay,” Gus said defensively. “Except for women’s golf. That’s pretty gay. Besides, are pink shirts really the gayest thing you can think of to wear? How about one that says Mrs. Timberlake, or I’m not gay but my boyfriend is. In fact, I might wear that one myself.”

“Be subtle. If you show up looking like a parade float I’ll have to pretend I broke up with you.”

“I’m not the embarrassing one. I do subtle just fine.”

The two friends were silent for a few minutes as they turned their attention back to their computers. After a few minutes Gus spoke.

“It won’t work, Shawn. I’ve just been doing some research online.”

“Sure it will. And if by ‘research’ you mean surfing for gay porn, you don’t have to worry. We won’t need to go that deep undercover.”

“It’s too much to learn in a few days. I don’t know any gay terminology, customs, or signals. You don’t have to be a cultural anthropologist to know I’d be spotted as a fake in five minutes.”

“Nonsense. Pretend you just came out. You won’t be expected to know anything.”

“Well do you know any of this stuff? This site says there are over 80 hankie codes.”

“Hardly anyone uses hankie codes anymore. It’s all done on Facebook now. Although I do know that the hankie colour for cop fetish is alarmingly similar to the colour for cock and ball torture. Trust me when I say you don’t want to get them mixed up.”

“I’ll go along with it,” Gus said, ignoring Shawn’s diversion, “But I don’t think anyone will believe that I’m gay. So when it’s a spectacular disaster, remember that I told you so.”

“You’re underestimating psychology.”

“What about psychology?” Gus looked at Shawn with suspicion. Shawn’s knowledge was hit and miss, and there was no telling when he would suddenly reveal that he’d studied some subject intensely for the two or three weeks it took him to master it, get bored, and move on.

“Look at you.” Shawn said. “You’re a god among men. You’ve got flawless skin, and a fight club six pack.”

“You know that’s right.”

“They’ll want you to be gay so much they’ll overlook anything that might suggest otherwise, no matter how obvious. They’ll cut you so much slack it’ll be like you’re in freefall.”

“Maybe,” Gus allowed. “But that doesn’t mean I condone this obsession you have with Lassiter. You’re only interested in him because you can’t have him. It’s fifth grade all over again.”

“Fifth grade?”

“Does the Snoopy Sno Cone Machine ring a bell? You only wanted it because your dad wouldn’t get it for you.”

“First of all, there’s no comparison between the snow cone thing and my interest in Lassiter. And second, what child doesn’t want the ability to produce sno cones all year round?”

“Let’s be honest, Shawn. Your interest in Lassiter would plummet if he was actually interested. And moreover, your dad was right. The Sno Cone Machine was too hard to work. Plus, it took like, twenty minutes to make one sno cone.”

“Enough with the sno cones. I’ve got the online registration form open now. Do we want a queen bed or a king? I’m leaning towards a king. I think it implies that I have an acrobatic sexual style but also says I like my sleeping space. And it’s got cute throw pillows.”

“I’ll pretend to be gay,” Gus said, “but I’m not going to pretend to be your boyfriend. You can leave that fantasy right on the shelf.”

“But if we don’t pretend to be a couple then you’ll be pretending to be single and all the guys will hit on you. I’m really only thinking of you. Plus there’s a sweet couples discount.”

## Chapter 3

Casa de Orgullo, on Cachuma Lake, was twenty minutes outside of Santa Barbara. Lassiter drove there in a rented Hyundai, which felt more appropriate to his cover as a history professor on sabbatical. He was dressed in his most casual attire: a short-sleeved blue plaid shirt, open at the collar, and khaki pants. His attempt to throw together a gay wardrobe had failed dismally. The rainbow muscle shirt had looked especially ridiculous. He'd finally decided to stay as close to his own style as possible, although he wouldn't admit that he was taking O'Hara's advice in that regard.

He stood by the car, stretched, and looked around to get his bearings. The main building was a Craftsman-style log structure surrounded by a multi-tiered flagstone patio. On the tiers closest to the dock a large group of men and women were having drinks. Paved walkways led to a series of smaller cabins along the shoreline.

*This assignment isn't going to be so bad, he thought. We'll smoke out our thief in a few days, book the bad guy and please the mayor. And spending this much time with a bunch of gay men will just reinforce how ridiculous and impossible this whole thing with Spencer is.*

He popped the trunk and removed his suitcase and fishing gear. Although Cachuma Lake was created by the construction of Bradbury Dam it was now home to a significant population of bass, crappie, walleye, and catfish. Lassiter had brought the custom Sak-Hart graphite rod and reel that Henry Spencer had given him.

*Just because this is a working weekend doesn't mean that I can't squeeze in some fishing time, Lassiter reasoned. Early in the morning. As part of my cover.*

He carried his luggage to the check-in area and O'Hara greeted him at the counter. She had gone ahead of him, and was now established as receptionist Julie Ohlsson.

"Welcome to Casa de Orgullo," she said pleasantly. "Do you have a reservation?"

Lassiter looked around at the reception area. It had a grey rock fireplace, a plush sofa and easy chairs, and some wall hangings of Navaho design. It seemed deserted.

"You know I do," he said, feeling his jaw tighten. *Was she going to stay in character every moment they were alone? Was this some attempt to teach him a lesson for deriding her undercover skills?*

"What's the name?" she asked.

"It's under Lasswell." He watched as O'Hara perused the electronic database. "Oh come on. This is ridiculous. Just give me the key."

“Please be patient, Mr. Lasswell,” she said. “This is my first day.” She looked meaningfully toward the sofa. “Yes, you’re here in the main building. Room 201. You’re here with GORN, aren’t you?”

“That’s right.”

“Did I hear you say GORN?” A man bounded energetically off the sofa where he’d been slouched down, out of sight. He was slight of build and dressed as if he were going on safari. “Hey there. I’m Chuck, your GORN retreat leader.”

Lassiter shook the man’s outstretched hand.

“I’m Booker Lasswell. Pleased to meet you.”

“Welcome to GORN, Booker. Here’s our schedule of events for the weekend,” Chuck passed him a detailed sheet from his clipboard. “We’ve got a meet and greet later tonight. But first we’re having a swim race down at the dock. Check in and get yourself settled. I’ll see you there in ten minutes.” It was a statement, not a question.

*If anything was going to be difficult, Lassiter realized, it would be maintaining his cover with GORN and still making time to find the thief. He’d have to be one of those guys nobody would notice if they were to say, disappear for twenty minutes several times a day.*

Lassiter obtained his key from O’Hara and went to his room. He had to hand it to Rodriguez; the room was pretty nice. It had a queen-sized bed, some interesting paintings, and a good view of the lake. He put his clothes into the bureau and stowed his portable gun vault in the top drawer of his nightstand. The only thing he didn’t enjoy about undercover assignments was not being able to wear his gun. Being without the Glock just felt wrong. With practice he could open the vault and be armed in three seconds. Provided the bad guy didn’t get the drop on him, he’d be ready.

He peered out the window. The swim meet was already underway. He could see people on the dock, cheering on the swimmers. He changed into his swim trunks and put a t-shirt and cargo shorts on over top.

Before leaving Santa Barbara he had been anxious about blending in with GORN. This wasn’t like going undercover at Mrs. Fields, where just wearing the uniform meant he belonged. He didn’t really know any gay men, not counting whatever Spencer was. If he couldn’t play gay convincingly the assignment would be a failure.

Of course these aren’t just regular gay men, he reminded himself. They’re gay sportsmen. We’ll bond over the activity and the identity will be taken for granted. At least all my swimming at the Athletic Club will come in handy.

During the drive it occurred to him that he might blend in too well. That possibility was

alarmingly new when it came to his undercover work. At no point during the Sunnyside Mall assignment did he ever wonder if he really *was* a cookie baker.

He locked his door and strolled down to the dock.

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Shawn Spencer, wearing his most flattering swimtrunks, sat on a lounge chair drinking a raspberry smoothie. He and Gus had just finished a swim race and they were now sitting on the terrace overlooking the lake. One of the GORN members, a man named Evan, stretched out in an adjoining chair and began applying body oil. Evan had a tan like George Hamilton.

“Nice race, you two,” he said. Evan was addressing both of them, but looking at Gus, whose swimsuit was just visible through the gap in his fluffy bathrobe.

“Really?” Shawn said, “I thought my second-last place finish was a little disappointing. I’m usually only third last.”

“Your boyfriend did pretty well.”

*Is it my imagination, Shawn wondered, or did the way Evan say boyfriend turn it into a question?*

Gus smiled. “I swam in high school. I guess I’ve still got it.”

“Of course you do,” Evan said, ignoring Shawn and smiling at Gus. “High school couldn’t have been that long ago for you.”

“It’s been a while,” Gus admitted.

Shawn sighed. *Gus has no idea what’s going on here.* He’d have to squash this Evan thing before it progressed to the clumsy pass stage and Gus’s heterosexual panic blew their cover.

“Gus and I went to school together,” Shawn interjected. “We were at camp together too. Doesn’t this weekend bring back memories, Gus?”

“I guess so.” Gus looked at Shawn, unsure where he was going with this.

“Remember that time you almost burned down the cabin?” Shawn laughed. He turned to Evan. “You know how kids are. That fart-lighting can really get out of hand.”

“I didn’t do that!” Gus hissed at him. He turned to Evan. “Seriously. I didn’t.”

“Then how did that cabin fire start?” Shawn asked. He innocently sipped at his smoothie.

“I was trying to dry my underwear out.” He spoke to Evan, who was looking increasingly put off. “I wasn’t wearing them at the time.” Gus crossed his arms and glared at his friend. It had been a very small fire, but he still felt defensive about it. Kids clothes are supposed to be fire retardant, but Gus had learned that they burn quickly enough if held over a Coleman gas stove.

“Right, right,” Shawn said. “You fell in the lake.”

“If you are referring to when you pushed me into the lake, then yes.”

“I had to push you. If you didn’t fall in the lake how was I supposed to impress everyone by rescuing you?”

“I’m glad to hear you admit culpability. By rights you owe me a pair of underwear.”

“Gus, sweetie, where am I going to find A-team Underoos in your size now?”

“It was the t-shirt that had the picture on it. The shorts were just regular underwear.”

Shawn smiled. Evan was now over at the bar, chatting up a man with tattoos covering both arms.

Chuck, their GORN leader, stood on the long t-shaped dock, lined up beside him were five men and three women, readying themselves for the next race. The tall form of Carlton Lassiter strolled down from the main building.

“Booker, you’re just in time!” Chuck shouted. “Four laps to the lie-out and back,” he pointed to a small floating raft anchored 100 metres or so offshore. Swimmers must touch the lie-out, and the dock on each pass. The winner gets a GORN t-shirt and coupons for free drinks at the social tonight.”

Shawn felt his breath catch in his throat as Lassiter stripped quickly out of his t-shirt and cargo shorts and joined the line of racers. The man was buff; even more so than Shawn remembered. His swim trunks were tight fitting and black against the pale skin of his hips. Although Lassiter’s suit was more modest than what the other swimmers were wearing. Shawn couldn’t take his eyes off it. He set his smoothie down on the terrace.

“Save my seat,” he said. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

“It’s a bad idea, Shawn,” Gus said, barely audibly. He didn’t know if Shawn heard him, but he was pretty sure it wouldn’t have made a difference either way.

Chuck blew his whistle and the racers dove in and swam toward the raft with strong strokes. Carlton came in third. He probably could have pushed himself more, but the goal was to fit in as a participant, not win prizes. He put both hands on the dock and pulled

himself smoothly out of the water.

“Can I offer you one of these delightfully fluffy one hundred percent cotton towels?”

Lassiter took the towel and wiped the water from his head and face. Once his eyes were clear he looked down to see Shawn Spencer, dressed in a tiny swimsuit and open terrycloth robe. The sight of Spencer almost naked was enthralling; too much so. He wrapped the towel around his waist and did a quick assessment of his surroundings. Most of the swimmers had moved up to the terrace where employees were handing out robes, towels and drinks. He and Shawn were almost alone on the dock.

“You’re getting some grey there, Lassie. Pretty soon you’ll look like the abominable snowman. Do they make Grecian Formula for chest hair? I bet some of the guys here would know.” Shawn ran a finger playfully down Lassiter’s chest, toward his swimsuit.

“Stop touching me!” Lassiter slapped Shawn’s hand away. A few heads had turned in his direction at the outburst and he lowered his voice accordingly. “What are you doing here, Spencer?”

“Who is this Spencer person you speak of? I’m Joseph P. Brennar and that,” he waved to Gus, who pointedly ignored him, “is my partner, John Kimble. He teaches kindergarten and I work for the Chicago mafia. What’s your cover story?”

“I’m Booker Lasswell, a history professor on sabbatical.” Carlton was proud of his choice of cover story. He knew enough about the Civil War period to pass in most situations, and being on sabbatical enabled him to claim that he worked at an obscure and distant university.

“I like the Lasswell part,” Shawn said. “It means I can still call you Lassie. But Booker? Like Booker T and the MGs? Where’d you come up with that?”

“If you must know, it’s a nickname my mother calls me.” Lassiter crossed his arms and straightened his stance. He would accept no teasing about his name.

“I got a small plastic parachutist stuck in my nose once and had to go to the hospital to get it removed.”

“And how is that relevant?” His forehead creased in irritation and confusion.

“Sorry,” Shawn said. “I thought this was the part of camp where we share embarrassing childhood stories.”

Lassiter sighed. “It’s easier to remember an alias if it’s something you’re already trained to respond to.” He smiled at Shawn without using his eyes. “Once again, if you were a real detective, you’d know that.” He scooped up his clothes, walked past him and joined the others on the terrace.

“Ouch,” Shawn said to himself. Lassiter might be giving him the cold shoulder now, but he was pretty sure that would change if he got Lassiter alone long enough. And a weekend could be a very long time.

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The lighting was low, highlighted only by accent candles. Relaxing music flooded the room from hidden speakers. Shawn lay back in a reclining chair, his face covered in a fruit-scented chemical exfoliant and cucumbers resting coldly against his eyelids. He had just had an amazing 20 minute massage from Barry, the resort masseur, and he was now enjoying a facial and manicure with Tanya, the esthetician. Tanya adjusted her spotlight onto Shawn’s hands and began using an orangewood stick on his cuticles. Shawn noticed that she had a bandage on her wrist. It could be a suicide attempt, but he was pretty sure it had a more larcenous origin.

“Is this your first time at Casa de Orgullo?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Shawn said. “I usually like to do St. Moritz at this time of year. The skiing is great. At night we make this treat out of chocolate, marshmallows and Ritz crackers. I call them Smoritzes.”

“Sounds terrific,” she said with forced enthusiasm. She applied a moisturizer to his hands and began to massage it in. “You know what would be great for you? This new nail strengthener I just got. Give me a minute to find it.”

She released his hand and moved across to the other side of the room. Based on the sound of cotton shuffling, and the direction from which it was coming, Shawn was pretty sure she was rifling through his clothes.

*Interesting, he thought. I may have found our thief already.*

Shawn wasn’t worried about Tanya blowing his cover. All she was going to find in that wallet, apart from money and coupons for \$5 off a double order of Jerk Chicken at Kingston’s, was his fake identification in the name of Joseph Brennar. Considering that most of his knowledge of forgery came from watching the Rockford Files, the end result was pretty convincing. His real wallet was back in his room, hidden in the battery compartment of the radio.

“Have you worked here long?” Shawn asked.

“Only a week. I worked at a salon in Santa Barbara before that.” Her voice was distracted.

*Obviously, he thought, she’s engrossed in my belongings. Or maybe she’s jotting down the numbers on my fake credit cards.*

“Nice town, Santa Barbara,” Shawn said, “what brought you to this isolated post?”

“I needed to get out of the city. Go somewhere relaxing. Rebecca, the hospitality hostess, told me about the job opening here and I applied.” Shawn remembered Rebecca, a small brunette with freckles and a friendly smile. She had checked them in when he and Gus arrived.

“So you’re in charge of the spa then?” Shawn asked.

“It’s a small staff. I do everything from run the spa to unclog the toilets.” Shawn heard the sound of paper rustling. *She’s counting the money in my wallet.*

“Are you dating Rebecca?” His memory quickly scanned the room. There was a picture of her with Rebecca, but the composition was tight on their faces and the background was just a beige cement wall. It could have been taken anywhere.

“No.” Her voice was amused, but slightly too forceful.

*Either she really doesn’t like Rebecca, Shawn thought, or she isn’t into girls at all.*

“Rebecca’s not too bright. But she’s a pushover, so if you need any favours while you’re here, she’s the one to ask.” His clothing shuffled again.

*She’s putting the wallet back. I wonder how much is left in it.*

“I am seeing someone,” she said, “but they’re stuck in Santa Barbara at the moment.”

*A-ha! She’s playing the pronoun game. Given that we’re at a gay resort that can only mean she’s seeing a boy.*

“Oh! Here’s that nail strengthener!” Tanya grabbed a container from the countertop. It was where it had been since Shawn had walked in: behind the nail polish remover and next to the buffing crème.

“So, Tanya, give me the run-down on the guys who work here,” Shawn asked. Some insight on her fellow employees could come in handy when he had his psychic vision and revealed her as the thief.

“Andy’s in charge of housekeeping. You’ll meet him soon if you haven’t already.” She sat in her chair and began applying the strengthener to Shawn’s nails. “He’s the freckled redhead who brings you towels or extra pillows. He’s handy with tools, too and does general repairs. Andy’s dating Raj. He’s the lifeguard and he takes care of the boats and the dock. He’s gorgeous, but don’t let Andy catch you flirting with him. Raj cheated on him last summer and he’s a little paranoid about it now.”

“There’s Barry. He was your masseur, but he also takes care of the web site and all the electronics in the resort. Barry’s single, in case you care.”

“I’m involved at the moment,” Shawn said, thinking of Lassie, not Gus.

“It never hurts to keep your options open,” Tanya said. “Let’s get you out of that peel now.”

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That evening all thirty of the GORN members, now fully dressed, sat in the dining room enjoying the first course of their meal—a choice between clam chowder or potato leek soup. Shawn had spoken to Rebecca Martin, the hospitality hostess, and arranged to have her seat him and Gus near Lassiter. Lassiter took one look at the table and moved his chair so Gus was between him and Shawn. The other people at the table looked at him oddly.

*Stare all you like, Lassiter thought. At least this way I won’t have to worry about fending off any under-the-table games of footsie. Or thigsie. Or crotchsie.*

The other three seats at their table were occupied by a man in his thirties named Clark and a lesbian couple in their twenties named Juanita and Barb. Clark had gotten the ball rolling by introducing himself and mentioning that he wrote horror novels for a living.

“Did you write *The Unmarked Grave*?” Gus asked.

“Yes,” Clark said, pleased to have his work recognized. “You’ve read it?”

“No, Gus said. “But I saw the cover in a bookstore and it gave me nightmares for a week.”

“Uh, thanks, I think.” Clark adjusted his glasses and turned to Lassiter.

“My name is Booker Lasswell,” Lassiter said. “I’m a history professor specializing in the Civil War period.”

“Was that you I saw teaching calculus to Lou Diamond Philips?” Shawn asked.

“No, that wasn’t me,” Lassiter said, looking sharply at Shawn. “Like I said, I teach history.”

Was Spencer going to pull this shit the whole weekend? People were going to wonder if they knew each other.

“Do you know a history teacher named Ralph Hinkley?” Shawn asked. “Because I have an instruction booklet that belongs to him.”

“The Civil War sounds like an interesting specialization,” Clark said.

“So basically,” Shawn said, “you focus on a period of history where all the men were crowded together away from all the women. Interesting.”

*Oh, so now my interest in the Civil War is some kind of evidence of my repressed homosexuality?*

“It wasn’t just men,” Lassiter said. “There were hookers that would follow the troops. Lieutenant Colonel Spaulding created the country’s first legal prostitution system trying to deal with them all.”

“So it wasn’t a big gay lovefest then?” Clark asked, amused.

“No,” Lassiter said. “Although Confederate president Jefferson Davis was dressed as a woman when he was arrested. But it was an attempt at disguise. He didn’t normally...that is, he wasn’t a ...a transvestite.”

“Good to know,” Shawn said. “Slave-holding redneck, certainly. But not a transvestite.”

“There were a few transvestites in the war,” Lassiter said. “But they were women dressed as men.” He turned to Gus. “But don’t let me prattle on all day. I believe it’s your turn.”

“My name is Gus, and I work in pharmaceuticals. This is my partner, Joe.” He turned to glare at Shawn, who glared back. All the way from Santa Barbara, Shawn had laid out the cover story he had built for them. But Gus insisted on playing himself.

“My name is Joseph Brennar,” Shawn said. “Call me Joe. I like pineapple, long walks on the beach and writing Barney Miller slash fiction.” He smiled a welcome at the woman next to him.

“I’m Juanita, and this is my wife, Barbara. She just immigrated here. Barb speaks mostly German, so if she seems quiet, it’s not because she’s ignoring you.”

“Oh.” Shawn turned to Barbara. “Ich heiÙe Joseph Brennar, nenne mich aber ruhig Joe. Ich mag Ananas, lange Spaziergnge am Strand und schreibe gerne Barney Miller Slash-Romanzen.”

Barb laughed and spoke briefly in German. Shawn turned back to the group.

“Barb says she’s a computer programmer, but that doesn’t mean that she won’t kick all your asses in capture the flag tomorrow.”

“How is it that you speak German?” Lassiter asked.

Shawn waved a hand, as if it were nothing. “I picked up some words from watching David Hasselhoff in Dodgeball.”

“So how do you ladies feel about GORN?” Clark asked Juanita and Barb. “I’d have thought the name alone would be off-putting for women. Or do you identify as gay instead of lesbian?”

“We’re not really into politics,” Juanita said. “We like a good game of baseball. With GORN we don’t have to play with a bunch of homophobes.”

“And if we tried to add lesbian and bisexual then we couldn’t pronounce the name, could we?” Clark said. “It gets even worse if we try to add the TTIQ.”

“GQ-TILT-BORN,” Shawn said. His tablemates stared at him, slightly confused. “What? I think it sounds interesting. And fashionable. Or you could say QuILTT-B-GORN. But that sounds like a product to get rid of unwanted comforters.”

“I don’t have a lot of time for politics,” Juanita said.

“Politics has its uses,” Clark said. “Remember what Stonewall taught us.”

“Would that be never retreat,” Lassiter asked, “or the benefits of relentless drilling and rapid troop movement?” *Although it could just as easily be not to approach your own side in the dark or the importance of early treatment in cases of pneumonia.*

“Nice one, Lassie,” Shawn laughed. “But I think he means Stonewall the bar.”

“I haven’t been to that bar.”

“Hey, how about this camp thing?” Shawn changed the subject. “Anyone else here been to camp before?”

“I went to writing camp as a kid,” Clark said. “But it didn’t have sports. I only got into that recently. How about you, Joe?”

“I did go to camp as a child,” Shawn said. “I try not to think about what happened at Camp Arawak, although Angela and I are still penpals. I was her date for senior prom.”

“He’s joking,” Gus said.

“I like the sports angle,” Shawn said. “I’m just hoping we can beat those snobs across the lake at Camp Mohawk.”

“A Meatballs reference?” Gus gave him a sharp look. “Really? Are you trying to get that awful song stuck in my head again? You know how long it takes me to get rid of that. I had to push it out using the Macarena.”

They glared at one another as the wait staff came to take their dishes and serve their entrees.

## Chapter 4

Early the next morning Lassiter sat on the end of the dock, Sak-Hart fishing rod in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other.

“Mind if I join you?” Lassiter looked up to see Clark, the horror writer.

“Please do.”

Clark pulled a pack of Marlboros out of his breast pocket and offered one to Carlton, who declined.

“I don’t blame you. I’m trying to quit but I still like to have a few puffs to start the day. I actually look forward to it.” He looked at the cigarette thoughtfully. “Why do I love something that I know is bad for me?”

*If I knew the answer to that, Lassiter thought, I’d have taken care of this Spencer problem by now.*

“Are you having a good time?” he asked. With all his years on the police force, he could tell when someone wanted to talk. Of course that someone was usually a criminal being held in an interrogation room, but the principle was still the same.

“I don’t know. This whole weekend is a little weird for me,” Clark said. He leaned against a bollard and lit his cigarette.

“How so?”

“My boyfriend made me go. He says I need to connect with my gay culture.”

“And you’re not? Connected, that is?”

“We’ve only been dating for seven months. I don’t feel gay the way he does. I mean, I accept that our *relationship* is gay. But it’s just weird thinking of *myself* as gay.”

“Yeah,” Lassiter agreed. “It’s like there should be some other word for it.”

“I’ve tried thinking of myself as bisexual, or pansexual, or queer, but I just don’t see why there has to be a word for *me* just because I’m with a guy now. I’m exactly the same as I was before. I’m just...”

“Gayish?” Lassiter suggested.

“Yeah.” Clark laughed as he exhaled smoke. “I’m gayish.” He took another drag on the cigarette. “Maybe it’s just the timing. Hell, my divorce from my ex-wife just became

final.”

“Really? Mine too.” Normally when he went undercover Lassiter didn’t share personal details. But this one seemed safe enough. It would be perfectly reasonable for a gay history professor to have an ex-wife.

“Oh, sorry to hear that,” Clark said. “Was it a happy marriage?”

“I thought so,” Carlton looked off across the lake. “But apparently I was wrong.”

“I know what you mean,” Clark said. “Are you seeing anyone now?”

It suddenly occurred to Lassiter that Clark might be flirting with him. He probably thought Lassiter was interested. He’d moved his chair last night to avoid Spencer and sat next to Clark. It might have looked like he was initiating something. He’d have to pretend to be involved.

“I am sort of seeing someone.” *Think of Spencer as a boyfriend and just answer the questions. That way it’ll seem natural and not like you’re just making it all up.* “It’s complicated,” Lassiter added. “We work together.” It was only now that he realized he welcomed the opportunity to tell someone about the Spencer situation.

“Is he in the department?” Clark asked.

“What?” Lassiter felt his spine stiffen as adrenaline shot through his system. *Did he know?*

“The history department?” Clark asked hesitantly. “You’re a history professor, right?”

“Oh. Yeah. No, he’s not in the department. Well, sort of. He’s more of a consultant.”

“That’s tough,” Clark said sympathetically. “If it doesn’t work out then you’ve pissed in your own swimming pool,” he gestured with the cigarette, “figuratively speaking.”

“Yeah. Tell me about it. I’ve put a lot of work into getting where I am. I could be, uh, head of the department someday. Unless, of course, I get outed at work.”

“That’s the great thing about being a writer,” Clark said. “As long as my books scare the hell out of people and sell like crazy nobody cares about my personal life. I can’t be fired.”

“It’s not that I’d be fired,” Lassiter explained. He was pretty sure that Vick wouldn’t care. “I just don’t want everybody knowing my personal business. I have no intention of being the topic of water cooler gossip.”

“What’s he like?” Clark asked. “This sort-of boyfriend of yours?”

Lassiter took a sip of his coffee and surprised himself by telling the truth.

“He’s brilliant, young, and good looking. To tell you the truth I wonder why he’s even interested in me.”

“Don’t sell yourself short there, Booker.” Clark said, stubbing his half-smoked cigarette out on the post. “Remember, I’ve seen you in a bathing suit.”

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O’Hara and Lassiter met up in Lassiter’s room after lunch, while the others were out playing capture the flag. Shawn hadn’t been invited to the briefing, but he showed up anyway. Lassiter stood near the door. O’Hara leaned against the writing desk, perusing a file folder, while Shawn splayed himself across Lassiter’s bed.

“Please,” he said sarcastically to Shawn, “Make yourself at home.”

“Thanks.” Shawn said. He adjusted the pillows and leaned into them, moaning exaggeratedly. It was disturbing and slightly arousing. Lassiter tried to keep his back to Spencer, focussing on O’Hara.

“Where are we on this missing watch?”

“I just got the background checks on the employees,” O’Hara said. “This place is chock full of suspects.”

“Great,” Lassiter said, “we’ll be stuck here for weeks.”

“You say that like it’s a bad thing, Lassie.” Lassiter glanced over at him. Shawn was bouncing up and down, testing the mattress.

“It’s not as big a task as it seems,” O’Hara said. “Only five employees were here for all the thefts.”

“So who’s at the top of the list?” he asked.

“Rebecca Martin, hospitality hostess. She worked here for five years, left for six months, then came back. She told everyone that she needed the time off to take care of her sick grandmother, but she actually spent it in county jail. The thefts started about four months ago and really escalated over the past month. I say she’s our best suspect.”

“Terrific,” Lassiter said. “Let’s talk to her. Where is she?”

“It’s her day off,” O’Hara said. “Nobody’s seen her all morning. She doesn’t have a car. She may have taken the bus into town, but she can’t go more than fifty miles away or be

gone for more than 48 hours without checking in with her parole officer. He's promised to call if he hears from her."

"She's probably already in Mexico or Canada," Lassiter muttered. "Of course if she has done a runner that's a pretty clear sign of guilt. Who else is a suspect?"

"Tanya Becker. She's the beautician here. She's on parole as well. She did a year for petty theft."

"I think she did it," Shawn said, bounding off the bed. "There's something fishy about her. Her aura's all wonky. Plus, she did a good job on my manicure, but look what she did to my pores." He moved in close to Lassiter, who backed away quickly.

"See Spencer, this is where actual police work is better than picking suspects based on crystal balls or horoscopes. We did our homework. She wasn't present for all the thefts."

"Maybe she liked stealing from here so much she got herself hired."

"That makes no sense whatsoever." He turned to O'Hara. "Is there anyone working here who isn't a criminal?"

"There's Andrew, he oversees the cabins. Everyone calls him Andy. He doesn't have a record. And there's his husband, Raj, who's the lifeguard and fishing guide. As far as I can tell he's just a guy who really loves watersports."

Shawn snickered and O'Hara and Lassiter looked at him sharply.

"Sorry. You said watersports."

"You know what?" Lassiter said. "Get out of here." He pointed to the door.

"Okay, fine." Shawn raised a hand in surrender and walked to the door. "But when I solve the case I'd appreciate it if you could gather everyone in the lounge. I like to do my wrap-ups Murder She Wrote style."

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Shawn and Gus were in their room. Gus was picking out warmer clothes for the evening. Shawn was perusing the GORN events schedule.

"According to this we have our choice between board games in the dining room or a marshmallow roast at the fire pit," Shawn said. "That's perfect. While everyone's occupied we can search the beautician's room for evidence."

"You go ahead," Gus said. "I have to be at the campfire pit in fifteen minutes. I've organized a Broadway sing-along."

“What?” Shawn looked at Gus with confusion. “Who are you? And what have you done with Gus?”

“It’s part of my cover.” Gus began applying copious amounts of insect repellent to his long-sleeved shirt.

“Right. And you just happen to know the words to Shy and A Girl Named Fred?”

“Those lyrics are common knowledge, Shawn. Once Upon A Mattress was a very popular show.”

“This sucks.” Shawn threw up his arms in protest. “You’re having more fun being gay than I am.”

“Maybe that’s because I’m doing things I enjoy that actually have a chance of working out and you’re trying to seduce a straight cop who would rather shoot you than kiss you?”

“Well you’re wrong there. He’s already kissed me. Several times. It’s the running away afterward that he needs to work on.”

“I did not need that mental image, thank-you very much.” He picked up his flashlight. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I have a sing-along to run.” He exited, leaving Shawn alone.

Minutes later, dressed in a black t-shirt and pants, Shawn walked casually along the paved path to Tanya Becker’s cabin. He let himself in with a key he’d lifted from the reservations desk while schmoozing with Jules. He switched on the overhead light and took a quick glance around. It was rustic, but comfortable. Most of the personal items were strewn carelessly across the dresser. He flipped through a stack of mail, mostly credit card statements and love letters. Whoever was writing to Tanya needed a crash course in the difference between romance and porn, but what could he expect from somebody named Rod? He looked at the bills. She had maxed out her cards with cash advances. He made a mental note to work that into his vision. A financial crunch was a good motive for the thefts.

The sound of crunching gravel alerted him that someone was coming along the pathway. He dropped the mail and looked around for a place to hide. Under the bed was too obvious, plus in the movies the hero was always trapped there while the badguy had loud sex above him. He ran into the bathroom.

Tanya was home. She was talking loudly into her cell and didn’t even notice the light was on. Shawn put his ear to the door but he could only catch bits of the conversation.

“I miss you,” she said in a babyish voice.

Great, Shawn thought. Talking to her boyfriend was not the kind of incriminating

evidence he'd been hoping for.

"...I've got twenty, and I'm waiting to hear on another ten..."

This sounds promising. Of course she could be talking dollars or Pokemon cards.

"I promise, it's only a matter of time before I get you out of there."

Shawn frowned. Maybe her boyfriend was in jail, and she was planning to meet up with him. The more he thought about it the more he was sure she was their thief. But suspicious conversations weren't going to cut it. He needed something that Juliet and Lassiter would accept as evidence.

"Hang in there, baby. Love you. Bye." Shawn tensed. Footsteps approached the bathroom and he launched himself behind the door. Tanya came in, washed her face, and applied some kind of clay masque. Shawn remained perfectly still, breathing shallow, hoping she wouldn't close the door. He looked around the small room. There was one window.

The moment Tanya left the room Shawn was at the window. He slid the frame up and wriggled through, his hips just barely clearing the narrow span. He stumbled away from the cabin, tripping over a coiled hose and rolling across the lawn. He lay sprawled on the grass and caught his breath. He stood up and dusted himself off. There wasn't any more he could do here; she was clearly in for the night. He may as well go back to the GORN group.

Then, moving through the darkness, he saw something more interesting than either Broadway songs or Trivial Pursuit.

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Lassiter, Maglight in hand, moved stealthily across the dark resort grounds toward Rebecca Martin's cabin. Most of the GORN folks were inside, playing board games or at the campfire on the opposite side of the property. He was pretty sure he had slipped away without anyone noticing.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Shawn's voice whispered hoarsely into his right ear.

Lassiter jumped. "Jesus Spencer! You scared the hell out of me. What are you doing here?"

"I'm following you. I thought that was obvious." He gestured toward the cabin. "Should you be doing this?"

"We don't need a warrant," Lassiter said. "Martin's on parole. Penal Code Section 3067. Parolees are subject to search or seizure by a peace officer—"

“I know. I know,” Shawn said. He’d had the damn thing memorized since he was fourteen. “I mean should you risk blowing your cover? Jules could be delivering towels or something.”

“I’m not here to have fun, Spencer. This is my job. I just have to be discreet about it.” Besides, Juliet was gathering more background on Tanya. Shawn might be annoying, but he was often annoyingly right.

Lassiter let himself in with the master key that Tim Rodriguez had supplied them, and Shawn followed after him. The detective donned gloves and began to quickly search the places people usually hid incriminating evidence – the underwear drawer, the nightstand, under the mattress. He came up empty. He frowned at the dark cabin. Tim had assured them that he hadn’t alerted the staff to their assignment, but maybe he’d let something slip. If she thought the cops were on her trail she might have taken any evidence away with her. He played his light across the room. Maybe he should try the desk.

He flipped open a jewellery box that sat on the top of the dresser.

“Well what have we here?” Lassiter said triumphantly, holding up a necklace. Shawn recognized it from the list of stolen items.

“There’s no way you found anything. Lemme see that,” Shawn hurried over.

Lassiter held the necklace up, out of his reach. Shawn stepped in close and tried to grab it.

“This is my evidence, Spencer, go find your own.”

Shawn’s keen ears picked up the sound of footsteps coming up to the front door. He grabbed Lassiter by the back of the head and pulled him into a kiss. Lassiter was momentarily frozen in shock. Shawn’s arm slipped around his waist and held him firmly as his hips ground into him. Lassiter made a low groan and dropped his arms to Shawn’s waist, unsure if he was going to push him away or pull him closer. Almost immediately they were bathed in a blinding light as Andy switched on the overhead.

“What’s going on in here?” He stood frozen by the door with an armload of colourful quilts.

“Oh, Andy, hey.” Shawn stepped back from Lassiter and used the back of his hand to wipe his lips. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m returning some quilts to Rebecca.” He put them on a chair and turned back to Shawn and Lassiter.

“What’s going on?”

“It’s not what it looks like,” Lassiter said. He quickly slipped the necklace into a pocket. He was sure Andy hadn’t seen it, but the last thing he wanted was to be accused of pilfering from the staff cabins.

Andy looked from one of them to the other then smiled at Shawn with an unconvincing grin.

“Can I have a word with you outside?” he asked.

“Sure,” Shawn said. “Just give me a minute.”

Andy stepped outside, casting a sharp look over his shoulder at Shawn.

“What the hell, Spencer?” Lassiter said.

“Well, what would you rather be caught doing, sneaking a bite of the nookie cookie or ransacking the cabin of one of his fellow employees?”

“I’m thinking about it. Give me a minute.” He ran a hand over his hair. “You’re right. You’re right.”

“I know I am.” Shawn stepped outside. Andy was leaning against the cabin, his arms folded and his brow furrowed.

“Andy!” Shawn smiled his most charming smile. “What’s up?”

“Save it Joe. I know what I saw.”

“No, see that was, uh, he was...” Shawn feigned embarrassment.

“I don’t know what you think you’re doing,” Andy said. “But Gus really cares about you. And I’d hate to see you throw that away for a fling with Booker.”

“I appreciate your concern. And you’re right. Gus and I have a very special bond. I would never do anything to risk that.”

“Good. I’d hate to see anyone get hurt.” Andy stepped close to Shawn and leaned in. “And just so we’re clear, you so much as touch my man and someone will get hurt.”

“Understood. I’m glad we talked.”

Shawn waited for Andy to leave then went back inside the cabin.

“Everything okay?” Lassiter asked.

“We’re good. He’s convinced I’m a total whore. He didn’t even wonder how we got in

here.”

The light on, Lassiter turned off his Maglight and quickly sorted through the papers on Rebecca Martin’s desk. Shawn, seeing that Lassiter wasn’t going to resume their clutch, joined the search by half-heartedly opening drawers and picking things up off shelves. To his sharp eye the room revealed a series of facts about Rebecca Martin: she played tennis, she loved Jodie Foster, she donated money to a foster child in Togo, she didn’t have many friends, and she was taking Paxil. He shuffled through a pile of photos on her dresser. Several were of her and Tanya, only these ones were obviously taken in front of the Santa Barbara county jail.

Shawn was pretty sure that necklace had been planted. He continued to be sure right up to the point when he opened the closet and found himself looking at Rebecca Martin’s body, hanging by her neck from a belt attached to the clothes bar.

“This looks like a confession,” Lassiter was engrossed in one of the letters he’d found on the desk. “I think we’ve found our thief.”

“Actually,” Shawn said, “I think I found your thief. It looks like Timmy’s not the only one in the closet.”

Lassiter dropped the letter he’d been reading onto the desk and hurried over.

“Well so much for keeping things discreet.” He closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. A dead body, even if it was a suicide as this one appeared to be, meant forensics people, uniforms, and probably press attention. He could see that future Chief’s job melting away.

“Unless...” Shawn said, “you just want to pop her into a freezer and pretend we never came in here?”

“Don’t even tempt me.” Lassiter pulled out his cellphone and called O’Hara.

Three hours later Lassiter had talked to O’Hara, Tim Rodriguez, Chief Vick, the coroner, and the Santa Barbara Country Sheriff’s Department. The coroner and forensics people had agreed to come in quietly, do their thing and leave before morning. The sheriff’s department, after a call from the mayor, begrudgingly handed the case off to the SBPD. As far as Lassiter was concerned, the case was pretty much closed. The evidence of the letter and the necklace was pretty damning, but the Chief wanted him and O’Hara to stay on location until the coroner’s report confirmed suicide. Lassiter felt relieved. It looked like the case was closed.

## Chapter 5

Shawn went back to his room to freshen up before the GORN dance that evening.

“It’s about time,” Gus said. “I was starting to think you were going to stand me up.”

“I still might. Is that what you’re wearing?”

“Why? What’s wrong with it?” Gus was wearing a black dress shirt with a silver metallic thread woven into the fabric.

“It’s very disco duck.”

“We’re going to a gay dance at a gay resort and this is the gayest shirt I have.” He didn’t know if the shirt was gay or not, but the man who had sold it to him at the mall had been pretty gay.

“Well at least I’ll be able to find you in the dark.”

“Where have you been for the past hour?”

“Dude, I’ve been working. Lassiter and I just searched Rebecca Martin’s cabin. Lassie found a confession and I found her hanging in the closet.”

“So Rebecca was the thief?” Gus asked. “That’s too bad. I liked her. She made sure my pillow was hypoallergenic.”

“Don’t feel bad. I’m pretty sure she’s been framed. And murdered.” Shawn pulled a container out of his pocket. “Why would somebody be taking Paxil?”

Gus stepped forward and grabbed the container from him.

“You can’t just take things from a crime scene, Shawn.”

“Hello. Do we know each other? I’m Shawn Spencer, psychic detective.”

Gus looked at the container thoughtfully.

“Paroxetine is a serotonin reuptake inhibitor. It’s an antidepressant. It’s sometimes used to treat kleptomania.”

“So maybe she’s got kleptomania,” Shawn allowed. “But having kleptomania doesn’t make her the thief.”

Gus looked at Shawn and cocked an eyebrow.

“Okay, so it makes her *a* thief, but not necessarily *our* thief.”

“Actually,” Gus said, “there have been cases where Paxil seems to have triggered kleptomania.”

“Well, that would be great info for her defence attorney to know if, oh, she weren’t dead already.”

“Dead or not, I’m sure her family would appreciate having her name cleared.”

“Again, I think they’ll be more upset about the fact that she’s been murdered.”

“The antidepressants could back up the suicide theory,” Gus said.

“I beg to differ my fine flashy friend. If these were all expired and mouldering in a sock drawer, I might agree with you. But this prescription was refilled last week and I’m not Rainman but I did a quick headcount and it looks like she’s been taking them every day.”

“I hate to disappoint you, Shawn, but an article in the Canadian Medical Association Journal reported that the use of Paxil significantly increased suicidal behaviour in adults.”

“Really? ‘Cause I thought my argument was pretty sound there.”

“It was a nice try. For a layman.”

“A layman? First, that sound incredibly sexual, even though I know it’s not. Second, where do you get off calling me a layman? What are you, Trapper John, MD?”

“I try to stay current.”

“Then come on,” Shawn grabbed Gus by the arm and pulled him toward the door.

“We’ve got a dance to go to, a murder to solve and a thief to find.”

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An hour into the dance, Shawn leaned against the wall and downed half a bottle of water. This dance was sucking. Sure, the music was good, and the topless men were hot, and his sweet moves during the remix of Beat It had been the centre of attention. But Lassie was purposely ignoring him. To make matters worse, Gus and Juliet were making a spectacle of themselves by bumping and grinding in a distinctly un-gay manner. Shawn pulled Gus aside.

“Dude!” Shawn shouted at him over the pounding music. “You’ve got to stop flirting with Juliet. You and I are supposed to be a couple.”

“Oh really? Well that didn’t stop you from making out with Lassiter in an employee cabin. Yeah. I heard all about it from Andy. If anyone is blowing this cover, it’s you.”

Shawn noticed several guests were pretending not to be watching them.

“On the up side,” Shawn shouted to him, “being seen having an argument definitely make us seem like a real couple.” He grabbed Gus by the arm and dragged him into the washroom. He peered under the stall door but didn’t see any feet. Having watched both Trading Places and Scream he then went along and opened each stall.

“Ew!” Shawn pulled back in disgust. The toilet was clogged with what looked like a clump of paper towel, but judging from the deep yellow water filling the bowl, that hadn’t stopped anyone from using it. He turned back to Gus.

“Making out with Lassie just makes me seem more gay,” he said. “And like a very bad boyfriend. But you can’t be dancing with Juliet. Flirting with hot women—not gay. Plus, she’s supposed to be a lesbian. Say it with me. Lezzzzbian.”

“Relax Shawn. Since everyone assumes that Juliet and I are gay, it doesn’t matter how flirtatious we get with each other. It’s camp.”

“What does being at camp have to do with it?”

“Not camp the place, camp the aesthetic. Camp intentionally makes fun of heterosexual roles and scripts. In fact, the way I figure it, the more straight I act, the more gay I’ll seem.” Gus smiled and ran his thumb across his nose, basking in the brilliance of his plan.

“Yeah. Good luck with that.”

“Don’t act like I’m not pulling my weight here, Shawn. My cover is solid. Did you spend two hours singing showtunes around a bonfire? No. And only one of us actually read Rubyfruit Jungle in Mrs. Fitzgerald’s English class.”

“If you recall, they assigned that book the week that Real Genius came out. I had other priorities.”

“First of all,” Gus said, “I’m paying for this weekend. So I’ll flirt with whomever I want. Second of all, I’m not just wasting my time. I’m already making up for the fact that we’re probably not getting paid for this case. Two of the guys I met at the sing-along are dating doctors. I’ve already arranged to visit them with my sample case next week.”

“That’s great Gus. Are you sure that your prescription medicines are all they want to sample?”

“Oh please!” Gus frowned. “It’s been very professional.”

“You’re so oblivious.”

“Like hell I am.”

“You’re not exactly ready for the observing olympics, Gus. It took you six months to figure out that Falco wasn’t singing in English.”

“English and German are both Germanic languages. Plus, Vienna Calling and Rock Me Amadeus were both a mix of the two. It’s a style he pioneered.”

“Fine. I’ll give you Falco.”

“Damn straight.”

“But I don’t think you’ve thought your plan through. Doesn’t making their boyfriends into clients mean you’ll have to keep pretending you’re gay?”

“I’ve got that all figured out.” Gus’s eyes gleamed. “Once we get back to Santa Barbara, I’m dumping your ass for cheating on me. Then I can have a period of not dating anyone because I’m getting over a bad break-up. That can lead to a period of re-evaluating my sexuality.”

“You have thought this out.”

“Of course I have.”

“Fine. I’ll just have to solve this whole case on my own.” He tilted his head thoughtfully.

“Actually, I may have a clue already. He turned back to the stall with the clogged toilet.

“We have to unclog this toilet.”

“That’s not my job,” Gus said, making a face at the acrid smell emanating from the bowl.

“You’re right. It’s not. It’s actually Tanya’s job. And she’s suspect number one on my list. What do you bet she’s clogged this toilet on purpose. I’m pretty sure that clump of paper towel will be our Ryan Phillippe watch.”

“Why would she do that, Shawn? Why would anyone do that?”

“So we don’t find it hidden in her cabin. You, my friend, are looking at Exhibit A. let’s have a look at that badboy.” Shawn motioned for Gus to retrieve the paper towel.

“Patek Philippe. And if you think I’m going to stick my hand in there you’re crazy. It’s filled with urine.”

“Don’t think of it as urine. Think of it as beer that’s been on a Magic Schoolbus ride

through the human digestive system.”

“If you’re so comfortable with it, you get the watch.”

“Fine.” Shawn looked at the toilet without moving. He turned back to Gus. “Do you happen to have a calving glove on your person? No? Fine.” Shawn held his breath and plunged his arm into the toilet. He pulled the paper towel free and rushed it to the sink where he gently opened it. Sure enough, the Patek Philippe watch gleamed up at them.

“I owe you an apology,” Gus said, surprised. “That watch was not even on the list of things I expected you to find in that lump of paper towel.”

Shawn leaned an ear towards it.

“Hey, it’s still working.”

“Well, it is waterproof to 120 metres.”

Shawn threw the wet paper into the garbage and began to lather the watch with soap and water.

“Shawn, that’s evidence. You can’t just wash it.”

“Really? After the toilet? I don’t think Gil Grissom is going to be pulling any hairs or skin cells off it at this point.”

“Still, that’s an impressive find. If I didn’t know better I might believe you were psychic.”

“Nobody wants to unclog a toilet. All Tanya had to do was wait to be assigned to it. She could take off with the watch once people bought the suicide theory and the heat died down.”

Shawn finished washing the watch and dried it with some fresh paper towel.

“You know what, screw the monkeys,” Shawn said. “This is a very nice watch.” He put it on.

“You’ve got to give that watch to Lassiter,” Gus said. “Or at least hand it over to Tim. That watch is the whole reason we’re here.”

“Really?” Shawn admired the watch on his arm. “Somehow it seems less important now that there’s a dead body in one of the cabins.”

“I hope you know what you’re doing, Shawn.”

“Of course I do.” He admired the shiny watch. “In fact, I’m on a roll.” He extended his fist for the traditional Shawn-Gus fist bump.

“If you don’t mind,” Gus said, taking a step backward toward the door, “I’d like to let a few days go by before we resume fist bumps.”

“How long are we talking here?” Shawn dropped the fist to his side, unbumped.

“As long as it takes for me to forget the image of you with your hand in that toilet.” Gus turned and returned to the dance.

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Lassiter leaned against the wall and took a sip of his beer. The music’s loud bass was reverberating through his ribcage. He would much rather be combing through the resort for more evidence, but the sheriff’s department was on site and maintaining his cover meant he had to at least pretend to some enthusiasm for the GORN dance.

He looked up to see Shawn, writhing in front of him, attempting to draw him forward onto the dance floor. It wasn’t the first time he’d been approached that evening. Clark, Evan, and a guy named Emilio had all asked him to dance within the last half hour. He’d declined each time, explaining that he appreciated the offer, but that this just wasn’t his type of music. He regretted not having thought ahead to fake some kind of injury. At least with Spencer he didn’t have to bother being polite about his refusal.

“Stop dancing at me, Spencer.”

“I’m dancing with you, Lassie. It’s very different.”

“I’m not dancing. With you or anyone else.”

“Not dancing, Lassie?” Shawn stood beside him, lightly bouncing in time to the music. “That’s not very gay.”

“Straight or gay, I don’t dance.”

“Really? You seem like such a by-the-book guy. Isn’t dancing part of that whole romance package? Candy, flowers, dancing,” Shawn counted off on his fingers. “Yes, it’s definitely on the list of romantic gestures.”

Lassiter frowned. Normally Spencer’s flirtations were sexual. It hadn’t occurred to him that Spencer might also be expecting romance. Was this also part of some game, he wondered, or did Spencer think of him as a potential romantic, rather than purely sexual partner? And if so, did that change anything?

“A few slow dances, certainly. But this disco stuff isn’t really my speed.”

“Disco? Really Lassie. This is house, some hip hop, a bit of electronica.”

He should have known that Spencer would love this noise. He’d been watching him on and off all evening, dancing with Guster and some of the GORN men. It was a strange experience. On the one hand, it was arousing to watch Spencer dance. He moved well, and seemed so comfortable and free in his body. At the same time, he felt jealous seeing Spencer with other men, but didn’t quite know what to do with that feeling. The current plan was to cram it down into the pit of his stomach with his other unresolved and confusing feelings about Spencer.

Over the past few days his anxiety that he might actually do something sexual with Spencer had been replaced by a more gut-wrenching fear—that he might do something emotional with Spencer. All concerns about his career aside, he really didn’t think he could take another trip through the emotional wringer so soon after his divorce. Spencer might be sexually easy—and judging from how much he threw himself at everyone within a mile radius he probably was—but he was also the least emotionally available person he knew.

“It’s no Frank Sinatra.” Lassiter took another drink of beer.

“Still,” Shawn lightly clinked his water bottle to Lassiter’s beer bottle, “It’s nice to see you unwind a bit.”

“Don’t let the beer and lack of a tie fool you, Spencer. I’m fully wound.”

“You know, we’ve kissed three times now. You should really call me Shawn.”

Lassiter laughed. Calling him Spencer was one of the few ways he had to keep any kind of emotional distance on this thing. He wasn’t about to give that up.

“I don’t think so, Spencer.” He tried to make his voice as cold as possible.

“You can’t keep ignoring this tension between us, Lassie. That’s what killed the dinosaurs, you know.”

“Could you please stop saying things like that?”

“Things like what?”

“You know what. Just stop it. It makes me uncomfortable.”

“Why’s that, Lassie?”

Lassiter wasn’t sure. It felt muddled. He was afraid that Spencer might really mean the things he said.

And he was also afraid that he might not. He suddenly realized that he hadn't answered Spencer's question. But the silence lasted long enough that Spencer stepped in himself.

"Fine!" he said. "I'll leave you alone. I'll avoid you like a cyclone ranger. I'll go lie in my cabin with my candy dishes and my Joan Crawford Postcards, drinking mineral water and underlining meaningful passages in my copy of Moby Dick and trying to forget about us."

"There is no us, Spencer. I'm sorry about what happened during the Gabriel case, and I'm sorry I thought you were going to tell Chief Vick. Now are you going to keep holding that against me or are you going to be a man about it and move on?"

"Don't worry, Lassie. If I was going to hold anything against you, it wouldn't be Chief Vick."

Shawn stood next to Lassiter in silence for nearly three minutes. He kept track on his new watch. Lassiter was so preoccupied with his own thoughts that he didn't even notice Spencer's new jewellery.

"So if they did play something more your speed," Shawn said, "then would you dance with me? Purely platonically? As part of your cover?"

Lassiter looked warily at Shawn. It was unlikely that anything Spencer did around him could be described as pure or platonic. He looked over at where O'Hara and Gus were sitting. Cover or no cover, O'Hara would never let him hear the end of it if he danced with Spencer.

"Oh. I get it. You'll dance, but you don't want Jules to see it. No problemo."

"I didn't say that."

"You didn't have to." Shawn tapped his temple, signalling that he'd psychically read the detective's thoughts. He strolled over to Gus and Juliet and wrapped an arm possessively around Gus's shoulder.

"Can I just steal Gus away for a minute?" he asked sweetly.

"Of course." O'Hara was smiling and her eyes were shining. From her perspective, this case was over but for the paperwork and she was enjoying herself guilt free.

Shawn pulled Gus to a secluded corner.

"What's up?" he asked.

"You have to get Jules out of the dance."

“Why?” Gus frowned. Things were going well with Juliet. They’d been drinking and laughing and dancing all evening. He’d been spinning a plan that would seamlessly move this vibe between them back to Santa Barbara. He still had some kinks to work out, such as how he was actually going to accomplish that, but he was pretty sure that leaving the dance, with its close bodily contact, was a step in the wrong direction.

“Because I think Lassie will dance with me if I can get Juliet out of the room.”

Gus looked thoughtful. Shawn was his best friend, and if he was honest about it, he was pretty sure that his odds with Juliet were much better than Shawn’s odds with Lassiter. The guy needed all the help he could get.

“On one condition. You give me the Patek Philippe watch. I’ll give it to Juliet and tell her where we found it. In fact, I get to take credit for finding the watch.”

“Of course you can. Just keep her away for at least ten minutes. Fifteen would be really sweet.”

“Done.” Gus could picture it already. The two of them on the terrace, overlooking the lake, bathed in moonlight. Him, revealing that he’d found the \$17,000 watch. Juliet would be impressed and grateful, and not at all bothered that it had been removed from its original location and scrubbed with soap and water.

“Thanks, buddy. I owe you one.”

“One?” Gus made a face. “After this trip you owe me dozens. In fact, I think I’ll make you take me to Space Camp. Your treat.”

“Space Camp? That’s for kids, isn’t it?”

“They have an adult program as well. It’s three days of space training including a gravity trainer and a G3 centrifuge.”

“Fine, but if we accidentally get launched into space don’t expect Kate Capshaw to rescue you.” Shawn shucked the watch and passed it to Gus. “Also, don’t expect her to help you escape the Temple of Doom. You’d be better off partnering with a thirteen year old Vietnamese boy.”

“Goodbye, Shawn.”

While Gus led Juliet off toward the reception area Shawn had a quick tete-a-tete with Tim, who was DJ that evening. As he returned to Lassiter’s side Frank Sinatra began singing *Under My Skin*. Shawn stepped in close and, already moving in time to the music, and put a hand on Lassiter’s hip.

“You going to keep your word, Lassie?”

“I didn’t make any promises.” Lassiter looked toward the door.

“True,” Shawn nodded. “But I think you’re the kind of guy who’ll keep them anyway.” He took Lassiter by the hand and pulled him gently to the dance floor. Lassiter made a pretense of resistance, but followed. He took Shawn by the left hand and put his other hand on Shawn’s hip, leaving half a foot between them.

Shawn laughed.

“This isn’t the Rydell high school dance.” He stepped in until they were nearly touching.

Frank Sinatra was singing “I’d sacrifice anything come what might, for the sake of having you near.”

“You can actually dance,” Lassiter said a few moments later, making no effort to disguise the surprise in his voice.

“I learned while working as a lifeguard on Pacific Emerald Cruises out of San Pedro. You should be glad I let you lead.”

“I’m taller than you are,” Lassiter said. “I’m supposed to lead.” *In as much as the rules of dancing take this situation into account at all.* Lassiter’s eyes scanned the dance floor. All the dancers were same-sex couples. Nobody was looking at them. As much as he had imagined various scenarios of physical intimacy with Spencer, he hadn’t expected any of them would feel this normal.

“Oh man!” Shawn said. “This is like Rush.”

“The band?” Lassiter frowned. *This song is nothing like Rush. Although Time Stands Still is sort of slow.*

“No. Good God, no,” Shawn said. “I mean the movie with Jason Patric and Jennifer Jason Lee. Two undercover cops trying to bring down a drug kingpin become addicted to heroin.”

“What exactly are you getting at?” Lassiter raised an eyebrow.

“You’re the heroin. Or maybe this is the heroin.” Shawn pulled him closer and ground playfully against his hips.

Frank Sinatra ended and Tim segued seamlessly into a second slow song. Lassiter and Shawn continued dancing. Lassiter hooked a finger under Shawn’s necklace and rolled the beads between his fingers they were mostly brown with a few white ones here and

there.

“Does it mean something?” he asked.

“Yeah.” Shawn smiled. “I add a bead for every cop I seduce. The white ones stand for detectives.”

“Spencer....”

“Hey, you should see the other eight feet of necklace I’ve got at home. I’m thinking I might macramé it into a wall hanging or a beaded sweater.”

“Are you even half serious?”

“I only have eyes for you, Lassikins.” He rested his head on Lassiter’s chest. Lassiter pulled him closer and held him tightly.

“If you don’t mind, I’m just going to take a few minutes and pretend you really mean that.”

Two slow songs later Shawn and Lassiter were standing by the wall again. Shawn’s arm was touching Lassiter’s

“Let’s go to your room,” Shawn said.

“Why?” Lassiter was pretty sure he knew why.

“How clear a picture do you want me to draw? I could do a puppet show, but I’ll need some time to construct the props.”

“I’d love to. But I can’t.” It was possibly the most honest thing he’d said to Spencer since the brownie incident.

“Sure you can.”

“No, I can’t. And nothing you can say is going to change my mind, Spencer.”

Shawn relaxed his mind and thought back over their interactions together. Lassie was right. There was nothing he could say. And that was the answer.

## Chapter 6

It was after midnight and Lassiter was lying on his bed, fully dressed. The only light was coming from the bedside reading lamp. His body was tired, but his mind was still wide awake. He was having regrets. Sometimes his life seemed like it all took place under a glaring spotlight. He was tired of feeling as if his personal life had to be vetted by his co-workers, his boss, his mother, or the nebulous entity of public opinion. If anything were going to happen between him and Spencer, Casa de Orgullo was the ideal location for it.

It was secluded, and gay was the norm here. If it didn't go well the whole thing could be left at Cachuma Lake and written off as an isolated incident. And if it went well.... He didn't know what that would mean. Dancing with Spencer had felt right. And it had been a long time since he'd had sex.

His thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door. He opened the drawer of the nightstand, where his Glock rested in its vault, just in case.

"It's open," he called.

Shawn entered, closing the door behind him.

"Oh, it's you." Lassiter breathed a sigh of relief, then felt a new surge of anxiety. "What do you want, Spencer?"

Shawn didn't answer. He just stood there, with his back against the door, looking at him.

His silence was a little unnerving. When was Spencer ever silent? He didn't even need to be asked questions. He just went on and on, regardless of whether people could even follow the thread of his tangled thoughts. Spencer's only answer to his question was to lock the door.

Shawn was 80% sure he'd made the right decision. This thing between him and Lassiter wasn't logical, which was why he couldn't reason Lassiter into bed. What they had was chemical, and, though he was hesitant to admit it, emotional. He needed to just keep quiet and let their sexual chemistry do the work. He was used to talking and charming his way into people's pants. Trust Lassiter to be the exception.

Lassiter rose from the bed and walked over slowly, noting that Spencer's eyes never left his own. He thought of a dozen things to say to make him leave. But found himself simply repeating his original question, sure that he already knew the answer.

"What do you want?"

Shawn couldn't tell if his plan was working for Lassiter, but it was certainly driving him crazy. He could feel the blood rushing through his body as he stood under the full force of Lassiter's ice blue gaze. He was half hard just thinking about what might happen if Lassiter let it. The detective was standing so close now, Shawn could smell his aftershave. He was so tempted to speak that he forced his teeth down onto his tongue, holding it still.

Wait for it, he told himself. Wait for it....

Lassiter was intrigued. He could tell that Shawn was struggling against his own nature not to tease, joke, wheedle and plead. Part of him wondered how long Shawn could go without speaking, and part of him wished he would break now, say anything to release him from the spell their shared gaze seemed to put on him. But whereas his rational voice was normally the dominant one, his emotional voice was suddenly more insistent.

*I don't want to die wondering what this might have been.*

He stepped forward, placed a hand on the door behind Shawn's head, and leaned in, smelling the warmth of his skin and the scent of whatever it was he put in his hair. He moved within inches of Spencer's mouth, and just hung there, leaving it to Spencer to make the next move. Despite all his flirtation, Lassiter had never been sure how far Spencer was prepared to take their attraction. But at least now he knew how far he was willing to go.

Shawn pulled Lassiter forward, letting his kiss speak for him. Lassiter responded, and Shawn pushed firmly against the small of his back, anxious to move past the part where Lassiter usually put a stop to things. He felt a surge of panic and disappointment as Lassiter leaned back again, just far enough to break the kiss. Shawn's breath was coming in pants and the urge to speak was almost overwhelming, but he bit his lip and stuck to the plan.

"Relax Spencer," Lassiter said. "I'm not going anywhere this time." He grabbed Shawn's shoulders and flipped him around, and pushed him chest-first against the door. He leaned into him, enjoying the feeling of Shawn's body against his. Shawn moaned as Lassiter's lips descended upon his neck, licking, kissing, then sucking his neck, bruising the skin.

He grasped Shawn's erection through the denim of his jeans. His breath was coming in shallow gasps. Lassiter unbuttoned the jeans and slowly pulled the zipper down. He slid his hand inside, beneath the band of underwear and was momentarily taken aback.

Shawn's pubic hair had been trimmed down to stubble. It felt clean, exposed, and brazen. He ran his fingers over the length of Shawn's cock, which swelled in response. He grabbed Shawn's hand and pulled it behind him, almost in an arm lock, then pushed the hand against his own cock, now straining at his pants.

"Is this what you want, Spencer?" he asked, his voice low and fierce.

Shawn could only whimper his assent. His legs felt like Jell-o and he clung to the wall trying to remain upright.

"Then I want you on the bed. Now." *Before I change my mind.*

Lassiter stepped back, releasing Shawn, who quickly scampered to the bed, doffed his shoes and socks and pulled off his t-shirt. He'd never seen Shawn this compliant before. He felt a surge of triumph, yet it was also a little unnerving.

"It's okay to speak," he said. "I need to know if you're...you're really going to do this, aren't you?" he asked. He wiped a sweaty palm on his pants as he approached the bed.

"If you're cool with that." Shawn, kneeling on the bed, plunged his hands into his pockets and began pulling out condoms and tiny tubes of lube.

Lassiter's eyes widened. "Did you bring all that with you?" What kind of a weekend had Spencer been expecting?

"No. Of course not. Timmy's got baskets of them at reception. Also," he pulled out a small handful of wrapped candies, "mints!"

Lassiter knelt on the bed and they resumed their kiss. Shawn's hands fumbled with the buttons of Lassiter's shirt, finally pulling it free. He ran his hand across his chest, feeling the rough hairs under his fingertips. He pulled back from Lassiter's mouth and descended upon his nipple, licking it into a tight point. He grasped it in his teeth and gently pulled, then released. Lassiter groaned then swore.

"Bad?" Shawn asked.

"No," Lassiter growled. "Good. Very good." He kissed Shawn again, enjoying the unfamiliar feeling of stubble against his lips.

Shawn, feeling fairly sure now that Lassiter wasn't backing down, felt free to speak.

"Where's your gun?" he asked breathlessly.

"Why?"

"I want you to wear it. The holster, the gun, the whole thing."

"Really?" Lassiter's heart pounded harder against his ribcage. "I mean, I've always wanted...do you mean it?"

"Absofuckinglutely."

*You don't have to ask me twice.*

Lassiter pulled the drawer of his nightstand open all the way, spun the combination on the gun vault, and removed his Glock 17. He removed the clip and checked the chamber before putting it into his holster. If this was why Shawn was here, fine. Lassiter didn't care. At least, he didn't care enough to stop. It wouldn't be the first time he'd worn his holster without a shirt on under it.

Shawn straddled him and licked the leather holster. It was one of the sexiest things Lassiter had ever seen. Shawn reached down and unbuttoned Lassiter's pants.

"No," Lassiter said, grabbing his wrist. Then, seeing the disappointment cross Shawn's face, he added. "Not yet." He pushed Shawn onto the mattress, and held him there.

"Strip." Lassiter was used to giving orders, but his experience in that regard didn't extend to the bedroom. Telling Spencer what to do felt reassuringly familiar; having him actually do it was new territory. Shawn pulled his jeans and underwear off and lay there panting, flushed, and stiff. Lassiter looked down at him. The tables were turned now that Shawn was the one naked and he was mostly clothed. He marvelled at how young, effortlessly athletic, and relaxed Shawn looked. He didn't exhibit any of the vulnerability or nervousness Lassiter had felt.

*Of course he's not high as a kite and terrified of losing his job, he reasoned.*

He sat on the edge of the bed and ran his fingers gently down Shawn's cheek and across the planes of his jaw. Shawn turned his head and kissed his hand. It was unexpectedly sweet. His touch trailed across his smooth chest and down his stomach to where his cock lay exposed and firm, trailing wetness across his abs.

Lassiter grabbed one of the packages of lube and tore the end off it with his teeth. He pushed the thick liquid out into his palm and then ran his slick hand down Shawn's cock. He moaned and thrust his hips forward. Lassiter tightened his fist and began pumping slowly. With his other hand he pushed the lubricant lower, across Shawn's balls and down. He felt his body yield to him, and he pressed forward, forcing him open. Shawn gasped as the fingers entered him. Lassiter marvelled at the feeling of the muscles clamped around him. Shawn felt soft, hot, and impossibly tight. For the first time since Shawn had entered the bedroom, he began to have second thoughts.

"You've done this before, haven't you?" Lassiter asked.

"With you? Nope. Unless dreams count. But if this were a dream we'd be doing this on Space Mountain."

"You know what I mean. You've had sex with a man before, right?"

"A couple of times. Why? Does that bother you?"

"No. I was just worried. Wondering."

"I'm guessing you haven't done this before," Shawn said.

"No. But I can figure out the basics. Just let me know if things are moving too fast for you."

"Actually, Shawn said, "if we could switch gears for a minute," He sat up and gently pushed Lassiter back against the pillows. "There is something I wanted to do first." He opened Lassiter's pants and pulled the band of his shorts down past his balls. Shawn glided his tongue along the underside of Lassiter's cock. Lassiter groaned and ran his fingers into Shawn's hair. He was torn between wanting to close his eyes and submit to the sensation and wanting to watch Shawn's every move. His mouth was warm, wet, and talented, and he could feel the tension building in his balls. He pushed back on Spencer's head with the palm of his hand.

"Enough." He stripped off the remainder of his clothes. Spencer opened the condom and rolled it down over Lassiter's firm erection. He opened another package of lube and rubbed it over the condom, slicking it from end to tip. "Get on your back." Shawn threw himself back onto the mattress and Lassiter shifted, pressing down against him. He kissed along the roughness of his stubbled neck to his swollen lips. This was what he wanted. Spencer—alive, passionate, and willingly surrendering to him.

Shawn grasped Lassiter's cock and slowly guided it into him. They both gasped as he entered him—Shawn because of the intensity of being stretched so far, and Lassiter because of the hot tightness enveloping him. Lassiter hesitated, afraid to push too hard, too fast.

"I appreciate the concern," Shawn said. "But I'm not a delicate flower. Rough is good."

He wrapped his legs around Lassiter's waist, pulling him forward.

Lassiter had never had what he would describe as rough sex. The sex he'd had before he got married had been hesitant and conventional. Making love to Victoria, he had always been gentle, and romantic. Sex with Berry had been more athletic and experimental, but still tender. None of this experience seemed to fit the current situation.

"What I really need right now," Shawn whispered in his ear, "is the sexual equivalent of you slamming me into the station wall."

"No problem." Lassiter smiled. *That, I can do.*

He drove his hips forward, thinking of all the times Spencer had pranced around the station like he owned the place, flirting with anything with a pulse, flashing his stomach and hips every time he went into one of his 'visions,' and constantly touching him in inappropriate ways. He gathered the frustration and pushed it all into every thrust. It felt angry, and brutal, yet liberating and amazingly hot. Shawn, writhing beneath him, looked debauched and beautiful. He realized that he had been wrong about his attraction to Spencer. He hadn't wanted to make love to him. He'd wanted to possess him, like this.

*No wonder I couldn't figure out where this thing with Spencer was going, he thought. This is a place I've never been.*

Lassiter's strokes were deep, determined, and relentless. Shawn struggled to stave off the inevitable. But the rhythm, the heat from Lassiter's rigid cock, and the aggression of their sex was pushing him quickly over the edge. His legs were shaking with the effort. Lassiter clamped a mouth to one of Shawn's nipples, sucking and biting at it. Shawn groaned and arched his back. He could feel the orgasm building, threatening to overtake him at every thrust.

"Oh God, Lassie," Shawn said, "You're killing me here. I can't hold back much longer."

Lassiter leaned in and kissed his neck.

"Then don't," he hissed through clenched teeth. He wrapped a fist around Shawn's cock, stiff and wet between them, and pumped it hard and fast. Shawn came, spaying across his stomach and chest. Lassiter surrendered to the sensations of Shawn's muscles clamping around him.

"Shawn," Lassiter growled, using his first name as a swear word. He surged forward, burying himself deeply as he came. Shawn clung to his back, sobbing and gasping. Lassiter rolled off and collapsed beside him, helplessly awash in waves of aftershock. He reached out and held Shawn's hand, their intertwined fingers their only contact. It was a few minutes before either of them could speak again.

"Remember before, when you asked what I wanted from you?" Shawn raised their hands and squeezed Lassiter's hand firmly. "This," he said. "This is what I want."

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The sound of someone talking roused Shawn from a dream about golfing with Chevy Chase and Scott Howard, Michael J. Fox's character from Teen Wolf. He had expected

to awake to an empty bed—possibly an empty room. At the very least, he expected to encounter a Lassiter who was embarrassed, coldly distant, and in the first throws of a heterosexual freak out. So it was a surprise to awaken to find the detective still in bed, sitting up, with his arm wrapped possessively around his shoulder.

“Hey,” Shawn said, smiling tentatively. “I didn’t think you’d still be here.”

“You were using me as a pillow,” Lassiter said, smiling back. “Where could I go?”

“Seriously, Lassie. I figured you’d have bolted from the room the moment you woke up. I pictured you running through the woods by now, screaming ‘I’m not gay.’”

“I’m not gay,” Lassiter took a sip from the bottle of water he kept on the nightstand.

“Well, maybe sort of gay. Gayish. We can talk about all that later.”

“Will there be a later?” Shawn asked.

“Why wouldn’t there be?”

“I didn’t know if you’d want a repeat. I figured once you’d got me out of your system I’d be getting the ‘like you as a friend’ speech.”

“I don’t do one night stands, Shawn.” Lassiter’s brow wrinkled. “Unless that’s all you were looking for.” It was a question.

“And give up all this?” Shawn ran a hand over Lassiter’s chest and down across his abs. “Not a chance. “That weightlifting and swimming has really paid off. You’re totally buff.”

“How do you know I’ve been—” He cut himself off and turned to look at Shawn. Sex or no sex, he refused to play into Spencer’s psychic game. “Forget it. I’ve still got work to do. Level with me,” he said, making his serious face. “You don’t think this theft case is closed, do you?”

“If closed means buying into the theory that Rebecca Martin killed herself, then no, I don’t.”

“You still suspect Becker.”

“Because she did it. I can’t prove it, but I know I’m right.” Shawn wondered if he should just tell Lassiter about her ransacking his wallet. Her prints would be all over it. At the time it had just seemed like so many other clues he used to support his psychic visions. It was suggestive, certainly, but it didn’t connect her with the missing watch. Technically, they still couldn’t prove she’d ever had it. Shawn still felt a nagging sense of guilt. *If I’d told him about her searching my wallet, he wondered, would Rebecca Martin still be alive?*

“You might not have to prove it,” Lassiter said. “The coroner just called. You’ll never guess what he found,”

Shawn put two fingers to his temple and furrowed his brow.

“Ummm... Rebecca Martin was killed first, and then strung up in the closet.”

“That was a lucky guess.” Lassiter got out of bed and went into the bathroom. “Becker’s on duty at the spa until 4:00p.m.,” he called back to Shawn. “I’m going to search her room. I want you and O’Hara to keep her busy. Be careful. If she’s our guy then she’s already killed once.”

“No problem.” Shawn left the comfortable sheets behind and followed Lassiter. “Of course this whole case could have been solved yesterday if you’d taken my advice.” He regretted it as soon as he’d spoken. He didn’t want to foist his own guilt onto Lassie. When had the detective ever done what Spencer suggested anyway—at least on a case? “I’m sorry,” he said. “I didn’t mean that.”

Lassiter frowned. Shawn was right. He should have searched Becker’s cabin yesterday. If he was honest about it, he’d resisted suspecting her because he hated the idea of Spencer being so damn right all the time.

“You’re right, Spencer.” He ran a hand across Shawn’s cheek then leaned in and kissed him. “It would have been much better if we’d solved the case yesterday and gone home, avoiding all of ...this.”

“I didn’t say that,” Spencer said, grinning. “I’d hate to have missed that amazing dance last night.”

## Chapter 7

Shawn entered the spa. The lights were on and the music was playing. Evan lay on the reclining chair, wearing a chemical peel mask. Hearing Shawn's entry, he said, "That was fast."

"Where's Tanya?" Shawn asked.

Evan peeled a slice of cucumber off his eye and turned his head. "Oh it's you. You literally just missed her. She's getting a special moisturizer for me."

Shawn quickly scanned his eyes over the room. It was deserted, and none of the cupboards looked large enough to conceal a person.

*Damn.*

Then he saw something that made him use a stronger swear word. It was a copy of *The Courier* lying face-down on a stack of magazines by Tanya's chair. Shawn didn't need to open it to know it was the copy with the story of Rodney Gibson's arrest and Lassiter's photo in it. He had his own copy at home. He flashed back to the love letters in Tanya's room. They'd been signed Rod. Tanya had been talking to her boyfriend, Rodney Gibson. This meant that Tanya knew not only that Lassiter was really a cop, but that he was the cop who had put her boyfriend behind bars.

"You might want to rinse that peel off now, Evan," Shawn said, turning for the door. "Tanya's not coming back." He ran out of the spa and down the hall to the reception area. O'Hara and Gus were there.

"Where the hell were you last night?" Gus hissed at him. "And if I already know, then I don't want to know. You know?"

"Forget that. A psychic flashbomb just went off. We're in trouble. Tanya's not at work," he said breathlessly. "And she knows Lassie's a cop."

"I'll warn Lassiter," O'Hara said. She whipped out her cellphone. After a few moments she closed it again. "There's no answer. That's not good."

Just then Tim came staggering in, holding a bloody towel to his head.

"Detective Lassiter..." Tim, obviously in pain, spoke through gritted teeth.

"What's wrong, Timmy?" Shawn asked anxiously. "Is Lassie in trouble?"

Tim fell heavily into an armchair. "Tanya's got him," he said. "I saw him enter her cabin and thought I ought to be there in case he found anything. She cracked me over the head with something really heavy." He pulled the towel away and looked at it anxiously, as if

expecting to see brain. “When I came to, they were both gone.”

O’Hara took a look at the head wound. “You’ll be okay,” she said. “But get to a doctor soon for some stitches and to check for internal bleeding, and in the meantime, don’t go to sleep.” O’Hara pulled her gun from her shoulder bag. “I’m going to check out the cabin. They might still be around.”

“What’s the quickest way out of here?” Shawn asked.

“She’s got a car,” Tim said.

“I’ll get the Sheriff’s department to set up a roadblock,” O’Hara said. She headed out the door.

Shawn was pretty sure that a roadblock was too obvious. He ran his mind back over everything he’d seen since arriving. Then he remembered the boathouse.

“I’m sensing a boathouse,” Shawn said for Tim’s benefit. “Gus, come with me.” Gus and Shawn ran down the terrace to the lake. Raj and a small handful of GORN members were congregated on the dock, holding waterskis and looking bewildered.

“Did Tanya come through here?” Shawn asked.

Raj gestured to the dock. “Yeah. She and Booker just took off with our boat. I was in the middle of a lesson here. What’s going on?”

“Tanya’s a thief and a murderer, and now she’s kidnapped a cop,” Gus said. He looked across the lake, where the waves from the speedboat were still visible, rippling over the surface. “Maybe the Sheriff’s department can send a boat.”

“They’d never get here in time,” Shawn said. He turned to Raj. “Is there another speedboat around here?”

“Mine’s in the boathouse,” Raj said. “It’s got three times the horsepower. If you hurry, you might catch up with her.” Gus and Shawn hurried to the boathouse and in moments were following the wake of the stolen speedboat.

“Maybe she’s just going to confess her feelings for him, like Candace did with Crockett,” Shawn yelled over the whine of the engine.

“Another Meatballs reference?” Gus yelled back, “At a time like this? Really Shawn?”

“A time like this?” Shawn protested, “This is an awesome time!”

“Are you out of your mind? The man you’re crazy about is being held by someone we know is a cold blooded killer. How is that awesome?”

“Okay, that part’s not so awesome. But this! Gus, we’re in a high-speed boat chase on the open water.”

“Open water refers to the ocean. This is a lake.”

“Don’t ruin this moment, Gus. We’re rocking it Miami Vice style.”

“I will not be Tubbs for you, Shawn.”

“I thought you wanted to be Philip Michael Thomas.”

“Fifth grade was a long time ago.”

“How about being Jamie Foxx?”

Gus’s brow wrinkled in thought. “Maybe. He was damn good in Ray and in Ali.”

“And I always enjoyed his work in *Booty Call*,” Shawn said. He grabbed a pair of binoculars and scanned the lake ahead of them.

“There she is!” he pointed to a spot on the lake. With the naked eye the boat could just be seen, but was getting larger with every passing moment as their superior horsepower propelled them forward. Pull alongside her, as close as you can.”

“Are you out of your mind?” Gus yelled. “If we hit her at this speed we could lose control and flip.”

“Gus, please. She’s got Lassie.”

With the binoculars Shawn could now see Lassiter’s limp form crumpled on the deck. Gus manoeuvred the speedboat as close as he dared. Shawn edged his way onto the gunwale. Lassiter was motionless, but Shawn could see him breathing. Water was spraying across the boat, making it slippery. If he didn’t jump soon he knew he might topple into the water. Releasing his grip on the cockpit, Shawn pushed off the gunwale as hard as he could toward the second speedboat, not caring where he landed. He smashed heavily onto the padded side seating of Tanya’s craft. He wanted to check on Lassiter, but there was no time. Tanya had already abandoned the wheel and whirled around, pointing Lassiter’s gun at him.

*Great! Trust Lassie to bring his gun to search a cabin.*

She was unsteady on her feet as the boat bucked over the waves. His keen eyes noticed the safety was on. He lunged forward. Shawn grabbed her by the wrist and they struggled for possession of the gun. She was surprisingly strong. They ricocheted off the cabin. He smashed her wrist against the port rail and Lassiter’s gun flew off into the lake. Enraged,

Tanya kicked him backwards with her legs. His head smashed against something hard and he fell, losing his grip on her. His hair felt wet and blackness began to seep in at the edges of his vision every time he tried to sit up. Tanya grinned and moved toward him, now holding a very sharp boat knife. Shawn's mind panicked. Maybe he could hold her off with his feet once she got close enough, if he could stay conscious.

"Hey!" Shawn saw Lassiter rise up behind Tanya, "You leave my boyfriend the hell alone."

Tanya turned, knife in hand, and was quickly dropped by Lassiter's strong right cross.

"Sweet moves Lassie," Shawn murmured as he collapsed, exhausted, where he lay. "It looks like those cardio boxing classes have paid off too."

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Back at the main building, everyone had gathered in the lounge. Tanya Becker, looking surly and bedraggled, was handcuffed and awaiting the arrival of a transport car. Lassiter was holding an icepack to his head and drinking a hot cup of coffee. The members of GORN filled the available plush seating and a few had brought chairs in from the dining room.

"All right, ladies and gentlemen, listen up." Shawn clapped his hands together for attention. "Lassie has an announcement."

"My name," he said, "is Carlton Lassiter, and I'm not a history professor. I'm the head detective for the Santa Barbara police department."

"Hot," Clark said, grinning. "Is he a cop too?" He pointed at Shawn.

"He's a psychic detective," Gus explained, "but we work closely with the Santa Barbara Police Department." He gave Clark a Psych business card. "Here's our card. We do private cases as well."

"I asked them to come here," Tim said, looking malevolently at Tanya and touching his sore head. "Well—I asked the police to come. I didn't ask for a psychic."

"You didn't have to, Timmy," Shawn said. "I picked up on your dilemma psychically. Your aura was projecting so high it was like the bat signal."

"Mr. Rodriguez asked us to look into a series of thefts, the most recent being a Patek Philippe watch. My partner, Detective O'Hara and I arranged to come here undercover and identify the thief."

"Hold the phone, Lassie," Shawn put a hand on his shoulder and let it linger. "You've got great abs, but you suck at this mystery wrap-up thing. You've started waaaay too late in

the story. We need to go back to a year ago.”

“A year ago?” Lassiter looked at Shawn, then quickly looked away. He was sure everyone would be able to see the familiarity in his gaze.

“Yes. That’s when Rebecca Milton went away for six months. She told everyone that she was visiting her sick grandmother, but in reality she was in jail for shoplifting.”

“So Rebecca was the thief?” Tim asked.

“Yes and no,” Shawn said. “She was a kleptomaniac. That’s someone who steals things, not someone who sleeps with everybody. The important thing is, during her six months in county jail, she made a friend.”

“Tanya Becker.” O’Hara said.

“Exactly. Her cellmate, Tanya, just got out of jail a month ago. She looked up Rebecca and pressured her into getting her a job at the resort.”

“I should have known something was up,” Tim said. “Rebecca was a little weird about recommending Tanya.” The woman in question looked at the floor.

“Is this the part where you remove her rubber mask and reveal her true identity?” Clark asked.

“Clark, please.” Shawn said. “This is my wrap-up. I make the jokes.” He walked over and put a hand on Tanya’s shoulder. She glared at him and he quickly pulled it away. “Becker was a great manicurist,” he continued, “but a terrible esthetician. It may take weeks for my pores to recover. And that unattended peel could have cooked poor Evan’s face off like a raspberry-scented wildfire.”

A butch woman near the fireplace raised her hand.

“Yes, you in the crewcut. You have a question?”

“Why did Tanya want to work at a gay resort in the middle of nowhere? I mean, no offense to Mr. Rodriguez, it’s a great getaway. But why did she want to be here? She’s not a lesbian—I can tell—and it’s not like she was hiding from the police.”

“She wanted a place for her and her boyfriend, Gibson, to lie low after their jewel heist,” Lassiter said.

“But then Detective Lassiter arrested Rodney Gibson,” O’Hara said.

“That’s right,” Shawn slapped a hand to his ear, as if using a ghostly cellphone. “If you check her cellphone records I think you’ll find out that Rebecca Martin was the one who

told you where Gibson was going to strike. Rebecca didn't like confrontation. So she called in an anonymous tip. No robbery, no need for Gibson to come to the resort."

"She was protecting the resort," Tim said, smiling. "That's so her."

"Gibson needed \$50,000 to make his bond," Shawn continued, "I can see her now, with my psychic wayback vision." He stumbled, as if the vision was overpowering. "Tanya started stealing, trying to build up the needed cash. She figured that even if anybody did notice she could pin it all on Rebecca and her sticky fingers." He fell to his knees in front of Lassiter who looked around helplessly. "Once expensive stuff started to go missing Tim got suspicious and called in Lassie here." He stared up at Lassiter and ran a hand up his leg. Lassiter stepped back and crossed his arms, trying to look serious and professional, and not at all like someone who had slept with Shawn the night before.

"My open smash and grab case," O'Hara said, "happened just down the street from the nail salon where Becker used to work. I bet we can match the blood found at the scene with hers."

"Oh, she's got bigger worries than being booked for a smash and grab," Lassiter said. "How about murder, assaulting an officer, aggravated assault, kidnapping, and grand theft. Oh, and taking an officer's weapon." Lassiter had to admit that he was more upset about losing his favourite Glock than he was about being blindsided with a piece of Inuit sculpture the second he walked into Becker's cabin.

"Since she hit me over the head and stole from my guests," Tim said, "am I legally obliged to pay her for this week?" Gus looked apologetically at Tim.

"Probably."

"Why did she kill Rebecca?" Clark asked. "I thought they were friends."

"People like Becker don't have friends," Lassiter said. "They just have people they can use. Becker figured out we were on to her and planted one of the stolen items in her room. Maybe Rebecca caught her. Tanya killed her and tried to pass it off as suicide."

"That's not true," Tanya said, visibly upset now. "We were friends." She looked at Lassiter though teary eyes—real or fake he couldn't tell. "She was the one who brought me that newspaper with your picture in it. She was going to rat on me if I didn't return the watch."

"So you killed her," Lassiter said grimly. "Nice friendship." He waked over to Shawn, still sitting on the floor, and reached out a hand. "Get up, Spencer."

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Tanya Becker had been taken away in a squad car, Tim Rodriguez had been driven to the

hospital for a CAT scan, and the majority of the GORN members had gone into the dining room for lunch. Lassiter sat in a wicker chair contemplating whether he could squeeze any more fishing in before driving back to Santa Barbara. Clark wandered over to him, looking slightly sheepish.

“Hey,” Clark said, removing a hand from his pocket and pushing his glasses back into position on his nose.

“Hey,” Lassiter responded warily. One could never tell how people would react after an undercover assignment. Some got really angry when they found out they’d been deceived. Bonnie, a former co-worker at Mrs. Fields, still wouldn’t speak to him when he went to the mall.

“I just wanted to say goodbye to Booker,” Clark said. “I realize he’s a fictional character, but I felt like I got to know him a little this weekend.” He laughed. “It figures that the guy I have the most in common with on this trip was just pretending to be gay.”

“Well,” Lassiter took a deep breath and spoke in a low voice. “I was pretending to be a history professor but the rest of it was pretty much real.”

“So our conversation on the dock. You weren’t just making all that up? The divorce and the boyfriend? That wasn’t just ‘mirroring the suspect’ or whatever you call it?”

“Nope.”

“Then you really are gay?”

“Gayish.” Lassiter glanced over at Shawn then back to Clark. Shawn caught the look and came over. Clark smiled at Shawn as he approached.

“So I’m guessing you’re the consultant he’s dating?”

“You’re telling people?” Shawn looked at Lassiter with astonishment. “I didn’t think we were at the telling people stage. Wow. At this rate I’ll forget our anniversary and you’ll have dumped me before we get our bags in the car. Who else knows?”

“I’m not telling people,” Lassiter said defensively. “I just told Clark. It was part of my cover.”

“Sleeping with me or telling people about it?”

“I said you were my boyfriend. You’re the one telling people about the...other thing.”

“Well it’s nice to meet you, Shawn,” Clark said. “Meet you again, I guess. Booker—Detective Lassiter—was right when he said you were good-looking.”

“You said I was good looking?” Shawn smiled at Lassiter.

“And brilliant,” Clark added. Lassiter’s face flushed. “Well, I’ll let you get back to work.” He pulled out a business card and passed it to Lassiter. “I appreciated you listening to my problems this weekend. If you ever need to talk more about yours just give me a call.”

“You know he’s flirting with you, right?” Shawn asked, watching Clark’s retreating back.

“He’s seeing someone,” Lassiter said. *And so am I, I guess.*

Shawn looked at Lassiter, a wide grin plastered across his face. “You called me your boyfriend,” he said. “On the boat, and just now, to Clark.”

“The thing on the boat was just me making a point. I mean, I thought we were dating now, but I don’t mean to imply it’s a unilateral decision.”

“Sexy. You make dating sound like trade negotiations with Red China. No wonder you’re single.”

“Am I single?”

“I’ll let you know after we’ve had sex a few more times.” The glimmer in Shawn’s eyes suggested he was joking, but with Shawn it was hard to tell.

“That’s not how I work, Spencer,” Lassiter said flatly. If there was anything he disliked, it was ambiguity about his romantic relationships. “I will not audition for you. I told you, I don’t do one night stands. As far as I’m concerned, we’re dating now. Deal with it or dump me.”

“I love this forceful thing you’ve got going, Lassie. It’s very virile.” He ran a hand along Lassiter’s cheek. “You are so not a sno cone machine.”

“That’s... good to know.”

“So, now that it’s official, I’m planning on telling Gus. You should probably tell Jules because it’ll spoil his chances with her if he knows something this huge and she doesn’t.”

“Chances with her?” Lassiter looked across at where Gus and O’Hara were engrossed in conversation with one another. *So that’s how it is with those two. That explains a lot, actually.*

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Shawn had planned to tell Gus about his new romance on the way back to Santa Barbara, but had gotten sidetracked into a discussion about which mechanical devices, apart from

the Pontiac Trans Am, could be improved by adding a computer that spoke in the voice of William Daniels. Once back in the Psych office, Shawn could hold off no longer.

“I slept with Lassie,” he said.

“I see.” Gus opened his laptop and became immersed in computer work.

When Gus didn’t respond further Shawn added, “Seriously. We’re officially dating. A month from now this will be our one month anniversary and I’ll need your help picking out an appropriate gift. I’m thinking gun oil.”

“Uh huh.” Gus’s gaze remained transfixed on his computer screen.

“What, that’s it? No big explosion of disbelief? No rants about how it’s all a bad idea that’ll end in tears? I at least expected you to stick your fingers in your ears and go ‘la-la la-la Shawn is still talking but I am not listening to him.’”

“I can’t discuss this with you right now, Shawn. I’m busy.”

“What’s more important than this astounding development? I’m kind of up for a little round of ‘I told you so.’ Because I did.”

“I’m shopping for apartments in other cities,” Gus said, looking at Shawn with cold accusation in his eyes. “Obviously Santa Barbara is no longer a safe place to live. Lassiter has a gun. Admittedly, one less since you threw his Glock into the lake, but still. The man has a lot of guns.”

“Don’t be ridiculous!” Shawn said in his best Mypos accent. “Lassie’s not going to hurt you.”

“Not now. But he might once you tear out his heart leave it to melt in the sun like an abandoned sno cone.”

“Gus, buddy. Why are you hating on my hot manlove?”

“Really, Shawn. I’d love to see you date someone—anyone—for more than a few weeks. But you’ve chosen the one man who can put us out of business, arrest us for fraud, and kill us. And not necessarily in that order.”

“I know. Doesn’t that just make it twice as hot? And I haven’t even told you about the handcuffs yet.”

Gus held up a hand “If this is really happening, we need to establish some ground rules, Shawn. One: No telling me any details that evoke any images of Lassiter doing anything sexual. Two: No doing anything sexual with him here in the office, whether I’m here or not. Three: No making...”

“You’re pretty fast with this list, dude. How long have you been working on it?”

Gus’s brow furrowed slightly. “I have a printed copy if you prefer.”

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Lassiter looked along the street toward the finish line of the Law Enforcement Torch Run, an annual fundraiser for the Special Olympics. He wasn’t at all sorry to be nearing the end of it. He’d been up late with Shawn the night before and running ten kilometres with the Flying Pigs was the last thing he felt like doing on four hours of sleep. O’Hara and McNab made it feel worse with their knowing smiles and early-morning enthusiasm. He crossed the finish line with a feeling of relief rather than elation, despite having improved on last year’s time.

He walked to a picnic table and collapsed heavily onto the bench.

“Good run time this year.” Lassiter looked up, shielding his eyes. Although the speaker was just a dark shape against the sun he recognized it at once. In the three weeks since they returned from Cachuma Lake he’d gotten to know Shawn’s body well in a variety of lighting conditions.

“I didn’t think you’d be up for another couple of hours.” When he’d left for the run Shawn had been fast asleep, drooling into his pillow.

“Au contraire, Care Bear. I made you something.” Shawn handed him a small shiny package.

“What’s this?” The last time he’d held a foil package this small it had turned out to contain \$50,000 worth of heroin. He’d gotten his picture in The Courier that time, too.

“It’s for you, Lassipants. Happy anniversary.” Lassiter unwrapped the foil, revealing six dark chocolate brownies.

“Is this your idea of a joke, Spencer?”

“No, it’s my idea of a dessert. Isn’t it weird how dessert and desert are such similar words? I’m thinking of making something out of brownies, fruit and vanilla ice cream and calling it a dessert island. What do you think?”

“Isn’t that what a sundae is?”

“A sundae also has peanuts. My dessert can be enjoyed by the anaphylactic deathly-allergic-to-peanuts kids. Why do you never support my inventions?”

“What exactly is in these brownies?” Lassiter asked, sniffing at them suspiciously.

“I’m glad you asked. It’s got sugar, wheat flour, niacin, iron, thiamine mononitrate, riboflavin...”

“—do they contain a controlled substance?” he cut in.

“Definitely no. Psychic Scout’s honour. They contain only chocolatey goodness. And love, cooked at 100 watts for forty minutes.” Shawn sat next to him and leaned his head against the detective’s sweaty shoulder.

“Thanks.” Lassiter set the foil on the bench and stretched an arm along the picnic table behind Shawn. It was as close as he could bring himself to hug in public. “Why did you wish me happy anniversary? Our anniversary isn’t for another two weeks.” Having been married, Lassiter didn’t see much point in celebrating a one month anniversary. It made him feel like he was in junior high. But it was important to Shawn, in part because his relationships didn’t usually make it as far as a second date, so he was willing to play along.

“I’ve decided to count our anniversary from the brownie incident,” Shawn said. “That was the day of our first kiss, so this present is in honour of that. I have a non edible present for you at my place. Here’s a hint: it’s liquid and you rub it on something.”

“Is it used in foreplay?” Lassiter asked, thinking of massage lotion.

“If it is then I’d need to be wearing a bulletproof vest for the sex part. We could negotiate that later if you think it sounds hot.”

“Gun oil?” Lassiter’s eyes brightened. That was much better than massage lotion.

“You’ll have to wait until you unwrap it to know for sure.”

“Fair enough.” he said. “Listen, Shawn, the SBPD runners and I—“

“—you mean The Flying Pigs?” Shawn interjected.

“I mean the other officers in the Torch Run.”

“—whose group name is The Flying Pigs.”

“Are you going to let me get this out?” Lassiter narrowed his eyes at Shawn, an expression that wasn’t really as effective behind sunglasses.

“Shoot,” Shawn said. Then as if he had read Lassiter’s mind he added, “In a purely metaphorical sense of course.”

“We’re going to Willie’s Crab Shack for food and drinks. Did you want to join us?”

Guster too, if you like.”

“Buzz and Jules already invited us. But now that you’ve asked me that makes it a date, right?”

“Yes. Provided you abide by the date rules. No touching under the table. No referring to anything we do in bed. No using the fork to—”

“Why does everyone in my life now have a list of rules for me?” Shawn bemoaned. He stood and crossed his arms, pouting down at Lassiter.

“Maybe it’s because you can be so annoying.” Lassiter stood, grabbed his brownies, and began to walk to his car.

“Annoyingly sexy?” Shawn called, tailing along after him.

“You know what you do that I find really sexy?” Lassiter stopped, turned, and looked at him, a slight smile on his lips.

“What?” Shawn asked suspiciously.

“Staying silent.” Lassiter thought back to Shawn’s visit to his room at Casa de Orgullo. “That was hot.” He resumed walking to the car.

“Maybe you can read me my rights tonight and I’ll think about it.” Shawn caught up and fell into step beside him.

“Fine. But I have to make a stop on the way home.” Lassiter thought about Shawn’s one month anniversary present, hidden at Gus’ apartment. It had cost him fifteen dollars at Toys R Us and it promised to make delicious iced confections. He wondered if he should have bought the ball gag that he’d seen online instead. *No rush*, he reasoned. *Besides, there was always next month’s anniversary.*