A Dose of Healthy Disillusion

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A Dose of Healthy Disillusion

by awayfromterra

Summary

There was definitely something intimate about being talked down from a fake panic attack, but Shawn didn’t know why this would be something he would ever desire- especially from him, of all people.

“What can I do to help?” Lassiter prodded.

Or, Shawn has developed a worrying habit of pretending to be unwell to get closer to Lassiter. Meanwhile, local psychics are going missing.

(Formerly "Five times Shawn lies to be comforted by Lassiter, and one time he doesn't have to.")

Chapter 1

Shawn was not new to Lassiter's skepticism. In fact, he was its most common target. The man had never once given him much grace or benefit of the doubt– at least not in regards to his psychic abilities. Rightfully so, as they were complete bullshit. Overall, the resistance ranged from a mild annoyance to a significant hindrance in their shared casework.

Even with this challenge, Lassiter was a good person. That was clear. He always double-checked Shawn and Gus' theories in case they were actually onto something. Despite his usual role as opponent to Shawn's antics, he always put their case first. His moral compass was clearly defined; sharp lines carved in stone. These lines contrasted starkly with Shawn's own, which were traced in sand and seemed to blow around quite easily in the breeze of their circumstances.

Shawn hadn't considered that this pristine moral compass would extend to him personally, a man the detective clearly held slightly negative at best feelings for.

Until it did.

Without a doubt, it had been a rough day. Shawn barely managed to put the details of their case together until almost the last possible moment. Gus was actually the one to uncover the most crucial bit of evidence in the end, and Shawn had to give a fairly convincing performance of a 'vision' to convince the detectives that their outlandish theory held weight. That is to say, annoy them enough that they'd do anything including their jobs to shut him up.

He was almost more proud of his performance than his detective work. Pulling out all the stops, his usual flailing and yelling didn't prove shocking enough to sway them. Shawn had actually managed to make himself *cry*. Real, authentic tears. Well, 20% allergy season, 30% rubbing at his eyes with the back of his hands, and 50% pure, stagecraft-approved *tears.*

The mortified looks on his audience's faces were like pure dopamine after the detectives had dismissed his hypotheses for the entire case. Gus' eyes widened and Shawn didn't know whether it was in a complimentary or disgusted manner; his partner was usually unfazed by his 'visions.'

O'Hara, the softy, had immediately urged Lassiter and the Chief to reconsider his theory, receiving little pushback from either. When they'd left the room, Gus had simply raised his eyebrows with a hefty shake of his head. Morally disappointed, yet impressed. Perfect.

Offering to go on a coffee run while they awaited news of their suspects' detainment, Gus left Shawn to pace every hallway twice before resigning to an unlocked interrogation room.

It was a rough day indeed, well deserving of his current posture- slouched, seated in a metal chair, head in his hands. Shawn wasn't particularly upset about the way the case went; he knew they'd done their best and it was difficult evidence. The detectives were right to be skeptical of his ideas, no matter how correct he ended up.

He and Gus had been out late investigating and woken very early. He was exhausted. That was why he currently found himself twenty seconds from falling asleep, something that may have been a first in the history of police interrogation chairs.

Abruptly, the door creaked open, and in walked none other than Lassiter himself. The detective entered, staring at a clipboard. He shut the heavy door before freezing as Shawn peered up between his fingers. It appeared he hadn't seen him looking, which meant he could still pretend to be asleep and avoid interacting with him entirely.

A single footstep hit hard ground as Lassiter took a step forward. "Spencer?"

There went that plan.

Shawn scrubbed his face, clearing his throat. "Lassie?"

His voice cracked. That definitely placed the embarrassment cherry on top of the annoyance sundae he'd been served. Lassiter would certainly huff at the nickname before telling him to scram. Rightfully so; this was an interrogation room. One that probably needed preparing for an interrogation.

Instead, the pseudo-psychic was met with a frankly awkward expression and body language, with a touch of… could that be *concern* ? How tired must he look?

"...what are you doing in here?" Lassiter's voice intruded on his analysis.

Here it came. The sarcastic beratement that would precede telling him to leave. If Shawn wasn't so tired, he'd leave on his own volition to avoid the nuisance. Exhaustion and spite kept him glued in his position. If Lassiter wanted to bust him for trying to nap in a restricted area, he'd let him. "What does it look like I'm doing?"

Lassiter frowned, his eyes studying Shawn before he moved to sit across from him at the table. Shawn's annoyance spiked. Carlton felt so little control in his own life that he felt the need to power trip over such a small occurrence? Make it mirror a real interrogation? No, that was Shawn's limit. Just before he could move to get up, however—

"Are you… okay?"

With those words, Shawn's mind reset itself and he became aware of how exactly he must have been perceived. He had just been walked in on in a position that might make an observer believe he was pretty upset— head in his hands, light dimmed, silence— especially if one was used to seeing upset people in the interrogation chair and not tired people. *Especially* if the upset person in question had broken down crying in front of his coworkers not an hour prior.

There was no way Lassiter actually believed he was simply shaken from his 'psychic vision.' The man held a PhD in Devil's Advocacy, for Christ's sake. And yet, the idea was captivating.

There was only one way to find out.

Shawn adjusted his posture, obscuring his face again and leaning into the curled-up state he'd half committed to previously. He was certain his eyes were still at least a bit red, and it was dark in the room anyway. He sniffled– just a bit, no need to overdo it when his real performance was behind him– and channeled his most unconvincing resolve.

"I…yeah, yeah. I'm fine, Lassie."

It was a thin line to walk, and Shawn almost expected Lassiter to roll his eyes, get up, and walk away. The act hinged on the fact that people like to feel smart, and detectives like to think they've spotted a lie.

Lassiter licked his lips, as if stalling before having to fulfill his civic duty as someone with a conscience. "Do you want to talk about it?" He asked softly.

The softness was shocking. The man might have had the same jarring effect if he'd screamed the words. Just as it must have been confounding for the detective to see Shawn, the usual figurehead for comic relief, so (seemingly) downtrodden, it was as stark a contrast for Shawn to hear a non-confrontational tone of voice from his regular oppositionist.

"You don't- you don't really want to hear about this…" Yes, he'd reel him in by feeding into humanity's natural savior complex.

Lassiter's eyes danced across Shawn's face. "I asked, didn't I?"

It was time for the hard sell. The true, past-the-point-of-no-return, no-going-back sell. One which burned any shred of his remaining plausible deniability.

Shawn let out a shaky breath. Then another for good measure, letting his body shake with the faux-sob, like the sound of a rollercoaster clicking up a hill.

"Sometimes the spirits are *so loud.* They just won't stop."

He couldn't make himself look at Lassiter. He felt his face flush red with a strange and sudden sense of embarrassment. It was one thing to fake hearing voices, yelling for the whole police station to hear, another even to choke himself and loudly throw his own body downstairs at a spelling bee, but a completely different matter to give such a private 'performance.' A maybe-unconvincing attempt at emotional manipulation, all just to further convince and test the belief his cohort had in his *lie.*

"It's like, I know the case is over, and that's all I needed from them, but *they* don't know that and they won't *listen*—"

Shawn could stop now, he knew, but for some reason, the exhaustion of the day and the general stress of the case were fueling his story.

"—And they're so *loud,* and constant, and everyone, *everyone,* just thinks it's some sort of, some sort of parlor trick, some sort of 'cue the laugh track' gag, something I can help, something I can control, and *god* I wish I could but It's *always on,* and they *always expect me to*—"

Shawn was cut off by a hand on each of his arms, pulling them down from his head so he stared face-to-face with Lassiter, who had pulled his chair up right in front of him to look him in the face.

“Spencer, you have to breathe.”

Shawn hadn’t realized he’d gotten so out of breath from his ramble and he gasped for air, admittedly a bit louder and more forcefully than he’d meant to. He choked the air back out, then gulped down more.

“In… two… three… four…”

Lassiter slightly raised his and Shawn’s wrists a few centimeters with each number, like he was modeling a PD training video for de-escalation.

“And out… two… three… four…”

Even Shawn’s attempt at breathing for himself had been substandard to the detective. Go figure.

He let the counting routine go on for another two full breaths. In the dark room Shawn wondered if he may have missed his true calling in an entirely different pseudoscience. *Keep your eyes on the pocket watch and count up to four, Lassiter. When you wake, you’ll trust me completely.*

Of course, the corporeal reality painted Shawn much closer to the hypnotized than the hypnotist. His eyes couldn’t quite leave the way his arms were being guided. Rough fingers tensed and shifted subtly over Shawn’s skin as if to calculate the exact amount of pressure to apply without spooking him.

When his breathing ‘evened out,’ he watched rigidly as the hands removed themselves from him. Raising his eyes, he was met with an alarmingly focused gaze. The direct eye contact was startling, like when a film character looks into the camera.

This was unusual, to say the least. The whole situation he’d at once produced, directed and starred in. This was undeniably manufactured, but even stranger than that was the fact that Shawn didn’t mind the result. There was definitely something intimate about being talked down from a fake panic attack, but Shawn didn’t know why this would be something he would ever desire– especially from *Lassiter,* of all people.

“What can I do to help?” Lassiter prodded.

It was absolutely undeniable. Underneath the detective’s carefully skeptical exterior, he *did* believe Shawn. He had to. The Carlton Lassiter he knew would not have hesitated to call bullshit on his act if he didn’t fully believe him. Apparently, Shawn was a better actor than he was given credit for. It helped, of course, that there wasn’t anything clear for the pseudo-psychic to gain from lying when they were completely alone and with no case currently at stake.

He did gain something, though. Now he knew that Lassiter believed in his ‘abilities.’ Now when the detective gave him pushback in future cases, Shawn would always hold the trump card. It wasn’t that he would be particularly keen to tell an audience that he’d been crying in a room alone– it was a pretty pathetic story– but Lassiter could never again look Shawn in the eye and honestly claim he didn’t believe he was a psychic. That was enough for Shawn.

Why, then, wasn’t he ready for this to end?

“Honestly, Lassie,” Shawn summoned his best, ‘the spirits are so chaotic it hurts to talk’ tone. “You’re helping just by being here.”

Lassiter looked satisfied enough with that. He sat back in his seat slightly. Still close to the other, but not ready to grab him again. Shawn found himself craving the proximity. How much of a frenzy would he need to work himself into to be pulled into an embrace?

“Spencer?”

Great, Lassiter had asked him something. He had been too distracted by his strange fantasies to even listen. “Huh?”

“How often does this happen?” Lassiter repeated.

“Does *what* happen?” Shawn asked, with immediate regret.

He had already begun to forget the gist of his ramble. It had spilled out as if someone had prepared him lines. Something about the ‘spirits’ being loud? A pointed complaint about people not believing in his visions? Subtle, Shawn. He did not want to hear Lassiter’s response. If he had to try and summarize it, he might realize how generic it sounded. It didn’t even make much sense; Lassiter was the only one at the station who voiced any distrust in his abilities to his face.

Lassiter furrowed his eyebrows. The only other meaning, Shawn realized, would be, ‘How often do you come to interrogation rooms and cry?’ and, well, he had already reached his daily quota of patheticness. He didn’t let the detective respond.

“Oh, well… sometimes it just gets a little overwhelming. I can’t really control when or how I get the visions. Sometimes I just need them to stop, but they never do…”

Shawn really didn’t know where he was going with this. If only someone truly had written him lines. He only knew he had to end it, and soon. Having obtained what he needed– proof of belief, leverage, and, well, other things… things that would need deep psychological examination later… It was time to get out of there before his deception was caught on to.

Lassiter wore a pensive expression. “I hadn’t realized these… episodes… could be so distressing for you.”

“Well…”

Shawn’s eyes would’ve gone anywhere to avoid the concerned, calculating gaze before them. Luckily, they landed on the door, through the window of which he spotted a familiar figure.

One who could decidedly never know the details of this little unplanned experiment.

“Well,” He continued. “Telling people only means pity. Or worry, which is useless, because nothing can be done about it.”

Lassiter frowned. “No one here would pity you, Spencer. Not over this.”

The figure in the window grew closer. That was someone who certainly might.

“Speaking of which,” Shawn tightened his voice, raising his right hand to his temple, and turned his head away from the door. “I’m sensing—”

Lassiter sat forward in his chair.

“—Gus is coming. Is there any way, oh god, is there any way this can stay between us? Gus, he has enough on his plate without having to worry about me, too, you know?”

Lassiter looked Shawn up and down in silence before dipping his head in a quick nod. Three somewhat hesitant raps sounded on the door before it opened, creaking. Gus’ eyes moved from Shawn to Lassiter, then back to his friend. Shawn shook his head in the universal signal of *do not ask.*

Gus coughed. “Uh, Shawn, I brought your coffee,” He emphasized the cup, before nodding to the other man. “Lassiter. If you want some coffee…”

The two had risen, standing awkwardly and slightly too close together, just like their chairs had been.

“...then you should’ve gone out for some.” Gus finished.

“Gus,” Shawn clapped him on the back. “Buddy, thank you. Running dangerously low on caffeine here, nearly fell asleep on that metal table.”

“Right.” Gus was not going to let this go.

“You two should leave. Interrogation Room A only *moonlights* as a coffee waiting room.” Lassiter finally spoke.

“Ha! Funny. Gus, Lassie made a joke.”

Gus shook his head. “So, our theory held up? Both were arrested?”

Shawn looked at Lassiter. Gus’ head swiveled again. “You don’t know? That’s *not* what you were discussing?”

“It is. And they were. Despite how outlandish it was, you were correct. Yet again.” Lassiter covered for him.

Gus shrugged. “Great. Any reason we’re still hanging around here?”

Shawn shrugged back. “Victory lap?”

“We’re leaving,” Gus replied, and they did.

As he exited the doorframe, Shawn risked a look at Lassiter, who was not looking back at him. If this were a film, they would have exchanged a knowing glance. Lassiter might have manufactured a clever excuse to send Gus away, and Shawn would work himself into a real panic attack if only to be the focus once more of those *eyes*—

“Shawn, you coming?”

“Yeah, ‘course.”

If Shawn’s moral compass was more like Lassiter’s, it would have ended there.

Chapter 2: 2

Chapter Summary

Shawn and Gus have an argument during a lock-picking demonstration, the former feigns a migraine, and a new case is revealed.

The second time was an accident, honestly.

Shawn had managed to move past the little ‘experiment’, sharing only one or two awkward looks with Lassiter before business as usual continued. And if he found himself craving the feeling he’d gotten under the concerned and caring gaze of the older man, well, that was between him and his thoughts. He certainly did not intend to hold a reenactment.

Shawn wasn’t even sure how they’d been invited to the lock-picking seminar. As he sat in the back row half-listening to the guest speaker’s drone on padlocks, he noticed that he and Gus were the only non-police officers in the room who had the displeasure of attending.

There wasn’t even a case to occupy his mind. Not even one that they hadn’t been invited onto- both O’Hara and Lassiter’s desks were completely empty of paperwork for the first time since the Psych team had started consulting. If Shawn were as superstitious as he claimed to be, he might think something big was coming.

The point was, Shawn really did not want to be there. He simply didn’t have a reason to leave his partner, who seemed to be genuinely enthralled by the presentation. The man already paid for the magazine subscription, what else could there be to learn on the subject?

His mind, itching with the deprivation of any sort of puzzle, began to wander without permission. He eyed the person sitting to his front right. *Shredded left shoe lace, two shaving cuts marring his jaw, fur coating his lower pant legs.* Up all night with a new puppy.

The woman behind him coughed. *Dry, red nose. Fresh tan. Feverish appearance.* Someone was quickly regretting using her sick days as PTO for a vacation.

Shawn shook his head as if the physical movement would stop his ever-racing mind.

Someone entered the room, quickly sitting to Shawn’s left, one of the only seats available and the closest to the door. *Sad, sullen eyes. Tie haphazardly tied. Lethargic in movement.* Shawn hadn’t seen this officer before, but he seemed to be genuinely depressed.

Shawn leaned to his right, nudging his friend with his elbow. “How much longer we got on this thing?”

Gus glared at him. “Shawn, we’ve only been here for fifteen minutes. This is an hour-long demonstration,”

“An *hour?”*

Gus shushed him, pointedly returning his attention to the speaker.

Shawn huffed. He had to get out of this.

“Listen-” He was met with another shush.

Shawn counted to five before trying again. “*Listen*. No one’s affected by me being here or not. I’m just going to go make a few rounds, grab us some lunch from the vending machines, and I’ll be back in no time!”

Gus turned to him sharply, eyebrows lowered. “Shawn, maybe if you paid attention to something other than yourself for once, I wouldn’t have had to solve that last case *myself* at the last minute.”

Shawn felt his face flush as anger came over him. Gus had *solved the last case himself?* Yes, Gus had been the one to put the pieces together during their last case, but that would have gotten them absolutely nowhere without Shawn’s final ‘vision’ convincing the detectives to actually consider it. Besides, how many cases had Shawn had to solve basically alone after Gus put Psych on the back burner in favor of his pharmaceutical job, family visiting, or literally any other minor distraction?

Shawn stood abruptly, his chair screeching as he accidentally caught the attention of the room, which fell silent save for the drone of the lecturer, who also paused to squint at him.

The late-arriving man to his left scowled at his interruption, while most of the crowd seemed almost excited to find a better source of entertainment.

Gus gritted his teeth as though expecting a loud retaliation.

Shawn had intended to storm out silently. He wasn’t used to feeling embarrassed by the precinct’s full attention, but his friend’s harsh words left him feeling like a dog being scolded in front of company. He avoided the room’s gaze as he turned on his foot, briskly making his way out one of the doors.

The PI walked quickly, although he didn’t have a specific destination in mind. *Solved the last case himself*, he’d said. Gus may have put the evidence together, but at least half of that evidence he wouldn’t have noticed in a million years *himself*.

Shawn settled into one of the chairs at O’Hara and Lassiter’s desk clump. He’d known the main room would be clear; all the detectives had just been accounted for watching him childishly storm out of the lecture. He spun the chair bitterly. *Solved the last case himself.* And he’d said it as if it was something he’d been stewing over since it’d happened, too. Shawn’s mistake, surely, for assuming that if his best friend had an issue with him he’d be an adult and bring it up.

“Shawn, are you alright?”

He recognized the voice as Juliet. She must have come to check on him, or more likely, taken any excuse to leave the monotonous seminar. No, she wasn’t getting out that easily; Shawn had *earned* his exile. *Solved the case himself.*

“Nothing, Jules, just a, uh, vision migraine coming on,” He said. There. She would leave him alone to stew, and he would have a perfect excuse for doing so.

“A *migraine?* Oh god, I have some ibuprofen if that would help?”

No, Shawn could not be forced to rejoin that conference. He could just picture the satisfied look on Gus’ face as he reentered the room like a lost pet being returned.

“No, a *vision* migraine, Jules. Only lessens when I get the vision, I’m afraid.”

Suddenly, the room got significantly darker. Shawn swiveled his chair around and nearly jumped out of it when he saw that Lassiter was with her, currently closing the blinds of the second closest window to them. Was he going to black out the whole precinct? “Lassie- what are you doing?”

The man didn’t turn around as he continued his task. “My mother used to get migraines. Even a lamp on made her sick; too bright.”

Well, now Shawn felt like crap. He really needed to start choosing his words more carefully. Migraines were worse than headaches; everyone knew that, but Shawn hadn’t meant to imply he was in excruciating pain.

“You don’t have to—”

Shawn paused. He was not going to admit to the detectives that he was basically mocking a condition that Lassiter had been personally affected by. He had to commit. He weakened his voice, adding the strained quality usually present when he feigned a vision. “That’s a lot better, thank you Lassie, but you can’t blackout the whole room. Besides, it’s not…” *That bad?* Was he really about to diminish what that sort of pain could cause someone? “It’s usually worse, I’m sure it’ll get better soon.”

“I’ll get you some water,” Lassiter said, and left to do so before Shawn could protest.

Shawn allowed his head to fall forward into his hands, running them through his hair.

O’Hara’s worried voice caused a pang of guilt to shoot through him. "How often does this happen?"

"Oh, not often at all. Only when something…" Shawn opened his eyes and was faced with the detectives’ desks, empty of paperwork. "...something really big is coming,” Perfect, that could amount to literally anything. “Or when the spirits are angry with me." He added.

“Big like what? Wait, what do you mean *angry*?”

"Angry, unappreciative, Jules, I wish I knew, but..." He cut off her explanation with a faux-wince.

"Okay, O'Hara, maybe the interrogation could wait?" Lassiter had returned, and set a short cup of water in front of Shawn.

Shawn winced again, for a different reason. He had just wanted the detectives to leave, but the intensity of Lassiter's eyes filled him with a familiar guilt. Maybe he could drag this out just a bit longer, graduate his pained reactions until the taller man offered his arms for comfort, pulling him close and silencing the pseudo-psychic's overactive mind.

No, *no.* This was not a reenactment of the previous week. This was not some sort of sick scheme to get the attention of a man who clearly only tolerated him at best. They needed to leave.

"Of course. I'm sorry, Shawn, I'm just worried is all." O'Hara's kind voice pulled him from his thoughts.

"Thank you both, really," Now leave. "Now, you kids should get out of here. What if you get locked somewhere? You're gonna wish you'd been paying attention," He tried for 'in severe pain but trying to brave through it'.

"Oh, I am more than capable of breaking a padlock," Juliet responded.

"We'll let you rest," Lassiter seemed to pick up on Shawn's hundredth hint that he wanted to be alone.

"Please, text one of us if you need anything, though," Juliet added, seeming reluctant at the head detective's executive decision to leave him.

Shawn only hummed in response, shutting his eyes again as he heard their footsteps trail out of the room.

Maybe twenty minutes passed, and Shawn's mind felt clearer as his anger dulled. Maybe… Maybe he could have been more attentive in the last case. He still didn't think his friend was in the right, not by far, but was it really worth dwelling on?

He had just decided to be the bigger person, return to the lecture, and apologize for storming out, when he heard footsteps return to the room. He looked up to see the two detectives hesitantly standing in the doorway.

"Spencer?" Lassiter spoke in almost an exaggeratedly hushed tone. "Are you… how's your head?"

Shawn shook it. "All better, Lassie, thank you."

O'Hara pushed past her senior, entering the room with an open file folder. "I'll bet I can guess why,"

Shawn opened his mouth to question her, but was waved off.

“Don’t tell me. Let me guess. Three missing persons have been reported in the last forty-eight hours.”

Shawn’s eyebrows raised. That certainly qualified as ‘big’. Maybe some spirits really were in his corner. “Yeah, Jules, that was exactly it.”

Lassiter’s expression was guarded as he shared a look with the other detective. There was something else.

“I can see why this would affect you so much, Shawn. The missing people… they’re all psychics.”

Chapter 3: 3

Chapter Summary

A new detective joins their team, the group scope out a missing psychic's shop, and a possible lead is uncovered. Oh, and Shawn fakes a syncope, of course.

“They’re all… psychics.” He stared at O’Hara in what he hoped wasn’t obvious disbelief.

“Yes, all of them. Or, actually, two psychics and a ‘clairvoyant’?” Her hand hovered at the lightswitch and she looked to him as if for permission. He nodded at her, and the room flickered to life. “Sorry, I’m really not sure what all the different terms mean.”

Shawn wasn’t either. “That’s okay, Juliet, I can’t expect a layperson to know all the ins and outs.”

O’Hara spread the contents of the file folder on the desk before them and sat down. Lassiter moved to stand uncomfortably close to Shawn, leaning over his shoulder to gaze at the photographs. He realized belatedly that he was sitting in the man’s chair. Hey, he was the one who’d just ‘suffered a migraine’, could he really be expected to stand?

“Other similarities between them?” Lassiter asked.

“Yes, but a lot of these are also just similarities between psychics in general. All female, all renting business properties within thirty miles of Santa Barbara. Their shops are all fairly popular. They’re all unmarried, no kids.”

“We should go to their shops, interview their staff,” Shawn suggested.

Lassiter's hand left the seat's backrest. “Obviously. I think O’Hara and I have that taken care of.”

“Woah, woah woah,” Shawn interjected, spinning in his chair to face him. “They’re not going to talk to just anybody!”

He cleared his throat, preparing for pushback as Lassiter would no doubt provide.

“You see, Lassie, we psychics are something of a closed off community. We don’t just go around discussing our ins and outs with outsiders—”

“I really wish that were true,” Lassiter deadpanned.

“—and anyway,” Shawn continued. “We all know how this works by now. Despite your best efforts, I’ll end up tagging along anyway and discover crucial evidence and-slash-or solve the

entire case.”

“Sure, Spencer,” Lassiter narrowed his eyes. “But isn’t there part of your little equation missing? Namely, your partner? Why don’t you go get Guster, and O’Hara and I will bring the car around.” He made no attempt at sincerity.

Gus. Somehow he’d managed to forget. Well… surely his partner should focus on his oh-so-important seminar. Wouldn’t want him to have to work too hard. God forbid he waste his *precious* time, given the last week when he’d apparently had to ‘*solve the case himself’*-

“*Shawn?* ”

He shifts his eyes back to where Lassiter and O’Hara were staring at him. He shook his head in a menial attempt to clear his reemerging bitterness.

“I, uh, no. Nope, no need to bother Gus on this one. Trust me, he does *not* want to be bothered during this session, the man is a lock-picking *fiend*, practically-”

“Shawn-”

“-practically lives for the things-”

“Shawn, what was that? You were zoned out for like a full minute, I called your name four times.”

He refocused his attention and found that both O’Hara and Lassiter were staring at him intently. It seemed like his argument with Gus was distracting him more than he’d thought.

“I just, uh, lost my train of thought.” He excused.

“Lost your…?” Juliet doubted. “Seriously, Shawn-?”

He really did not need to get into this right now. “Just- unrelated vision, Jules. Drop it.”

His tone was probably sharper than it’d needed to be and he quickly regretted it upon seeing her eyebrows shoot up in shock. In avoiding her gaze he realized that Lassiter was looking at him with the same alarm mixed with concern.

A lot of concern. One again reminiscent of last week’s… incident… in the interrogation room, and just as intoxicating.

He was pulled from his admittedly disturbing thoughts by the sound of someone entering the room. The three turned to see a middle aged man. He was a few inches taller than Shawn, white, and otherwise rather nondescript- apart from his familiarly tired, grey eyes. He instantly recognized him as the man who had sat next to him late at the seminar.

The man looked between them and raised an eyebrow in clear questioning. Lassiter straightened quickly with O’Hara following, leaving Shawn the only one still seated.

“My apologies, I was just about to inform you,” Lassiter said quickly before looking between him and Shawn. “This is Detective Jason Clark, he’s just transferred from Anaheim. He’ll be helping us out on our next few investigations.”

The man- Clark, he supposed- regarded Shawn vaguely, although he got the impression it wasn’t with intentional dismissal, rather distraction.

“Clark, this is Shawn Spencer. He’s a consultant; he works with us on some of our cases.” Lassiter’s introduction was surprisingly lacking quips or disparagement- it really seemed as if the man was walking on eggshells around him.

“Consultant…?” Clark stated, offering his hand, and Shawn blinked before realizing it had been a question.

“Psychic detective,” He clarified, accepting the man’s handshake.

Clark’s eyes seemed to clear from their previously glazed-over state to examine him more thoroughly. This was unsurprising, of course, as reactions to his occupation could range from approval to outright mockery.

He seemed to make his decision as his eyes narrowed, pulling back his hand. “Excuse me?”

“Oh, psychic detective,” Shawn repeated. He would normally invite scrutiny; the challenge could even be fun at times. The way the man's eyes raked over his face, though, wasn't very fun at all. He almost wished Gus were here so he could take the focus off of himself with a ridiculous fake name. “So, Anaheim, huh? Big Disney fan—?”

He’s cut off as the man turns sharply to Lassiter, face still lacking emotion but eyes now fully alert. “Is this some kind of joke?”

Lassiter looked at O’Hara before responding, as if making sure he didn’t actually miss a joke. “I’m sorry?”

“You’re sorry,” Clark repeated in a mumble. “We’ll speak privately.”

Lassiter paused before he nodded, then turned to Shawn and Juliet. It was some consolation that Lassiter looked confused as well. “You two don’t need to hear the same information twice. Why don’t you go get Guster and meet us back here?”

“Sure,” Nope. “Jules?”

She nodded, and they started towards the door. Lassiter began explaining the specifics of the missing individuals, and was cut off just as they left earshot.

Shawn made sure to keep their pace slow as they walked through the station, although his ruse was realized when he made a turn away from the lecture room.

“Shawn? Where are you going?”

He faked a chuckle. “My bad. Must’ve zoned out.”

They continued in the correct direction until Juliet spoke up.

“Shawn, is everything okay? Like, lately?”

He slowed to a halt. “What? Of course. You know me, Jules, I’m fine. What do you mean?”

She shook her head, motioning for him to keep walking. “No, I know you’re *fine*, just…”

Juliet sighed as if choosing her words carefully.

“Carlton’s been worried about you. As much as he can be, I mean. I don’t know what it is, but he asked me to check in with you.”

Shawn felt like all his senses had rebooted. Lassiter was *worried* about him?

Sure, he’d noticed the man’s lack of criticism in the last week or so- he noticed *everything*- but he hadn’t honestly given it much consideration. The last week or so… maybe his little ‘test’ in the interrogation room hadn’t been without consequence after all. He should feel mortified, or at the very least guilty, so why did he feel so warm at the thought of the man worrying over him?

“I’m fine, Jules. Or, honestly?” Shawn found one stone for two birds as Juliet nodded encouragingly. “Gus and I have been fighting. I really think inviting him in on this case would be more of a distraction than a help. Come to think of it, he might not even say yes.”

A partial truth. It had been one fight, and Gus would definitely agree to help, especially on a case so interesting as missing psychics.

In all honesty, he wasn’t sure exactly why it had gotten under his skin so much. Gus claiming he had *‘Solved the last case himself’* kept echoing in his mind. It had really dawned on him how little Gus understood about Shawn’s thought process. It wasn’t something he could turn off, and oftentimes it felt like he was working 24/7 just to have his revelations discounted as luck.

In fact, the only time he could remember anyone caring about his mental health was Lassiter last week, and he’d had to lie to earn that concern.

Juliet stopped walking and turned to face him. “I’m sorry. I didn’t even see you guys arguing.” She tilted her head. “Are you sure you won’t work better with him, though? This is a big case. We could kind of use all hands on deck.”

“I’m sure. Like I said, he probably wouldn’t even agree to help.”

She grimaced. “That bad, huh?”

“That’s one word for it…” If he got any more specific, she might bring it up to him. That could not happen. “Speaking of bad, how about that new guy, Clark?”

“He didn’t exactly seem keen on working with you.” She said. So it hadn't been in his head. He'd considered that his wounded ego might've affected his perception of the interaction, and he didn't know if he was relieved to find out it had not.

He scoffed. “I haven’t said ten words to him!”

“Just,” They paused their trek outside of the main room doors as Juliet looked at him earnestly. “Don’t step on his toes. Don’t do anything— well, don’t do anything you would do.”

“Ouch."

“I shouldn’t be saying this, but Clark was on leave for a while before he transferred here due to personal issues. His wife passed away this year.” She added the last bit like she'd forgotten it wasn't explicitly implied in the phrase 'personal issues.'

Shawn risked a look through the glass and saw Lassiter and Clark speaking. Laughing, actually. A far cry from the solemnity expected from a discussion about a missing persons case. Or from the righteous indignation he might have hoped for from Lassiter had the other pressed Shawn's place in the investigation.

“Jesus,” He mumbled. “He seemed… off, but I wouldn’t have thought…”

“Yeah.”

That would explain the depressed appearance he’d given off when Shawn had seen him in the seminar.

“You won’t have to worry about seeing him too much, honestly, he’s just assigned to work with us until he’s cleared 100%.”

Shawn wanted to ask what 'cleared' meant in this context. How bad, exactly, were these so-called 'personal issues,' and what about them made him leave Anaheim? At first with dark humor, Shawn wondered if Clark's wife had died at Disneyland. Then, he half-seriously considered that maybe that had been the reason he'd snapped at Shawn. It was ridiculous; it would have been in the news. Though he did cut Shawn off the second he mentioned it...

Juliet pushed the door open.

Clark’s hint of joviality died as soon as he saw them enter the room. Lassiter looked between the man and Shawn before reluctantly speaking.

“Where’s Guster?”

Shawn opened his mouth before Juliet cut in.

“He’s otherwise occupied this week, he won’t be able to help on this one.”

He gave her an appreciative look, silently thanking her excuse.

Lassiter sighed, nodding. “Alright, let’s get going then.”

Clark shook his head. “Let me know what you find.”

They paused awkwardly, but there was really no reason they needed four people for such a simple task.

“*Mystic Melanie's: Palm and Card Reader,*” Read O’Hara as the three approached the stone steps to the building. “Owned by, well, Melanie Andreas, age 43, has been in business for four years…”

“What makes someone suddenly decide to become a psychic halfway through their life?” Lassiter muttered.

“You don’t choose the spirits, the spirits choose you,” Shawn supplied, silencing his phone. Gus had called twice.

Lassiter scoffed. “Or she’s a fraud.”

“She’s been missing for at least two days,” O’Hara continued. “She has no immediate family, and the last person to see her was her assistant.”

It took banging on the door for over a minute for a short, dark-haired woman to crack the door open, sticking her head through to examine the detectives. “We’re closed.”

“We’re not looking for a reading,” Lassiter held up his badge and the woman slid the door open completely. “Are you Ms. Andreas’ assistant?”

She looks between the three before nodding, standing to the side as an invitation to enter. “I’m Rani. I’m the one who called? Well, of course, not you specifically, but to report her missing…?”

O’Hara gave her a reassuring smile. “You did the right thing. When exactly did you notice she was missing?”

The three entered the small building, finding the main room absolutely smothered in crystals. There was not a spot or shelf in the room empty; even the walls were cluttered with palm reading and chakra charts.

“She left here on Friday at around 7PM after her last appointment and she didn’t come in on Monday.”

“And that’s when you called?”

“Melanie’s *never* late. Not without telling me,” Rani confirmed.

“Who was the last client she saw?” Lassiter asked, taking out a pen and notebook.

Rani's face scrunched up as she looked between the three. "You can't be serious? I mean, I'm sorry, but I clearly can't tell you that."

Lassiter looked up from where he'd been preparing to write. "...And why's that?"

She scoffed. "I mean- client confidentiality? People come here in all kinds of situations, Detective…?"

"Lassiter," he supplied.

"*Lassiter*, and there's a level of trust placed in both Melanie and myself."

"You're a… psychic, too?" O'Hara asked carefully.

"Me? No. No, I'm just Melanie's assistant. She's the one that's truly gifted." Her eyes twinkled in either deep respect or, if Shawn was feeling cynical, immense jealousy.

Shawn took this as his moment to step in, extending an arm. "Nice to meet you. Shawn Spencer, Psychic Detective."

Rani hesitated before shaking his hand. "I'm sorry, are you actually?"

He chuckled. "Yes, in the flesh. I work as a consultant for the SBPD. Listen, it would be a real help for us to get a list of Melanie's clients- surely you want to help us find her however you can?"

She frowned. "Well, then, as a psychic surely you'd understand the importance of respect and confidentiality."

Well, that was his best shot. She didn't seem disbelieving of his 'abilities', per se, but definitely not convinced yet. He'd need to resort to more orthodox (for him) methods of investigation.

"Does Ms. Andreas have some sort of office or space where she might have left any notes or personal belongings?" Lassiter asked.

"I've already searched it, but you're welcome to take a look." Rani gestured towards a small room down a short hallway. Perfect.

"I'm gonna stay here, try to get a… get a read on things." Shawn excused.

Rani raised her eyebrow before leading the two detectives away. Maybe that hadn't been proper terminology?

Now alone in the large room, he examined the various shelves to find nothing out of the ordinary. A shame, these crystals and statuettes were begging to inspire some sort of Raiders of the Lost Ark-style booby trap.

He made his way behind the counter and to a stack of files and notebooks. A quick glance towards the hallway to ensure he was still alone, and he opened one of the files. Each one

seemed to be filled with old checks and receipts- definitely useful, but he didn't have enough time to examine all of them right now.

Rather, he put the files back carefully and moved on to the notebook. Jackpot. A bookmark opened to today's date. He flipped back several pages scanning the entries.

2/15

No appts today.

2/27

NC's appt Seemed to work miracles on her. Came in the worst I've ever seen her and left the best. Mel says she had a revelation. Reminds me what this is all for.

Okay, the two seemed to genuinely believe in Melanie's psychic abilities- it might've been easier to stomach her disappearance if she'd been a con artist.

3/02

Mel had an important vision today. Canceled all appts. I hate that her gift taxes her so much.

3/03

Mel's doing better. It scares me when she loses consciousness, but I know by now true visions do that to the Gifted.

Jesus. No wonder Rani seemed skeptical of his abilities- she was used to her boss apparently *passing out* when *she* 'got a vision'. He wondered if she may have some sort of medical condition that might be causing this. Or hell, maybe she really *was* a psychic.

Suddenly, footsteps began closer from the short hallway to the office, and he only had seconds. He flipped the pages back and replaced the bookmark as he found it, stealing a final glance at the most recent entry.

3/23

New client intake 5:45PM. On the phone he said it was an emergency. May run late.

Jackpot, indeed. The last client Melanie had seen before her disappearance had been new. That was all the more reason they needed a name. But what could convince her to give it up?

The young assistant led the two back into the room as O'Hara spoke. "Thank you for your help, Rani, but I'll be honest— we really need all the information you can give us if we want a chance at all."

"You'll find her," Rani insisted. "She'll never forgive me if I betray her clients."

Lassiter sighed. "She may not be around to be angry if you refuse to help us."

Shawn's phone buzzed in his pocket. Four missed calls. He shut it off. That argument could wait.

"I'm sure your department is more than capable of doing their jobs without sacrificing respect and trust," Rani bit back.

Solved the case himself. God, that argument could wait, indeed. Maybe if Gus were here he'd have been able to get the name already, huh?

"With all due respect, things would go a lot smoother with your full cooperation."

His phone buzzed once more- hadn't he shut that off? He turned away from the argument and hastily removed the battery, slipping both parts back into his pocket. He could see it now, Gus' self-satisfied expression when he'd learn Shawn was of zero use alone.

"With all due respect, you people have no idea what it takes to be a trusted psychic in this day and age!"

He'd barely even spoken this entire time. How could he sit through an hour drive home in the heavy silence of the detectives wondering why they'd even brought him?

"Melanie *gives* more than you could ever imagine to- to upholding her reputation," Rani continued emphatically. Shawn remembered her journal entries as she defended her boss. "I know what she wants better than anyone!"

Screw it. He could *give* just as much.

Surely Rani couldn't dismiss what she'd referred to as a 'true vision'?

He let himself sway slightly. He'd seen people faint before, of course, but he'd never tried faking it. Luckily for him, he was facing away from his audience, requiring less acting prowess.

"-And she would never want me to betray her clients' trust, not without- not without-"

Shawn let his knees buckle, collapsing to the ground head-last in a carefully crafted heap.

A shocked beat passed before voices chorused, cutting off their previous argument.

“*Shawn!”*

“*Is he-?”*

He heard two pairs of quick footsteps cross the room, and felt callused hands ghost over his shoulder.

“Spencer. *Shawn,”* Lassiter spoke urgently. How long was he supposed to be out for Rani to buy it?

Suddenly, a head brushed against his chest and he prayed he didn’t flinch.

“He’s breathing fine, heartbeat’s… fine…”

“Shawn-” Juliet’s smaller hand shook him.

“*Careful! ”* Lassiter scolded, and the hand flinched away.

“How long has it been?” Shawn heard something snap open. A phone?

He really couldn’t let them call an ambulance. Shawn rolled his head sideways slightly and groaned. He felt Lassiter’s hand grip his shoulder, the broad fingers mindfully gentle against his carefully limp frame.

“Shawn?” Juliet prompted again.

He let his eyes flicker open, then closed again. Really, people underestimated his acting skills. It took a lot to have a convincing, entirely fake career, after all.

“*Shawn.”*

He opened his eyes slowly, and found himself looking up into Lassiter’s concerned eyes. Something about the care in which he looked at him was… exhilarating, just like it’d been being talked down from ‘hyperventilation’, or when he’d given him water and shut the lights off during his ‘migraine’ without even hesitating. Shawn decided he must not have gotten enough hugs as a child, or gotten too many. Something had gone terribly wrong to make his chest pound this way under the detective's frantic eyes.

“Spencer?”

Jesus, the case. There’d been an actual purpose to this. He really had to get control of his own thoughts.

Shawn brought his hand up slowly to his head, moving to prop himself up with his other arm.

“Easy, easy.” Juliet assisted him in sitting up carefully.

“Sorry…” He looked past Lassiter to examine Rani, who was frozen in place, if nothing else likely from sheer awkwardness. He couldn’t blame her, this was probably the strangest day she’d had in quite some time.

“Sorry... This hasn’t happened in…” He clutched his head suddenly, gasping. How was that for a ‘true vision’?

“*Shawn.* Look at me,” Lassiter demanded. He complied. “Am I calling an ambulance?”

“No! No, no, Lassie, m’fine,” he said too quickly.

The detective looked insulted. “You are not fine.”

“Shawn, you passed out,” O’Hara added.

He looked at her, then slid his attention back to Rani with a shake of his head. “Vision, Jules, vision.”

Rani’s eyes snapped up, examining him as if she cared for the first time. “...Vision?”

O’Hara furrowed her brow. “What? You’ve never passed out before.”

“Not during a case, no…” He agreed.

“You’ve been fainting *regularly?”* Any concern in Lassiter's tone was masked by an incredulous anger. Shawn chose to ignore the question.

Rani cut in, surprisingly helpful to his cause. “The crystals here were chosen and placed specifically to channel Mel’s visions.”

He nodded in agreement. “I saw… I saw Melanie. Yeah, leaving here on Friday.”

Rani was by his side in an instant, now looking just as invested as the detectives. “What else?”

“Her client… a man.” It was a private game of how general he could be without crossing the line into charades-territory. “She hadn’t met him before, had she?”

“No, no, he was new,” she agreed. “What about him?”

“His name… His name was-” He cut himself off with a violent wince, bringing both hands up to cover his eyes.

O’Hara barely had time to lay a hand on his shoulder before Rani was inches from his face, forcing him to reel backwards. *“What about him?”*

“That’s quite enough,” Lassiter snapped, separating the assistant from him.

“*Greg Kelson.* That’s who you saw. Right?” Rani asked frantically.

Bingo.

“That’s it,” he breathed a sigh of relief. Finally, he was pulling his weight.

He barely finished his exhale when his shoulders were grabbed roughly and Rani lunged forward again. *“What did he do to Melanie?”*

“That’s *enough*, ma’am.” Lassiter separated the woman’s grasp on him, moving himself between them as a form of barrier. “We’re leaving.”

Rani stood, stumbling back as if to snap herself out of her frenzy. Lassiter looked Shawn up and down as if looking for some sort of injury before speaking. “Can you stand?”

Shawn nodded. He was more than happy leaving now that they’d gotten what they’d needed. “I’m fine, Lassie.”

The detective scowled at his words, and he and O’Hara braced him on each side as he stood. How do people act after they’ve fainted? He let himself sway in place once more, as if he were unstable, and Lassiter quickly looped his arm around his shoulders for support.

Shawn froze. Well, that was… nice.

“Shawn?” Juliet asked.

“Sorry, sorry, let’s go.”

“Are you sure you’re alright?”

“People that are *alright* don’t faint, and then dismiss it like a weekly occurence, O’Hara,” Lassiter's chastising tone wasn't directed at Juliet..

“Let’s just go,” Shawn insisted.

The three made their way towards the door, Shawn leaning on Lassiter for support. He needed to maintain his act, that was all…

“You’ll let me know if you find anything?” Rani's small voice called after them, a stark contrast from the desperate shout still ringing in Shawn's ear.

“You'll hear from us,” Juliet confirmed.

She shut the door behind them and they descended the steps. Maybe Shawn didn’t still need to be leaning on Lassiter, but hey, Rani could’ve been watching from the window.

Greg Kelson. Leaning against the passenger door as Lassiter retrieved the key, Shawn found himself wondering exactly how far he would go, and for exactly how little.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

> Lassiter escorts Shawn back to Psych and Shawn finds himself faking another panic attack. These are *fake*, right?

"Remind me your address?"

Shawn shook his head. "Just take me to Psych, it's fine."

The drive back from Melanie's had taken well over an hour, and it consisted of him being told to keep his head between his knees, while simultaneously being tapped or shaken every five minutes to make sure he was still awake. Not fun. Apparently all he'd needed to do to sit in the front seat was pass out, though, so that was a bonus.

It was evening by the time they'd returned to the station, and Gus' car was gone- go figure. He mentally reminded himself to put the battery back in his phone.

He'd been about to call a cab when the decision was made for him and Lassiter insisted on playing chauffeur.

"You're sleeping in your office?" He clarified, and to Shawn's ears the words were dripping with judgment.

"We pay for it at night, too, it'd be an awful shame not to use it."

A beat.

"How often have you been fainting?"

"Lassie…"

"Spencer. We're discussing this."

"You got any music?"

"I'll make this perfectly clear: you won't be allowed to consult with us on investigations if you're passing out with no explanation."

Shit. That made complete sense, and before he could stop to think he was talking.

"I've been psychic since I was young, Lassie. Nothing's wrong with me. Besides the spirits, that is."

“I’ll take that as a no, you haven’t seen a doctor?”

“I *know* the cause, but if I say so they’ll just want me to see a shrink.” His default really was lying, wasn’t it? No wonder nobody who got close enough trusted him.

“Might be a good thing…” The other muttered.

Shawn did not need to see a psychologist. It was damaging enough being related to one. “I’m not crazy.”

Lassiter seemed caught off-guard by this response, grimacing at the lack of humor in it. “I know that.”

Shawn, on the other hand, wanted to make it perfectly clear. As his lies grew more specific, he wouldn’t blame the other for assuming his ‘symptoms’ might be of a psychiatric type. Consistently claiming to see and hear spirits, and now fainting with no apparent medical cause?

“I’m not- I don’t *hallucinate*.” Shawn said quickly, and the other man looked over, eyebrows raised in shock and… concern. Damn it, that was supposed to be reassuring. In an ‘I know I sound crazy right now, but I’m acknowledging it, so I must be sane!’ way. It clearly came off more as an ‘I’m defensive because I definitely might be crazy’ response.

Luckily for him, Lassiter chose not to respond, returning his attention to the road. Unluckily for him, this meant that the rest of the drive was left in heavy silence.

They pulled into the empty parking lot. Shawn reached forward to open his door, but to his confusion, Lassiter opened his own. He watched the detective walk around front of the car, and his door was opened for him.

“What are you doing?”

“Come on.”

“I’m actually *just* old enough to stay home alone, thanks.” Shawn tried unsuccessfully to joke, but he complied with the other’s request.

It was a relief that Lassiter hadn’t gone back to bracing his shoulders as if he would collapse again at any moment. Maybe ‘relief’ wasn’t the right word, because it felt like his neurons lit up as he felt a hand on his lower back gently guiding him towards the glass door of Psych.

“Thanks for the ride home, let’s do this again sometime.” He tried again, to no avail, as Lassiter pushed the door open.

“You don’t keep the door locked?”

Well, he usually did. How the hell had he forgotten? He didn’t forget things. Gus must have been by. Although he was even more cautious than Shawn regarding safety.

Lassiter followed him inside, shutting the door behind them.

“What-? Lassie, it’s past my bedtime.” He was running out of lighthearted ways to tell the man to leave.

“Where’s Guster?” Lassiter pushed past him, making his way to sit stiffly on the couch. Shawn reluctantly followed, sitting on the other side.

“At home, I’m assuming?” He hadn’t meant that to sound as bitter as it had. Here he was, yet again, spending an entire day on a case while Gus went about the rest of his life. It’s not like Shawn’s workday ended when he got home, either- his mind would be rerunning things down to the type of lint on Rani’s blouse until he fell asleep. That’s if he slept at all.

Would Gus find some way to swoop in at the last moment, connect some already-laid-out clues that could’ve been easily solved if Shawn hadn’t been so sleep-deprived, and claim to have ‘*had to solve the case himself’* again?

…Then again, he hadn’t even told Gus there was a new case. How many missed calls must he have now?

“Spencer?” Shawn’s head snapped up. If Gus *were* here, he’d feel much more guilty about the warm feeling he got at the concern.

“What, sorry?”

Lassiter scowled, sitting forward. “Look at me.”

He furrowed his brow, but did so.

The detective sighed. “Your pupils look fine… I didn’t see if you hit your head.”

“I didn’t hit my head.”

“Well, you’re acting like you did,” Lassiter sighed. “More than usual, that is…”

“Ouch.”

“This has to be the tenth time today you’ve zoned out when someone was talking to you.” He accused.

Shawn grimaced. He was right. It seemed like lately he was so caught up in his thoughts that he didn’t even realize he was being spoken to. What was the point of his mind if it was *preventing* him from work?

“I’m sorry, Lassie. I’m usually not so distracted… Ah, by the spirits, I mean.” It was like there was something ingrained in him to curb any chance of vulnerability with that oh so intoxicating vice: dishonesty.

Lassiter raised an eyebrow, his expression hard to read. It seemed like he was just as uncomfortable attempting the role of ‘confidant’ as Shawn was at confiding. “Did something

happen recently?"

"What? No. I'm fine."

"Shawn, you had a migraine and passed out within the same day, both of which you then admitted are regular occurrences! The- the more I say this out loud, the more I'm realizing how absurd it is that we're not at the hospital right now—"

"I'm *tired*, Lassie."

"I—" Lassiter sighed. "Tell me how I can help you."

Shawn sputtered, taken completely aback by the sudden onslaught of sincerity. They were not meant to interact like this. "I'm *fine*, Lassie! Or, you know how you can help me? Leave me alone so I can *sleep.* "

The other man seemed to process that for a minute before responding in a much calmer tone than before. "I don't feel comfortable leaving you alone right now."

"What?"

"Spencer, I'll be candid. You've been acting off ever since last week—"

Shawn recalled his 'episode' in the interrogation room, and immediately tensed. Actions have consequences. Lies have *consequences.* Of course, he'd been letting himself think that indulging in these small moments of having someone care for his well-being was harmless, even useful, but obviously not. What it had been was selfishness.

"—and I can't just leave here if you're experiencing symptoms—"

His heart pounded in his chest. Selfishness, which had only led to him pushing his best friend away out of guilt, shame, and fear of being caught. Yes, that's what it was. Because he could hide behind his anger as long as he wanted- and yes, he was *righteously* angry at the trivialization of his work- but it was clear what the driving force of his actions was.

Lassiter was still talking. When was the last time he'd gotten more than a few hours of sleep? Fuck, he must have had more than fifteen missed calls by now. He'd stormed out like a dog being chased. Then, then he'd been useless if not for his little performance at the scene itself. It felt like he wasn't getting enough oxygen. He rubbed at his throat.

"Shawn? Damn it."

And Lassiter was kneeling in front of him- when had that-? God, it was hard to breathe.

"Breathe, come on…" And then he was counting.

This was familiar. This was *familiar.* God…

He was doing it again.

He'd gotten to the point that he was pretending to be unwell without even trying to. How sick of a person do you have to be to fake this kind of thing as a natural reflex?

"*Shawn.* "

"*I'm fine.* I'm not— this isn't—" How could he explain?

He chuckled breathlessly. "This isn't like..."

At the moment, Shawn couldn't even place himself near the mindset he'd had a week ago when he'd carefully plotted his 'episode,' his experimental false malady. At the time he'd excused it as a test of his colleague's opinion of him, but it was clear now that the real test was that of his own moral character. A test he'd failed wholeheartedly.

"Stop," Lassiter commanded. "Just breathe with me. Please."

Shawn did so, or tried to, but it turned out his little simulation had gotten a bit out of hand this time, because it helped none.

He waved an arm at the man, leaning away. This had to end. What was he doing? He still hadn't put the battery back in his phone.

"Spencer, just—" Lassiter scowled at his attempts to wave him off. "Let me help you, damn it!"

"I don't *need…"* He started, and suddenly the room was spinning. He screwed his eyes shut.

Lassiter muttered something under his breath and placed a hand hesitantly on Shawn's knee. "Spencer."

They could've finished research on Greg Kelson if he hadn't been so preoccupied in procuring more attention from his colleague. He could still salvage this, right? He just had to knock off the act and get to work.

"Shawn, just—" He shook his knee, and Shawn squeezed his eyes back open to see the older man's large eyes examining him. For once, he looked uncomfortable, like he wasn't sure what to do. That was understandable- last time Shawn feigned this he'd let Lassie's little counting routine cure him. Why was he subconsciously choosing to be more difficult now?

"Listen. Uh, here's what we'll do. You're supposed to name five things you see, four things you feel, three things… Well, you get the idea." He cut his explanation short, and Shawn internally cringed at how frantic Lassiter seemed to help him as quickly as possible. This didn't feel good. This had felt good at some point, hadn't it? Could you die from hyperventilation?

"So just tell me— *Shawn.* Just tell me five things you can see."

Fine. He could do that. That was simple. He tried to take a deeper breath, flicking his eyes across the room unnecessarily- he knew what was in his own office space. Everything was as

they'd left it this morning. The coffee machine sat uncleaned, their fridge magnets in their proper position, even the cereal was as usual— was that file cabinet open when he'd left?

"Spencer. What are five things you can see?" Lassiter gently repeated.

Shawn nodded, trying again to steady his breathing. "I, uh…. The fan…"

Lassiter seemed instantly relieved. Jesus, how much of a basket case had he been acting if basic sight was an accomplishment? "...Gus's, ah, Gus's laptop…"

He looked down at his hands. They seemed to be shaking slightly less.

"That's two." Lassiter prompted.

And suddenly, Shawn was no longer in the Psych office. He was in a diner booth, small in stature and in authority as he stared across at his father. Henry looked at him with disappointment and disinterest as he fidgeted with his hands.

"That's two. I asked you how many hats were in the room, Shawn, not how many people were wearing them."

He shot forward, stumbling to his feet as Lassiter reeled back in surprise. "Get out."

The detective gaped at him, standing but not moving to obey his wishes. He spoke incredulously, like leaving had been the very last thing on his mind. "Shawn, you're having a panic attack."

"Lassiter, get the hell out of here right now."

"Shawn—"

Shawn surged forward, grabbing his arm and pulling him towards the door. Lassiter, although he could most definitely overpower the shorter man with effort, gave little resistance. Shawn grasped at the doorknob, realizing he'd locked it. Of course he had, he always locked it. Why hadn't Gus locked it? God, Gus. His partner could've been trying to get a hold of him right now.

"*Shawn*. I told you, you are clearly not in a- in a sane state of mind right now."

Shawn scoffed. He was insane now, too. Lassiter sighed exasperatedly. "You know what I mean. Just take a breath, we need to talk about this."

"What I need." Shawn choked down a breath. "Is for you to leave."

This hung in the air for a moment, the detective finally seeming to consider his requests. He still looked at Shawn as if he were one of his mom's headcases, but he didn't come right back with an argument. He swallowed, seeming wholly unconvinced by the decision he was about to voice.

"Okay. Okay, I'll go."

The psychic breathed a sigh of relief.

“But, Spencer, tomorrow…” He paused. “We’ll talk tomorrow.”

Shawn pushed the door shut, immediately turning the lock.

He returned unsteadily to the couch, collapsing against the warm leather his colleague had occupied not five minutes prior. The only sounds in the near-liminal office were his own heavy breathing and the crickets chirping outside. An indeterminate amount of time passed, but in the silence, he could finally breathe.

He reached into his pocket, slipping out his cell phone and battery, hesitating before popping the pieces back together. A few seconds later his screen loaded, summoning the only light in the barren room.

He had no missed calls.

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