

**Late Night Visit from the Boys
and Girl in Blue**

A Short Story

by

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For Mr. Donald R. Freyer, Jr.

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California*

It was Sunday, the dog days of summer, and a full moon to boot. I was lying on my apartment sofa, trying to stay cool under the arctic air shooting from the ceiling A/C vent, when I heard eight thudding beats. From the door. The noise boomed through the clear, dead-hot space of my ubiquitous apartment dwelling in the San Fernando Valley.

Sitting up, ramrod straight, my heart thudded as I cocked an ear out for more ruckus. But just silence. Then I heard faintly the squawks of a walkie-talkie. Squawking, talking, static, silence... again, squawking, talking, static, silence. Footsteps. Quiet conversation. I sensed what this was all about. The timing wasn't coincidental.

But still not completely sure, and desperate to solve the mystery, I jumped off the sofa and rushed to my front door to unlock it. Not even bothering to look through the peephole first, I opened it a crack.

“Yes?”

There were at least eight boys in blue. Holy moly. This meant at least four squad cars parked outside. What was I, trouble?

There was one in charge, a real jerk, who started the dialogue: “Jason Park?” He was very curt, very hostile and very rude.

“Yeah? What’s this all about?”

“Los Angeles Police Department. Step outside.”

He motioned with his arm, and his voice breathed no nonsense. With a heavy heart, I cursed under my breath. Resigned to Fate, I faced this fellow through the door crack, and began to go through the motions. *Here we go again...*

“Face the wall. Spread your legs. Place your hands on the wall,” he barked.

I complied unquestioningly, knowing this was serious trouble. I figured not to object, but just to follow instructions.

The radio crackling continued, oblivious to my presence, sounding out in code.

Two Hispanic guys felt me over, from top to bottom. I was wearing boxers, board shorts and a tank top. Nothing else. No socks, no shirt. My personal space had been violated.

I suspected the cause was an obscenity-laced tirade against my mother an hour earlier. I became enraged because she had cast doubt on my romantic relationship with the assistant manager of a nearby Mexican restaurant.

“Now put your hands to your sides.”

I could tell this jerk was enjoying his hold on power over me. Again, I complied without saying anything. I sneak-peeked a sideways glance at him. He looked cruelly at me, as if he were sure that he had this one in the bag, as if my case were just par for the course.

“What is this all about?” I asked in a weak warble.

The jerk did not give an answer. One of the other officers, a white guy of slight build who didn't fill out his uniform, explained matter-of-factly, “You're being detained for a 5150 hold.”

I knew the drill. In the state of California, a

peace officer in a 5150 case is given the authority to put you on a seventy-two-hour-long confinement in a psychiatric ward if you are a danger to yourself, to others, or are “gravely disabled.” A 5150 is an involuntary hold. In other words, I wouldn’t have a choice in the decision when someone called that on me.

I had been 5150’d a number of times before in Los Angeles County. And I really didn’t want to go back into those circumstances. The indignity of being shoved, handcuffed, into the back of a police cruiser was beyond belief. And the affront to my personal freedom in those psychiatric wards was nonpareil.

“Put your hands behind your back.”

Again, I acquiesced. The slight white boy in blue held me by one elbow and then clumsily traipsed me back into my own apartment, while the jerk officer followed. The living room was lit by the single fluorescent light in the ceiling, which cast a dull moon-like pall over the proceedings. Everybody and everything was illuminated in harsh relief by it.

Spying one of my director’s chairs in the living

room, the skinny officer dragged it across the floor with one hand, scraping it unceremoniously over the linoleum. With his other hand, he perched me on the edge of the seat, with my hands still behind my back. That's when he busted out the handcuffs and...

“Lean back farther in the chair.” Then he chained me to one of the wooden posts in the back of the chair. Oh, brother.

I was unnaturally bent backwards, while the more-unnatural frame of the cuffs ground into my wrists, making them increasingly uncomfortable with every passing minute. I have never felt so undignified, so vulnerable, so naked, as I felt at that moment, when my civil liberties had been taken away from me.

There was a lot of moving around and shifting by the officers. The jerk officer gave me an unadulterated glare, before going outside, I suppose, to gloat about how I was easy pickings. Two officers—an older Asian with a gut and moustache, and the previously mentioned skinny white guy—made themselves comfortable on my sofa, right where I had lain earlier, right where the air-conditioning was strongest. Meanwhile the two

Hispanic officers paraded around, back and forth, leaving dried mud tracks and clay-like droppings on the floor.

“How could my parents do this to me?” I cried out rhetorically in anger and pain, as if I had just caught my long-time girlfriend cheating on me behind my back.

“Look, kid,” said the Asian officer, shifting himself on my couch, as if he thought he was my uncle doing me a favor by giving me some old-time advice, “there are no bad parents.”

Oh yeah, as if what he had just said justified any parenting style whatsoever; or as if what he had just said justified how he parented. Still, I didn’t want to reply to his comment.

“I can’t believe I’m being 5150’d again,” I pined out loud instead in a half-moan.

From my sofa the skinny one replied, “Hey, you’re not being 5150’d, you’re being detained. OK?”

Then all of a sudden, fifteen minutes after the initial pounding on the door, a curvy female officer, who I will call Girl in Blue, entered my apartment, approached me, and asked, “Jason, I

want to see your cell phone.”

Her radio chattered as I studied her. For some reason, she commanded authority naturally. It was neither her badge nor her gun that moved me. It was her sophisticated control over *information*—in this case, from my cell phone—that commanded respect. So I complied, only this time, with uncontrived assent.

“It is in my bedroom in the upper drawer of the nightstand,” I replied.

Thirty seconds later, she emerged from the bedroom, with the flip-phone I was using at the time in her hand.

“What’s the password?”

“0463.”

She went outside to the hallway, and for about five minutes I didn’t see her. The radio chatter continued in irregular cadences from the other officers’ walkie-talkies.

Meanwhile, the jerk officer came in to check on me. He stood over me as I sat chained to my director’s chair, and he looked sadistically pleased that I was helplessly handcuffed with

my hands behind my back. He still had that cruel smirk on his face. I looked up at him, helpless, with dark fears clutching at my throat.

He asked me: “Do you have any drugs or drug paraphernalia on you, Jason?”

“No.” It was all I could do to give a guttural, phlegm-choked reply of surrender.

My answer initiated a search anyhow, as the two Hispanic officers went into my bedroom, and through my line of sight, I saw them checking out the bottom drawer of the nightstand. With light-blue rubber gloves on their hands, they began riffling through my belongings.

But then, just at that moment, Girl in Blue walked in briskly, my cell phone in hand. Her radio wasn't gawking.

“Take off the handcuffs,” she ordered.

The Asian officer and skinny officer got up from the sofa and obeyed her command.

Still in the chair, I rubbed my sore but free wrists, and then she returned my phone and handed me a piece of paper—a business card?!

This was not a job interview! But no, while the front of the card resembled a normal business card, the other side of the card contained a summary report.

In my agitated state of mind, it was hard concentrating on reading, but a quick scan was enough to pick up the gist of it. On the front:

LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT

VAN NUYS AREA

VAN NUYS PATROL DIVISION

Taylor #96504
Fitzgerald #89083

This listed the commanding officers' last names and their badge numbers, along with the patrol division and area where the officers were attached. But on the back, more tellingly, was

written in all caps:

DATE: 08-10-2014 TIME: 22:55 INC.
NO.: 4628
R/C MALE W/ MENTAL ILLNESS
CONTACTED MEU, DID NOT
MEET 5150 WIC CRITERIA

In other words, “Radio call. Male with mental illness. Contacted Mental Evaluation Unit (MEU), did not meet 5150 Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) criteria.”

I felt like crying. How was I going to justify my text to my family? Boy, I really screwed up this time! The feeling of contrition was an ocean wave crashing over me and taking me down deep until I hit—ow! —rock bottom, all while I suffocated before it let me go and brought me back up, gasping for air. How am I going to justify what I said to my mother?

It seemed that the LAPD was letting me go. What had compelled this move? Were they playing games? Maybe not. After all, I had complied with their instructions, I hadn’t caused a ruckus while being detained, and I had been completely cooperative with the officers. That was for certain.

But I didn't know what Girl in Blue had seen, or not seen. Or divulged, or not divulged, to the commanding officer. I mean, the obscenity-laced tirade was there, in the sent messages folder. Did she and the others disregard it? Or could they not find it? I guess I'll never know.

The jerk officer had treated me roughly, as if he were playing the role of "bad cop" with gusto and relish. But now that I was being let go, his cruel smirk turned into an open-mouthed, frightened stare. I felt that same feeling of anger inside of me, right at that moment, for the jerk officer. And he sensed it in me, the crazed fool. If his colleagues hadn't been there to back him up, and if he had not been there with his gun, a very disagreeable scene might have arisen.

Girl in Blue said, "Mr. Park, we are releasing you from detainment. Are you aware that you are being let go on your own recognizance?"

I replied in earnest, "Yes, ma'am."

And then everybody started clearing out, including the bad cop. They all left. I was in the room all alone. I remained in my director's

chair, my wrists throbbing in pain, and sensed that the ordeal wasn't over.

Someone knocked a few times, in a medium, socially acceptable volume.

I yelled, "Come in!"

I heard the door swing wide open, and in walked somebody else: the Boss Cop, the one really in charge.

He was six feet two, easily 210 pounds, big-jawed, big-boned. He had a shock of blond hair on the top of his head, and on the bottom of his figure his feet and legs filled out a pair of black leather boots that were made for stomping—they reached all the way up to his knees. He carried in his hands his motorcycle helmet.

"Jason Park?"

"Yes, sir."

"Could we have a talk over there?" He motioned to the living-room table.

I shrugged. "Sure."

I sat in one of the dining room chairs while he remained standing. The table held my laptop and printer. I shut the lid of the laptop. He gingerly placed his helmet on his side of the table.

The Boss Cop started: “Mr. Park, thank you for your cooperation. I’m Lieutenant Winston of the LAPD. We determined that you will not be 5150’d.”

“Thank you, Officer,” I replied politely, knowing that I still wasn’t out of it just yet.

“At this point, do you want to press charges against the LAPD?”

What? I kind of stared at him, then I looked out the window at the moon a moment. Is this a trick question? Does it really make sense for him to ask that?

But I was undeterred. In a quiet, measured tone I replied, “No, sir, I think your men and women were simply following orders.”

At this, the Lieutenant lowered his head... and also his aura of authority, as if he were trying to confirm that he had heard me right. His men

and women, following orders? His orders? Was I saying that he had barked out the wrong orders, simply because the detainment had led nowhere?

I seemed to have confused him. In any case, Lieutenant Winston raised his head back up and looked straight at me, and as if in slow-motion, raised one hand over the table where he and I were sitting.

“Well, it seems that you have some equipment”—he waved to the laptop and printer— “that you can do some work with.”

“Yes, I am a writer, and this,” I said, pointing to the same equipment, “is my printing press.” I shot Lieutenant Winston a wistful smile, as much as I could manage. It had been a difficult night thus far.

“Well, you have a lot to keep you busy,” he quipped, as the Lieutenant got up from the table and reclaimed his helmet to make his way out. “Have a pleasant evening, Mr. Park.”

After he ended with this courtesy, I followed him out to say good night to the boys—and girl—in blue.

“Thanks, guys. Thanks for coming out. Have a good night,” I said in a parting shot of false civility to the LAPD. There were two other officers who had stayed outside the whole time: buff black brothers. I saw them glance at me, with long, drawn looks on their faces. The Asian officer with the moustache and gut in particular stared at me a while before getting in the elevator. The others simply turned away.

I shut the door and locked it behind me. I looked at my watch: 11 PM. I lay back down on the couch, in the same resting position that I’d been in exactly thirty minutes earlier, with the A/C vent above blasting frigid air onto the couch below. I had dodged a bullet, and I resolved that I would never be placed in such a compromising position again.

Since then, no more obscenity-laced tirades, and no more 5150’s.