

It Ain't Easy Bein' Green

Copyright: Pamela K. McCaughey 2006

based on UFO (1969-70)

created by Gerry & Sylvia Anderson and Reg Hill

Rescue Me (2004-2006)

created by Denis Leary and Peter Tolan

Disclaimer: coarse language and drug use discussed.

Chapter One

Omega operative Ralph Peluce was having a bad day. Earlier, he'd been part of a team assigned to take out an alien nest just off the coast of New York State. The aliens had died to the man, meaning they didn't get any captives for interrogation. Two of their own men were lost in the operation. One alien spacecraft managed to get airborne and perhaps got out of earth atmosphere, and the one ship they took, they had to cannibalize as much of the portable alien equipment as possible and get back out before the damn thing exploded.

The task fell to him to transport a sealed container of pen like alien energy tools back to Omega's New York City headquarters. The bodies and the larger alien items of equipment were being sent via a special plane - but it wasn't going to get to the site for another couple of hours, so he was going on ahead. In the package was also a small cache of pills. The Omega lab boys would be keen to analyze them.

All this and more was running through Peluce's mind when a transport truck suddenly backed out of a concealed alleyway and struck his vehicle...

* * *

"Jesus, Tommy, I think he's dead," Lt. Kenny Shea leaned into the driver's broken window and pressed the victim's throat for a pulse.

"Can't be - he just spoke to me before I went to get the jaws of life," FDNY firefighter Tommy Gavin yelled back, tool in hand.

Shea tipped his helmet back, "I guess all you can do now is get the body out for the ambulance people. You sure he spoke to you?"

"Hell, yeah! He said there was a box in the trunk - he seemed agitated about it!" Tom experienced a moment of concern - he'd been talking to dead people for some time and it scared him whenever it happened.

The two firefighters powered up the jaws of life and cut open the driver's side. Ambulance workers assisted them in carefully extracting the now lifeless body from the seat. Shea and Gavin watched until the gurney was wheeled away and secured in the back of the vehicle. Tommy lit up a cigarette and held out his lighter so Ken could ignite his cigar. They both exhaled.

"Wanna check the trunk?" Kenny asked, nonchalantly.

"Yup."

They removed the car keys from the ignition and used them to open the trunk lid. Inside was a briefcase sized metal box, with a fancy combination lock on it.

"Damn. This isn't gonna be easy to get into," Tommy said, taking off a Nomex glove to scratch his face.

"Think we should turn it over to the cops? Box like this is liable to have something valuable in it," Kenny replied.

Tommy made a face, "If there is something valuable in it, well, I could use some extra dough."

"Isn't that sorta like...theft?"

"It's found money. We found it," Tommy lifted the box out of the trunk, "I can stash this on the truck and we'll get it open later."

* * *

It had taken an enormous amount of effort and seven different tools, but Tom and Ken finally managed to compromise the combination lock on the box they'd recovered at the car

accident. Much to their chagrin, there was no stash of cash or apparent valuables. Just two more sealed containers, neither of which held the promise of anything worth stealing it for.

"Well, that was a fuckin' waste of time," Tommy sat down in disgust.

"I wonder who this stuff belongs to," Kenny mused aloud.

"I heard the hospital didn't find any ID on the victim - he's a John Doe."

"How'd ya find that out?"

"I got Sean to call up that Emergency Room nurse he used to bag and ask." Sean Garrity was one of the guys on their crew - a good firefighter, but not too sharp otherwise.

"And, nobody's stepped forward to claim this guy or what was in his trunk?"

"That's right."

* * *

"We picked up Peluce's body and his vehicle, but the container in the trunk is gone," Pete Little reported to General Paul Foster at Omega Headquarters.

"What about the locator beacon inside the box? How many hands did the vehicle pass through?"

"The only thing we can figure is that the beacon was never turned on, or it was somehow compromised. The firefighters extricated Peluce's body. Then the car was towed to a city auto impound. The keys were on the driver's seat and the trunk showed no sign of forced entry - so the obvious theory is that the keys were used to open the trunk by whoever took the box."

"Fingerprints or DNA?"

"No usable prints but we're hoping for a DNA hit off the leather key holder. It's being processed as we speak."

"Any chance whoever stole the container could compromise the combination lock?"

"Well, certainly, but they'd have to have access to some pretty specialized tools. The energy pens and the medical stuff Peluce was transporting were further sealed in their own separate containers inside the box."

Paul thought for a moment, "Wouldn't firefighters and auto mechanics have specialized tools?"

"We're on that - our snitch at the NYPD is tracking down which firehouse crew responded to the accident. I already had a chat with the impound manager and his staff - I put a good scare into them."

"What's our worst case scenario if someone does open the box?" Foster asked, "Can the lasers be used as weapons?"

"Yes, sir, they could be. And, the pills in the box, they're believed to be green oxygen pills - similar to the fluid the aliens pump through their breathing apparatus. Anyone taking those pills could end up with an oxygen high and...quite likely end up with a greenish tinge to their skin. And, it's not easy to get off that stuff and breathe normally again - you know all about that, General," Pete was referring to Foster's own encounter with the aliens' green fluid back in the 1980's.

"Let's get this box back ASAP."

* * *

Tommy waited until Kenny turned in for the night. The two men were sharing Tommy's apartment. Both were now single, thanks to their divorces, although Gavin had 2 daughters with his ex. His son, Conner, had been killed by a drunk driver only months earlier. Lt. Shea was also in a financial bind due to a liaison sometime earlier with a hooker who managed to clean out what money he had left over from his failed marriage. Neither man had any cash left

in reserve and the siren call of possible found money or something they could sell for a quick buck, had spurred them to steal the metal box in the trunk. They weren't inherently dishonest, but circumstances had forced them to be selfish.

Faced with child support payments and legal bills, Tommy was determined to open the two packages they found in the box. The containers didn't look like there was cash in them, but Tommy had heard of diamond couriers and drug dealers using locked boxes when transporting their products. If they yielded any gemstones or illicit drugs, he intended to get top dollar for them and perhaps even share some of the bounty with Lt. Shea.

The oval container was about 10 inches long and at least 6 inches in circumference. Could there be hidden jewels inside? When shaken, the container made no noise. The other container was larger and made a soft shooka-shooka sound, suggestive of stones, pills or some other small items rubbing together.

After running his fingers and a small flashlight over the larger container, end for end, Tom realized there was an almost invisible hairline seam running around the middle of it. Using several small tools from his kit, he gently pried the two pieces apart.

Strangely wrapped little packets of greenish gel capsules fell into his lap from the open container. What the hell were the pills for? They didn't look like any drug he'd ever seen before. He held up a packet and looked at it with his magnifying glass. The capsules were filled with some sort of viscous green liquid - and they were much larger than most capsules - almost an inch in length each! Man, choking one of them down would not be easy!

He turned his attention to the other container. Sure enough, it opened similarly. The cylinders construction was amazing in that one couldn't see the opening seams with the naked eye. Both containers were made of highly polished and milled steel, and they shone with an unusual reflectivity.

As Tom twisted off the lid carefully, he noticed there were small foam lids filling each open end of the cylinder. He prized the pieces out with a tiny pair of needle-nosed pliers. What he saw made his heart sink.

Inside each half were what looked like pens, packed in separate foam tubes. He pulled one out. There did not appear to be any hole at the end for the ink nib. The other end did have a tiny pinhole opening. Tommy noticed a recessed button on the underside. He held it out and pressed.

An almost soundless streak of blue energy shot out the pinhole end and struck the wall. Tommy dropped the instrument in shock, staring at the precise incision in the gyprock. On closer inspection, the damage was small enough to be covered with a bit of putty and paint. He got an idea.

Picking up the strange pen, Tommy went into the kitchen. The freezer yielded a rock solid bag of burritos. Wielding the pen, he pressed the firing button and watched as the bluish beam shot out and neatly sliced the bag in half. What the hell?

Tommy needed a better brain working on this than his own. Kenny was snoring away loudly in his room, but woke up when Tommy gave him a good shake, "You gotta see somethin' right now!"

A demonstration on the wall, then a can of frozen orange juice concentrate drew forth a whistle from Lt. Shea, "Holy fuck, Tommy, what is that thing for, anyway?" he reached out to touch the OJ can halves and found they hadn't melted on contact with the beam of light from the 'pen'.

"I was hopin' you could tell me," Tommy took Shea back out to the living room, "There's

gotta be at least ten of these things packed in the cylinder."

"Pills?" Kenny noticed the large green gel caps on the coffee table.

"Yeah, BIG mothers! Question is: which end do they go in?"

"Suppositories?"

"Jesus, I don't know! I haven't tried them yet! I like to know what I'm stuffin' up my ass, ok?"

Kenny grinned, despite the situation, "I don't know, Tom. I mean, these things were packaged up pretty securely - maybe they're medical prototypes."

"What makes you say that?"

"Pills and some kinda laser cutters. Sounds medical to me. I read somewhere that some surgeons use laser for delicate work - you know - cataract removal and cosmetic stuff. These are handheld - easy to get into small places."

"So what was buddy doin' with 'em? Makin' a delivery?"

"Could be. I don't know about the pills, but I'd guess these laser things are worth a few bucks," Shea said, "We could get some money if we figure a way out to sell them."

Tommy sighed and replaced the pen back into its spot and resealed the cylinder, "The pills are sorta gel cap."

Shea picked up a packet and examined them more closely, "I've seen alot of shit - legal and illegal - and these don't look like anything I've ever seen before. We don't even know if they're to be taken orally or rectally," Kenny laughed, "You can play guinea pig. Take one now and see what happens."

"Are you nuts?"

"Look, if they're really suppositories the worst that can happen is that you'll have a million dollar dump. If they're some sorta new drug on the market, you might sell 'em on the street and made some extra cash. That's why we took the fuckin' box in the first place."

"So what's our secret evil plan for this stuff?"

"I say we do our homework - hold onto the stuff - don't tell a soul - do some snoopin' and watch the paper in case its reported missin'. Then we wait a coupla weeks and see if we can find a way to unload it."

"Who could we sell the pens to?"

"I dunno, eye doctors, plastic surgeons - this is New York, Tommy - there's tons of those guys who do that kinda work here and would pay big money to get their hands on these things!"

* * *

"I'm headed out to the firehouse to chat up the men who responded to Peluce's accident," Pete informed Paul Foster, " The captain's name is Gerry Reilly. The ambulance guys came up clean - didn't match the DNA we lifted from the leather key case."

Paul nodded, "I'd like to go with you and see these men."

"No problem. The crew comes on shift at 8:30 this morning. Let's go."

* * *

Posing as NYPD officers was nothing new for the Omega operatives. In fact, posing as just about anything but who they really were seemed to be SOP for the most part. Getting those alien medical supplies back was vital - they couldn't afford for them to fall into the wrong hands. Not only were the lasers dangerous, they could actually be utilized as weapons. And the green pills were an additional form of the green liquid the aliens breathed in space. It was a more solid version, packed with a high oxygen content and other constituents which

kept the aliens healthy as they travelled across the galaxy to Earth.

Chief Reilly led Paul and Pete into the common room, "Hey, guys, coupla NYPD's finest here - they wanna talk to Kenny and Tommy."

Mike, the probie, looked up from his coffee and magazine, "Kenny's in the bay doin' somethin' with the truck, but Tom's not here this morning. Called in sick..."

Reilly nodded, "I'll take ya out to see Ken Shea, he's our lieutenant."

The men found Lt. Shea re-stocking filled Scot air packs and replacing other items into the storage compartments of the big red truck.

"Tommy's out sick today?" Reilly said to him.

"Yeah, looked a little green around the gills this morning when we got up...must be the flu or something like that."

"These guys are NYPD, followin' up on that accident case you and Tommy handled a couple days ago - y'know - you cut the body outta the car?"

Ken looked the officers over carefully, almost cautiously, "What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

Pete spoke first, "Did you open any other part of the vehicle other than the driver's side door?"

"Well, we just used the jaws of life to get the vic out, but he was already dead by the time we started workin' on the truck."

"We know that - we just want to know if you worked on another area of the SUV - like the trunk for instance."

Oh, oh. Busted. Feigning as much innocence as possible, Kenny replied, "Had no reason to. We cut the guy out, the ambulance workers took the body away and we stowed our gear and headed back to the house, here."

"Did you see the vehicle removed from the accident site?"

"No, as I said, we left before the tow-truck arrived."

"We'd like to talk to your crew-mate," Paul interposed, "Where does he live?"

"He'll be back in on his next shift, you can talk to him then," Ken said.

Pete shook his head, "No, we want to talk to him right away."

Kenny gave them the address of the apartment he shared with Gavin, "But, you might not wanna go over there this morning - he wasn't feeling well - he might be contagious..."

Paul smiled "We'll take that risk, Left-anant, thank you for your time."

With that parting shot, Paul and Pete left the station house, presumably on their way to Tommy Gavin's apartment. It did cross Ken's mind that one of those officers spoke with a mildly British accent...

As soon as they were out of sight, Ken pulled out his cell phone and speed-dialled Tommy's number, "Tom? You up yet? Get your ass outta the house - there's a coupla NYPD's finest headed your way!"

"Whatta they want?"

"They were here askin' about that box we swiped, Tom!"

"Did they ask specifically if we had it?"

"No, but they wanted to know if we'd used the jaws of life on the trunk, or touched the trunk - they didn't mention the box at all - but I knew what they were gettin' at!"

"Jesus. I gotta get outta here!"

"Take that box and all the weird stuff with ya - they might get a warrant for the apartment or some damn thing like that! If they find the stuff, we'll be facing criminal charges! And one

more thing - one o' them has a British accent!"

* * *

As quickly as he could, Tommy threw on some clothes and jammed the weird medical supplies back into the box. He glanced in the bathroom mirror as he had one final bladder evacuation and caught sight of his own image. His complexion had changed - maybe he really was sick - he looked a little green around the gills - just like Kenny had said earlier when he was getting ready for work. Maybe he shouldn't have taken two of those strange green pills last night...

Grabbing his keys off the counter, Tommy went out the back exit, jumped in his truck, fired the box under the seat and drove off.

Just as Gavin was out of sight, Pete Little and Paul Foster had found the apartment building. They parked out back and used a special instrument to get into the back exit Tommy had just vacated. Once they found the apartment door, they knocked cautiously and identified themselves as NYPD. Both had bogus ID and badges, and they'd utilized them before to great effect in other circumstances.

When nobody answered the door, they let themselves inside, and scouted the premises.

"Gavin was supposed to be sick," Paul commented, "Doesn't look like he was too sick to remove himself - and the box - if he in fact has it."

Pete had finished checking every room and every closet, "I've taken the liberty of removing and bagging the toothbrushes in the bathroom. We might be able to get a DNA hit off one of them. Gavin might have taken himself out to a local clinic, but my money's on him getting out of here before we showed up - I bet that Lt. Shea called him and told him to vamanos."

Paul indicated the small tools lying out on the coffee table, "I'd say those tools look like something that could be used to open the alien med supply box."

"Let me get one of our techs to hack into the DMV - I'll get a license number on this guy...we'll track him down..." Pete pulled out his own cell phone.

* * *

Tommy Gavin hadn't driven too far when he began to feel light-headed. It was a strange, almost nice feeling, actually. Unlike the lightheadedness that accompanied a drinking bout, this sensation was peaceful, almost energizing. He felt as though he was breathing better than he ever had. He pulled over and parked. Being drunk had never felt this good. This was more like a high, but even better and purer than any marijuana he'd ever smoked. Was it those pills he took? Man, if they were some sort of illegal drug - they had to be one of the best ever!

He took off his dark sunglasses to rest his eyes for a moment from the brilliant morning sun streaming in through the windshield. Tommy shook his head, and spied himself in the rear view mirror. He did a double take. And looked again.

Much to his amazement, his skin was not just limned with a greenish pallor. It was completely green. And the green didn't stop with his face. When he pulled his shirt collar aside, he could see the greenish tint had crept down his neck and further down as well. A wave of panic crept up his throat - but slowly - as if he was looking at someone else's face instead of his own. He watched his own hand speed dial Ken Shea's cell number as though the hand belonged to another man.

"Kenny? Yeah it's me. I ditched those NYPD guys. But I gotta problem. Can you get the Chief to let you come and get me? I can't drive..."

* * *

"Tommy, you shouldn't be out here - those NYPD's could find you like this...," Ken Shea jumped in the passenger side of Tommy's truck and stopped talking mid-sentence - stunned into silence by his first full frontal view of Gavin's face.

"No comments from the asshole brigade, OK? I know what I look like - but maaaaan this is the best high I've ever had..."

"Jesus, Tom, you're...godammit, you're *green* !"

"I think it was those pills - I took two last night before I went to sleep..."

"Are you fucking nuts? We have no idea what's in those goddamn pills! I was just jokin' last night when I said you should take some..."

"But, Kenny...I feel soooo goood..."

Ken looked at him eagerly for a second, "How good?"

"Ohhhhh, this is like nothin' I've ever done before...It's better than booze, better than weed..."

"Think we could get alot of money for the stuff?"

"Once people try this, they'll want it all the time, maaaaan..."

"Are you dizzy? Disoriented?"

"Nah...well...sorta...but in good way..."

"You can't drive like this!"

"Tell me about it!"

"What if you got stopped by the cops - they're probably lookin' for ya right now!"

"I bet whatever those pills have in 'em - it won't register on one a those booze-o-meters they carry around..."

"You sure you took only two?"

"Yeah, chased it with the remainder of Maggie's vodka from the freezer..."

"You're supposed to be on the wagon, Tom!"

"Well, if I can get more o' this stuff, I'll never touch a drop a booze again - whatever this shit is - it's better than booze!"

"We gotta get you somewhere safe! And, don't take anymore of those horse pills - we gotta save them to sell if they're that good!"

"I can't go back to the apartment..."

"If I take you back to the station house the police could come back there too...what about if I dropped you off at Sheila's place?"

"That crazy bitch? I'd rather ya hand me over to the goddamn cops..."

"OK, OK...let's go back to the house. But ya gotta lay low - hide somewhere in the station and keep outta sight - the Chief thinks you're sick and the guys will cover for ya...C'mon, I'll get ya on the back of my bike - and don't let go of me y'hear?"

* * *

Little and Foster stood beside Tommy Gavin's empty truck. Flashing their badges to curious onlookers on the street, they'd scrutinized the entire vehicle - no box of alien medical supplies.

"He ditched the truck, Pete, but he's got to be somewhere in this city. The man hasn't got the means to get far on his salary."

"I know, Paul. We can go back to the apartment building but if he really is dodging us, he wouldn't be stupid enough to go back there."

"Would he be stupid enough to go back to his own station house?"

"You wouldn't think so...we could swing by there anyway and question the other men."

They might let slip something Lieutenant Shea didn't know about..."

Chapter Two

Kenny set Tom up in the second bathroom their one female crew member used to use. It wasn't going to be fun sitting in there alone with the door shut and locked, but Ken fortified Tommy with some coffee, a couple of sleazy magazines and a more comfortable folding chair.

"I'm warning you - don't come outta there unless you set yourself on fire! Keep quiet and call me on your cell if you need anything. I'm puttin' an 'out of order' sign on the outside of the door so the guys won't try to use it. I'll pretend like I'm callin' a plumber to come look at it later..."

Tommy pulled out his cigarettes and Ken yanked the package away from him, "Don't - the smoke'll give you away! It'll come out from under the damn door!"

Shrugging his shoulders, Tommy slumped down into the folding chair as Ken left and closed the door, "Remember," he whispered through the wood, "Lock it from the inside so nobody can get in."

He took a half-hearted swig of his coffee. If he took in too much caffeine, he might lose the high, and right now, that was almost more important to him than getting caught or worrying about the consequences.

The magazines were ones he'd seen before, and contrary to what alot of men said about 'buying the mags for the articles', Tommy quite honestly only bought them for the naughty bits. He wasn't a reader. Never had been. Never would be. He stood up and looked at himself in the mirror over the sink. His face was still a decidedly green shade. Unbuttoning his shirt, he discovered the green had covered his chest and had moved down his whole body, likely. He took down his pants and undershorts and viewed himself. Tommy grinned. Even his favourite parts were green. Sort of like being the Incredible Hulk without the personality change!

He flipped open his cell and called Ken, "Hey, ya know what? My dick is green!"

Standing in the kitchen with the other guys, Ken was somewhat anxious to hear from Tommy - especially so soon, "Uh...that's nice...I really can't talk now..."

"But, ya gotta see it! It's really green! Even my pubic hair is green!"

"That's wonderful...I'm so happy for you...", Ken lowered his voice, "I told you not to call me unless it was an emergency!"

"You don't think a green dick is an emergency?"

"Nooooo, I think you should worry about that later...much later...I'm really kinda busy right now...", Kenny snapped his cell shut.

"Who was that?" Mike asked.

"My bookie. You know those guys...always looking for money. And it isn't payday until the end of the month," Kenny smiled, hoping he sounded convincing. Mike wasn't exactly the sharpest pencil in the box and with any luck, he'd accept Ken's lie.

"Are you still bettin' the ponies, man?"

"Oh, just when I think there's a good one...", *whew - crisis averted!*

The kitchen door opened and the two NYPD officers came in.

"What can we do for you now?" Franco nodded at them.

Paul Foster smiled, "We felt we had been remiss when we were here earlier - we'd like to talk to everyone on the crew about that accident."

Sean pulled out a seat for Paul, "Not much to tell, really. We got the call, drove down there like bats outta hell. Tommy and Ken took the lead, they cut out the body with the jaws of life, the paramedics pronounced him dead, and the ambulance took the body away. We packed

up the truck and came back here to the house."

Pete looked at Franco, Mike, Chief Reilly and Ken, "Is that the way it happened?"

Reilly put one hand on his hip, "You think we'd bother lying to you? Look, we got no reason to lie. It's our job - the guys just did what they could. According to Kenny here, the vic was already dead when we got on the scene."

"It's not the victim's death that is in any contention, Chief. It's the small metal box that was in the vehicle's trunk. It's missing."

The Chief did a double take, "And you think my guys took it?"

"We didn't say that, we're just trying to find out if anyone at the scene might have noticed it and given it to one of the other authorities there."

"If there's such a flap about this box, it must be something important, then?" Franco took a sip of his coffee. Cold. Damn.

Foster replied, "It contains medical supplies which were being delivered to a clinic here in town. The clinic wants their merchandise back. They paid for it. It's theirs."

"Can't they just accept that it's gone and collect the insurance?" Mike questioned.

"It's medical supplies, they're dangerous - hazardous materials - in the wrong hands," Pete told him.

"Don't mind him," Sean laughed, "The probie's our resident retard!"

"Hey that's the pot calling the kettle black!" Kenny piped up, forgetting for the moment that he wanted to keep a low profile with these cops.

"If there is any chance any of you gave the box to someone else, or saw it, we'd really appreciate you telling us," Paul added, smiling, "We'd rather handle more serious crimes than chase after a box for some doctors on Park Avenue, but we don't get to pick our assignments, you see."

"Well, sorry, but we just can't tell you anything," the Chief reiterated.

Paul rose from his seat and handed a business card over to Reilly, "Call us at this number if you happen to remember anything useful."

* * *

"It's about time! I'm starving!" Tommy whispered furiously to Ken as he slipped inside the bathroom with more coffee and a plate of supper.

"Those fucking cops came back right after you called me - they're suspicious, Tom. They questioned everyone on the crew. They did everything but say we took it."

"But you guys didn't say anything, right?"

"Hell, no! I kept my mouth shut, and the others didn't know anything anyway. But, I am willing to bet those cops are stakin' this place out waitin' for you to show your skinny little green ass so they can get their hands on you. So, you're gonna have to stay in here for at least the rest of the shift. Maybe we can sneak you out the back after its dark or somethin'."

"I need some new magazines - I've seen these ones already."

"Jesus, Tommy, I'm not your valet! Just read the articles or something! I hope you're not in here jerkin' off by yourself!"

"I'll never tell..." Tom smiled coyly.

"I gotta get back out there - they guys think I came back in here for a dump..."

* * *

Paul and Pete had not been satisfied with the stonewalling they'd gotten from the firefighters. Either none of them knew anything or they all knew about it. One way or the other, they knew Lt. Shea was mixed up in the mess and since Gavin had dropped out of sight,

they were sure he knew where he was. But how to get it out of him?

Sitting in their car half a block away, they were monitoring the comings and goings of the crew, but nobody had stirred out. It was a quiet night.

"I just had an idea," Pete said, "Let's suppose Gavin's holed up in the station house somewhere. We know he's not at his apartment."

"Alright, if he's at the station, why didn't the men tell us?"

"Put yourself in their shoes. The NYPD are looking for a special item. If one of the firefighters took it, how likely are they to rat him out? If they do, they break the firefighters' brotherhood code. Since 9-11, the whole firefighters' thing has been blown way out of proportion. These guys cover for each other like the police do - like we do sometimes when it's necessary."

"But, they can't hide him indefinitely. Sooner or later he has to show up to work a shift even if he has claimed to be sick today."

"Right. However, if he's there right now...there are other ways to confirm his presence."

"What do you suggest?"

"I've got a heat sensing device in the trunk. Let's turn the heat up on our little firefighter friends and find out if there's an extra body in that station house that shouldn't be there."

* * *

"Yup. He's there. See that stationary image? He's holed up in some small room inside the station."

"Fine. He's there. What do you propose to do? There are only two of us. They're going to know that we can't barge in there and demand they give us Gavin without a search warrant."

Pete smiled slyly, "Ohhhh, I've got a couple more tricks in my trunk..."

* * *

The tiny canister slipped through the kitchen window unnoticed. It imploded silently and the invisible gas crept through the station house. One by one, the firefighters succumbed to its fumes and the two Omega men watched on the heat sensing device as the men slipped to the floor or remained stationary. It was a specialized canister that contained a knock-out drug.

"That gas only works for a few minutes - we have to get in and get out fast!"

Paul nodded, "You go in, get Gavin and and I'll park close enough for you to bring him out and get him in the car."

Pete wanted to work fast but he managed to inject all the other men in the station with a good dose of the amnesia drug as well. When they woke up, none of them would remember the events of the last twelve hours. Little had memorized the location on the building grid where the first stationary body had been detected. He stepped over Sean and Franco just inside the bay door, and walked around Mike, who was slumped over, with a novel fallen from his hand. The others must have been in the kitchen. The gas dissipated quickly, so Pete wouldn't feel its effects, but it would only last so long before the men would start to wake up again.

He found the bathroom and tried the door. Damn. It was locked from the inside it seemed. He had a small package of tools but taking the door off its hinges seemed like a job which would take too much time. What could he do? Pulling his tool pack around, he removed a small vial of a very corrosive liquid. He hated using it, but he had to melt the hardware on the door quickly. Good thing it didn't leave any residue. Pete opened the spigot on the top of the vial and poured several drops down where the button slipped inside the door frame and also where he could gauge the interior lock was slid across.

In seconds he heard the metal pieces from the inside locking mechanism clatter to the

floor. The door opened easily and he dashed inside to gather Tommy Gavin up in his arms. Gavin was a veteran firefighter, and tall, but he was also skinny and didn't weigh much. Pete had no trouble slinging him over his shoulder and carting him outside to the waiting car...

* * *

The unconscious Tommy Gavin, lying on a gurney was rushed into a sterile wardroom in the Omega Corporation building complex, downtown Manhattan. General Foster and Pete Little watched through the window while hazmat suited technicians worked on him.

Paul shook his head, "I can't believe that fool took some of those alien oxygen pills!"

"I wonder how he explained his change in complexion to his crewmates," Pete was rather bemused. He could see the med techs had stripped Gavin down and his entire body was green.

Dr. Raychaudhuri stepped out of the wardroom and pulled off her hazmat helmet, "General Foster, we're doing tests, as you can see. The patient is in a stable condition, we've kept him unconscious for the moment, and I can't tell you much more than that. You might as well go to write up your reports and let me page you."

"We still have to find that box! Pete didn't have time to do a search in the fire station. It's got to be there somewhere. It's vital that we interrogate this man as soon as possible," Paul explained.

"Like I said, General, you're going to have to wait a little longer..."

* * *

Sean Garrity lifted his head from the hard surface of the station house floor. Beside him was Franco, also laid out on the floor. He could hear voices and heard the other crew members talking.

"Franco!" Sean gave his friend a shove, "Wake up, Bro!"

Blinking against the light, Franco roused and stared unfocusedly at Sean, "What the hell are we doing on the floor?"

"You tell me! I just woke up!"

They got up and went towards the kitchen, tripping over Mike the probie, and his fallen book on philosophy. The guys had been kidding Mike because they told him he didn't have the smarts to get anything out of a novel like that.

"Hey, Probie! Get it together, man!" Franco nudged him and then picked the book up off the floor and handed it to him. Mike yawned and stretched.

"Geez, guys, I didn't mean to fall asleep...I was just readin'..."

"Yeah, yeah, we know just how much of that book is making sense to you," Franco grinned and punched him in the shoulder.

Sean took up the teasing, "C'mon, Mike, a book like that's waaaay over your head - why bother?"

"Well, Franco here is studying for the lieutenants exam - how much of that is over his head?" Mike shot back.

"Watch it Probie, unlike you, I don't have a rep for being retarded!"

"Are you implying I'm stupid?" Mike asked, bristling.

"Ooooooh, 'implying' - that's a BIG word for you, Probie," Ken Shea laughed as he came around the corner. At that moment the alarm sound went off.

"OK, ladies, let's get our asses in gear!" Chief Reilly yelled as they started to pull on their bunker gear and jump in the truck.

* * *

"And you're saying he turned himself green with those alien oxygen pills?" General

Straker had to laugh.

Paul nodded, "Green all over, Ed! Probably high as a kite too, from the excess of oxygen the pills put into his system."

"We're just lucky he didn't hurt anyone with those lasers."

Looking down at his pager, Paul said, "I'll have to call you back. Mitali just texted me. I think our 'guest' is able to talk now."

Interrogations were Pete Little's thing. He'd done hundreds of them all over the world. But Paul wanted to sit in on this one. Mitali had promised she'd dose Gavin up with a good measure of amnesia drug after so they could dump him safely in his own apartment - and he'd have absolutely no recollection of what had happened to him over the last several days.

They found Gavin sitting up in bed in his sterile sealed wardroom. He didn't look happy, but the green was beginning to fade out of his skin. By the time they took him back to his apartment, he'd be back in the pink, so to speak.

"Why am I in the hospital?" Gavin demanded as soon as Pete and Paul entered.

"You had a little accident," Pete said.

"An accident - what accident?"

"Well, alright, you were DUI and we took you out of your car, We could have arrested you, but someone from your station house begged us not to. We're willing to overlook this little...indiscretion...in return for some information," Paul smiled.

Gavin shifted under the covers nervously, "What kind of information?"

"Let me make it easy for you," Pete leaned forward, playing with the gold cross on his chain, "DNA. We matched yours to the leather key chain from Ralph Peluce's accident vehicle. The keys opened the vehicle's trunk - and you removed whatever was in there. No charges will be laid against you on this. We just want to get it back. So, where is it now?"

"Uh, well, y'see, me and Kenny, we didn't know what it was...it looked...important...and our finances haven't been so great lately, I mean we're both divorced and our exes got everything..."

"Not interested in your personal problems, Mr. Gavin. Just tell us the location of the metal box you took from the trunk," Pete reiterated.

"You serious about the no charges thing?" Gavin looked at Pete and Paul warily.

"Very serious."

"What the hell were those pens? Man, they're dangerous! And those pills - Jesus - they turned me green!"

"The pills and the pens are not your concern. The location of the metal box, please."

There was something in Pete's tone that finally galvanized Tommy. He swallowed, and turned his head away. When he turned back, he said, "It's in the cabinet under the sink in Laura's bathroom."

"Laura's bathroom?" Paul queried, impatient at Gavin's stonewalling again.

"Well, what was Laura's bathroom...I was hiding in there...from you guys..."

Pete rolled his eyes at Paul, "I was in there - he's telling the truth - I found him in a bathroom."

"Let's get an extraction team together," Foster and Little headed for the door.

"Hey, are you just gonna leave me here? When can I get outta here?" Tommy yelled at them.

The door opened and Dr. Raychaudhuri came in with a prepared syringe.

Paul turned back to Gavin, "The doctor will fix you up - you'll be home again before you

know it." He smiled and followed Pete outside.

"You're pretty cute for a doctor, Sugar Tits," Tommy looked up at Mitali.

She held up the needle and Tommy moved away from her, "What's that for?"

"For your pain," she smiled.

"I ain't in any pain," he replied.

"And, let's keep it that way, shall we?" Mitali injected Tommy quickly. He leaned back on the pillows as the amnesia drug began to work, "Wait'll the guys hear about this..."

* * *

Chief Reilly's crew had come back from a big fire. They were exhausted. After exchanging used equipment and Scot air packs for fresh ones, they took turns getting in the shower and crashed into bed. The station house was in darkness when Pete Little and Paul Foster crept through the open kitchen window. They both smiled at the predictability - that was twice in one night they'd been able to compromise the security of the station!

Both were wearing special goggles to see in the dark, so flashlights wouldn't be necessary. Clad in black ninja style fatigues, they sneaked out of the kitchen, out through the garage area where they trucks were housed, and back into the area by the dormitory where the firefighters were sleeping. The bathroom Pete had found Gavin in was open, the door still hinged, but the locking mechanism on the floor. Obviously the men had not noticed the damaged door yet. Paul stood as lookout, motioning Pete to go inside the bathroom.

Pete slipped in and opened the under sink cabinet. He lifted out the metal box and used a small penlight to scan the interior of the laser and pill containers to be certain none of the items were missing. Satisfied all were accounted for, he sealed the box again. The two men made their way back to the kitchen, and from there, exited the building the way they'd come in. Their Omega SUV was parked less than a block away. It had been a simple operation.

* * *

With the metal box safely placed with the technicians at the Omega labs, the next task on the agenda was to place Tommy Gavin back in his apartment. Mitali had dosed him up well with not only the amnesia drug, but a knock out potion guaranteed to keep him comatose for another seven hours.

Paul and Pete carried him to their SUV and placed him in the back. They drove to Tommy's apartment building. At that hour in the morning, there was no activity. It was still dark, still at least an hour before sunrise. A busy night!

They parked on the side of the building instead of in the lot. In the pre-dawn silence, the two men quietly lifted Gavin out of the SUV, and carried him between them into the building. Now dressed in street clothing, Pete and Paul intended to tell anyone they might encounter that they were fellow firefighters bringing Tommy home from a night of drinking - if any of his neighbours knew him well - they'd believe such a story.

Using a special unlocking device, Pete got the apartment door open. Paul slipped in with Tommy and they gently laid him on the couch.

"Who's out there?" a strange voice called out, "Is that you, Tommy?"

The two Omega operatives looked at each other - did someone else live there? They hadn't seen anyone else there when they'd investigated the apartment earlier. Time for a fast exit!

They were across the floor and out the door in one bound, before Tommy's father came shambling out of the bathroom. He saw Tommy on the couch again, "Aw, Tommy, I thought you were supposed to be at work..."

* * *

"Man, I am pooped. I'm gonna sleep all day," Franco groused as the guys prepared to go off shift, "That fire last night was too much!"

"Yeah, but we got everyone out - that's the main thing," Chief Reilly nodded, "I gotta drive upstate today - gotta go see Jeannie."

The guys all knew the Chief was referring to his wife, now housed in an expensive Alzheimers' home, "I'd like to know what the hell happened to Gavin, " the Chief continued, "He better have a good excuse for not showin' up to work!"

Kenny shrugged his shoulders, "Ya live with a guy, but ya don't really know him!" He put on his helmet and walked out to his motorcycle. The bike gave him a sense of freedom he hadn't known in years.

"I'm not kiddin', Ken," Reilly said, following him out, "If Prolee finds out Tommy blew off his job again, the shits gonna hit the fan!"

"I'll talk to him, Gerry, I'll find out what happened. Maybe there was a problem with one of his kids. He's been pretty messed up ever since Connor was killed."

"I can't keep coverin' up for him forever. I mean, Tommy's a good firefighter, but I gotta keep my own nose clean. I can't lose my job. Jeannie's gotta stay in that place. For that, I need money. Not to mention my bookie's after me again."

"You and me both, brother!" Ken revved up the bike and drove off with a backwards wave to his commanding officer.

Epilogue

Kenny unlocked the apartment door and took a breath. Damn. Tommy's dad had taken a dump on the living room floor again. They were really going to have to do something about him. Was he crazy or just incontinent? Or did he just enjoy the fact someone else got to clean up his mess?

Tommy was lying on the couch, passed out as usual. He had given Kenny the big bedroom and preferred to sleep in the living room in front of the TV. Was he really sick, or had he fallen off the wagon and gotten drunk? Ken leaned over and sniffed Tommy's breath. No booze. He gave Tommy a shove - just enough to wake him up.

"Whaddya want? I was asleep, here....," Tom growled at Ken.

"Chief's really pissed you didn't show up for work today...," Ken told him.

Tommy rolled over, "I was...sick...I guess..."

"Yeah, well, you better get your ass down to the house and smooth it over - take another tour or something to make up for this one. Chief said Prolee is hasslin' him about any absences you have."

"That bastard. First he has me followed around to AA meetin's and then he's up my ass about missin' time."

"He knows ya gotta drinkin' problem, man. He's just lookin' for a chance to bounce you outta our house."

Sitting up, Tommy rubbed his head, "Whooo, do I feel woozy..."

"Yeah, you've looked better, that's for sure," Ken patted him on the shoulder, "Go take a shower - ya might feel better."

Gavin got off the couch and headed for the bathroom, he threw his cell phone to Ken, "Take any messages for me - and if it's my ex, I'm NOT here!"

"Hey, I'm not your goddamn secretary!" Ken yelled at Tommy, catching the cell with one hand.

"Jesus! Who shit on the floor in here?" Tommy's voice complained from inside the bathroom.

Ken shrugged his shoulders and said to himself, "This is where I came in..." He put his bike helmet on and headed for the door, "I gotta find another place to live..."

The End