

thaw

The background of the poster is a night-time photograph of the Chicago skyline. The city lights are reflected in a body of water in the middle ground. In the foreground, there is a large, textured area of broken ice, suggesting a winter or frozen setting. The sky is dark with some faint stars or light spots.

a PsyCop Short

Jordan Castillo Price

Thaw - a PsyCop Short

BY JORDAN CASTILLO PRICE

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I'm the last guy in the world who cares about sports, whether we're talking about the Cubs, Sox, Bulls or Bears, or for that matter anything even remotely athletic. So I was a little surprised when Jacob suggested that we take a trip downtown to go ice skating. But nowhere near as surprised as he was when I told him I thought it was a great idea.

What Jacob didn't know was that I'd played pee-wee hockey the winter I was eleven. (I didn't give a rat's ass about hockey. I had a crush on the goalie.) And what I didn't know was that the ice rink would look so cool after sunset. All the bare trees along Michigan Avenue had been wrapped in white Christmas lights, and the whole Chicago skyline blazed behind them. Millennium Park was insanely cold, but it was gorgeous.

Jacob must have figured out that I could skate before we even got out on the ice. Not only is he smart that way, but I'm about as easy to read as a billboard. Even so, he still spent more time checking me out than he did enjoying the scenery. It's weird, the way he stares. He doesn't stop when I catch him at it. He just smiles a little.

And what a smile it is. Jacob is drop-dead handsome, dark haired, dark-eyed, with an immaculately trimmed goatee that's just this side of supervillain chic.

He watched me lace my skates as if I were doing a strip tease for his benefit, and then gave me a hand up. He didn't let go of my hand once I was on my feet. It almost felt like he'd pull me against him and kiss me—right there beside the bench, with people milling all around us. Straight people, I was willing to bet, at least for the most part. Families. Kids.

I gave his hand a squeeze and he let go. "You ready to see some action?" I asked him.

“Oh yeah.”

I launched out onto the ice and glided into the stream of skaters. That expression they always use, “It’s like riding a bike?” It never made much sense to me, since I was a crap bike rider at any age. But skating? It came right back.

My black wool peacoat wasn’t particularly aerodynamic, but it didn’t matter. My legs were longer now than they had been when I was eleven, and the blades bit into the ice with a satisfying crunch when I pushed. I veered easily around the tottering couple in matching yellow parkas trying to support each other. Another skater, a fit looking woman crouched low to the ground, caught my eye and smiled, glad to see someone else on the ice who was willing to turn up the speed. She looked serious, lycra leggings and all. I bet I could beat her.

But then someone caught my elbow. I turned. Jacob was there, sexy as sin in his leather jacket and Indian patterned scarf. “Vic—want to know what I’m thinking?” he said. His scarf covered his mouth, but I could tell by his eyes that he was smiling.

“Is there a G-rated version?”

“No.”

There was a long gap in the crowd in front of me, so I spun around to skate backwards and watch Jacob watching me. The white lights sparkled behind him. The night was magic. Even though car crash victims that only I could see wandered around on Michigan Avenue like *Night of the Living Dead*, if I tilted my head at just the right angle, I could block them out and pretend my whole world was just Jacob, Christmas lights, and the dark night sky.

I turned back around to avoid bodychecking an innocent middle-schooler and let Jacob glide up beside me. He slipped his arm through mine and slowed me to a pace less likely to put someone’s eye out. Other couples were arm in arm, but none of them were two men. Unless you counted the kid dragging along the runny-nosed brat who looked to be his younger

brother.

I tugged my arm to see if Jacob would disengage. Nope.

Oh well, why not? If anyone wanted to be a prick about the two of us skating together, I was sure Jacob would be happy to subdue them with a withering look. And if things turned physical, I could always skate away really fast while Jacob taught them some manners. But other than the transparent cabbie with a crushed face who stood half-in, half-out of a light pole, no one even made eye contact with me. Jacob and I skated together under the Christmas lights for a good hour until I started to shiver, and Jacob steered me off the ice. He seemed to enjoy watching me remove my skates just as much as he had staring at me as I laced up.

It's nowhere near as much fun to slide across the ice without skates on, especially if you aren't doing it on purpose. On our way back to the El I hit a slippery patch, shot forward a few feet, arms flailing, then caught myself and staggered upright.

"We can go back if you're not done," said Jacob.

I ignored the remark, even though he was grinning at me, trying to goad me on. "I was way faster than you," I said.

"Uh huh."

"With better moves."

I waited for a zinger, but there was none. We both stopped and looked at each other. He was still staring, still grinning.

"Wha—?"

Jacob grabbed me before I even finished the word and dragged me into the recessed doorway of a deli that was closed for the night. He spun me around, backed me into the door handle, and covered my body with his.

His lips tasted like winter. His face was cold, even his mouth, but his

tongue was hot as he pressed it against mine. My hands in their thick gloves fumbled around his neck, pulling him against me. Jacob blotted out the rest of the world—other than the door handle, which could be ignored, at least in the short term. The whole night with him felt like something stolen out of a much simpler, much happier life. Only it was actually mine. I sighed into his kiss while he drew back reluctantly, lingering over my mouth until the unmistakable sound of people crunching through frozen slush drew near.

“Do you know how happy you make me?” he said.

Good thing it was too dark in that alcove to get a good look at his eyes. That would’ve been way too much. I swallowed hard, the metallic taste at the back of my throat from skating hard mixing with the cool flavor of Jacob’s kiss. “Same here,” I said.

I pushed Jacob back onto the street and fell into step beside him as I did my best not to go all head-case on him, though the realization that I was actually happy had hit me pretty hard. I moved a little closer to Jacob, and slipped my awkward gloved hand into his. He gave my hand a squeeze.

Sample chapters of the PsyCop novels, Victor and Jacob snippets, the PsyCop blog and more can be found at www.PsyCop.com