

I've had to endure a lot of smart-ass comments about being a Chinese cowboy cop, or my personal favorite, an Oriental cowboy cop, as if I were a style of furniture or a rug. But that's nothing compared to the grief I get over my name--Daniel Chan--and that I'm captain of the Riceland, Texas Police Department.

If I had a dollar for every time I've been asked if I was related to Charlie Chan, that famous Chinese detective of old B movie fame, I could have retired early. It's probably one of the reasons I never became a detective. Trust me...I hate that stale joke more than gun control.

Of course, the shit about my name would be nothing compared to what I'd get if it were common knowledge I was gay. I can say that word now. *Gay*. Time was, I'd said I was straight and believed it. So had my wife. Then times, being what they are, changed, and I'd claimed to be bisexual. Straight by necessity, gay by preference, I've straddled the barbed wire fence of sexuality, so to speak, for most of my adult life.

Recently I've had to choose which side to stand on and, after over twenty years of having my ass scratched by that wire, it feels good to get off it, get free and, I suppose, get proud, but in my line of work, not too loud. Of course, my road to sexual truth wasn't smooth, paved, or lined with gold. More like a switchback filled with potholes, pitfalls, and pain.

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I sat in my pick-up truck parked in the parking lot at Clancy's Bar and Grill and watched the front door as people entered and left. Old habit, staking out a place before I went in. Not like I hadn't been in Clancy's every Saturday night for the last ten years.

Looking down at myself, I figured I looked okay. Not too well-dressed. Not too scruffy. My faded blue jeans didn't have any holes and my size twelve brown Tony Lamas boots looked broken in, not worn out. Black T-shirt neatly tucked into my jeans and a long-sleeved khaki shirt over it.

Perfect cowboy attire for a Saturday night.

I'd been very careful about picking out what I wore. Yeah, men aren't supposed to worry about their clothes, but gay men do. I wanted to look good, not that there'd be anyone else but me in the bar who was gay. Riceland might have had some gays and a few lesbians, but they didn't hang out here or at the other two bars in town. We know who we are, but for our mutual protection, we keep it on the down low and deep in the closet.

Time to go in. Leaning over, I locked my gun in the glove box of the Ford F-150 and got out. At most bars in Texas, there's a sign reminding you to "Check your gun at the door," and Clancy's Bar and Grill was no exception. Oh, you can carry concealed, but they still asked you not to. That was okay because I knew where the owner kept the shotguns.

Clancy's is my favorite bar, partly because it's cop-free and mostly because the owner and bartender, Jeff Strauss, happens to be my best friend. Some people find it hard to imagine a cop being best friends with a biker, but Jeff was a high school teacher before he decided to quit teaching, buy a Harley, move to Riceland and open Clancy's.

We've been friends for almost ten years. I stopped him on a routine speeding ticket when he was new in town and had just bought the bar. We started talking on the side of the road and have been best friends ever since.

Of course, Jeff tells me his biker friends can't believe his best friend is Chinese and a police captain. I trust him not to mention my sexual preferences.

After opening the door, I stepped inside, letting my eyes adjust to the dim lighting. John Fogarty's gravel voice singing about being stuck in Lodi blared on the ancient jukebox filled with rock and roll, but it had some great country classics tossed in as well.

I think that's a Texas state law.

There was the usual smoke, but the smell of stale beer was absent, replaced by the mouth-watering smell of frying onions on the grill. Behind the bar was a small kitchen where you could get some of the best burgers and nachos around. On Friday nights, they fired up the barbeque pit outside and served a decent steak and baked potato for ten bucks.

Like Toby Keith says, I love this bar.

Jeff looked up as I opened the door and waved me over with his dishrag, then flicked it back onto his shoulder. He tossed out a coaster, poured a lime and tonic, and placed the drink in front of my usual spot at the end of the bar. Next to it sat a chessboard with the game we'd started a couple of nights ago still set up.

"How's it hanging, Dan?" Jeff asked as he leaned on the bar and sipped a draft beer, then licked the foam off his blond moustache.

"To the left. Any new action?" I grinned at my friend, who just shook his shaved head.

"Where the hell do you think you are, boy, Houston?"

"Just asking." I shrugged and pulled on my drink.

At the chessboard, he made his move, then wandered down to the other end to serve another patron. Scanning the chessboard, I thought about my next move and whether I was hungry enough for a burger. I'd had a late lunch so I decided on just some nachos, no onions or jalapenos, in case I got lucky. Jeff came back, and I placed my order.

"Nachos, meat, no onions, no peppers!" Jeff shouted through the opening behind the bar.

The cook, Carlos, nodded his head to signal he got the order and waved his spatula at me. I saluted back and took another sip.

The door opened. Jeff looked up and grinned. "Look what just walked in. Lawd have mercy!"

"Who?" I didn't turn around to look, but glanced up at the mirror behind the row of liquor bottles. Two women stood in the door and scanned the room, then made their way to a table.

The tall one wore dark slacks, a light blue sweater, and her blonde hair hung in loose waves to mid-back. She looked good enough to eat and I could see Jeff's mouth watering. Mine wasn't too dry either. She was my type, if I had a female type.

I checked out the other woman, a platinum blonde with what they call around here "big hair." If you like your women a little on the trashy side, this was the girl for you. She wore a very short, tight knit dress, which accented tits a man could smother in and round hips he could hold onto. I could see the outline of her thong.

God, you gotta love those thongs.

It crossed my slow-moving mind that she might be a working girl. Not many of the upstanding, righteous, Christian women around here would wear an outfit like that. Not out in public anyway. Riceland had its problems, but prostitution wasn't one of them.

Maybe I'd been all wrong about the ladies being ladies. How did I not spot them? Too long off the vice beat, for damn sure. But maybe I was wrong.

Jeff returned from serving the drinks. "No move yet?"

"No, not yet. Guess I'll just eat my nachos and go home, Jeff." I stared at the chessboard, finally moved a knight, and took one of Jeff's pawns.

"Good move." Whether he said it about the game or my plans was unclear.

The nachos arrived and I half-heartedly started to eat. Jeff came by and grabbed a chip or two between serving the guy at the end of the bar and filling orders from the pool players. I was scraping the bottom of the plate for the last bit of cheese when the woman in the tight dress sidled up next to me.

"Got a light?" She leaned in, held her cigarette to glossy purple full lips, and waited. Her perfume wafted to my eager nostrils as I inhaled. There's nothing like the scent of cheap perfume on a woman.

"Don't smoke, sorry." I shrugged and continued looked straight ahead, trying not to encourage her. If it had been the other woman, she'd have been harder to resist.

"Well, dang, you look like a cop to me. Are you a cop?" Her east Texas twang was cute.

I had no idea how she'd made me. I didn't answer, just let her ramble on.

"See, I could tell right away you were an okay guy, even for a cop. One who wouldn't bother a working girl once we had an understanding, right?" She leaned her hip against me, put her hand on my leg, and squeezed.

"I'm a cop, that's right, and I won't bother you if you don't bother me." I looked at her face--pretty, but not so young. Maybe late twenties; still a lot younger than my forty-two years. She moved her hand slowly toward my crotch.

"Don't," I warned and put my hand over hers. It was small, warm, and soft.

"You do me a favor, and I do you"--she paused as her tongue passed over her lips suggestively--"a favor. Just between friends, no money required."

"I don't do badge pussy, honey, so go back to your table." Good thing I'm a strong man. It's not that I don't fuck women, I do, but men turn me on more. Of course, it'd been a hell of a long time since I'd been with a woman or a man. Or anyone but my own hand.

However, my alarms went off. Something didn't feel right. What were a couple of hookers doing in this small town neighborhood bar anyway?

She pulled her hand away and pouted at me. "Don't know what you're missing. I could suck you dry." Her warm breath tickled my ear. Then she turned on her three-inch fuck-me heels and headed back to the table, her ass jiggling all the way, as I watched in the mirror.

"Jeff, come here," I said.

Jeff nodded, casually walked over, wiping down a beer mug in his hand.

"Those two are hookers, and they know I'm a cop, yet they're hitting on me. I know I'm cute, in a Jet Li sort of way, but something's not right. Know anything about that? Seen them before?" I continued to watch the women in the mirror.

“Hookers? No shit? And you’re more like Jackie Chan.” He scratched his chin. “Never seen them before tonight.” He leaned on the bar. “Well, well, well. What are a couple of hard-working girls doing here in beautiful downtown Riceland? They must’ve gotten lost on their way from Austin to Houston.” Jeff took another sip of his beer.

“Took a wrong turn?” I guessed.

“Picked the wrong fork?” he replied.

“Oh, the choices we make on the road of life. It’s so sad.”

We shook our heads.

“If I’d known there were loose women in Riceland, I’d have been here sooner.”

Jeff grinned wolfishly.

“But you got here as soon as you could,” I finished the quote and grinned back.

“Still...think I could interest one of them in a ride?”

“On your Harley or on you?”

“First my bike, then she could ride me *on* my bike.” His eyes lit up and the words “pussy hound” sprung to my mind.

“That depends. How much money do you have?”

“On me? Maybe fifty.” He leaned on the bar, watching the women.

“Well, if she takes a good look at you, she may ask for more money,” I warned.

“Good thing it’s dark in here.” Jeff nodded his head in agreement. Jeff was a good-looking young guy and kept his six-foot three-inch body in shape by lifting weights, something I never could get into. His stomach gave the phrase “six-pack” its meaning. Hell, I’d do him, but he’s completely on the straight and narrow and I wouldn’t do anything to fuck up our friendship. And besides, he’d want to top, and I’m not a bottom.

“What are two hookers doing at my favorite bar, hitting on me? It stinks like day-old road kill.” I finished my drink and stood.

I threw a twenty on the bar for the food and drink. “We’ll finish the game another night, okay?”

“Sure, Dan, I can wait until then to beat you. Watch out on your way home.” Jeff nodded as he scooped up the twenty, and I headed to the door.

Out in the parking lot, I stopped, looked around and spotted the white van at the end of the lot, non-descript, no windows, screaming “cop” from fifty feet. I can smell dead skunk just as well as the next guy.

Who’d be after me? Just me, or any cop? Someone must be bored and have nothing else to do but troll for officers taking free pussy or paying for it.

Walking to the pickup, I hit the unlock button on my remote, slid in, retrieved my Glock from the glove compartment and placed it on the seat beside me. Didn’t think I’d need it; just force of habit. Not waiting around to see what was going on, I backed up, pulled out of the lot, and made my way home.