

8. MORE JOY

I meet Joy at a natural foods restaurant. We make our way through thick veggie sandwiches.

“I think that we’re all looking for a hero to help us do the really important things in life because we want to make up for the hero that we lost when we were younger.”

Joy gives me one of her looks.

“You just have to learn to do things on your own.”

I defend myself, “I can do things on my own. I’m just thinking about the really important things.”

Joy advises me, “That’s just your future self talking to your present.

“I’ve been feeling a little alone as of late.”

“What have you been doing? Staring into the night sky.”

“I think that I’ve been working too much.

Joy tells me sympathetically, “You just seem as if you don’t have a very good grip on reality.”

“I’ve got a bank account. There’s money in the account. I don’t know how it can be any more real than that.”

“This is only a temporary thing. And you spend most of your time trying to hide out from the real world. A lot of good that is going to do you.”

“I’ve got plans for my life.”

Joy smiles. “I know you’ve got plans. You’ve planned out your whole life. But a lot of good that’s going to do you when you run out of money.”

“I’m doing OK right now.”

Joy stares into space. I can tell that there is something on her mind. She rests her fork on the bed of rice on her plate.

She confesses, “You know what I’m really afraid of. That there’s someone out there who spends all his time just thinking about me. He communicates in this weird language of his. And one day, he’s just going to show up randomly at my house and be all violent with him because I never gave him the time of day.”

I look at her in the eyes, “Maybe you smiled at him once.”

“What was that?”

“What?” I ask back.

“You gave me a really creepy look. You’re not going to do anything to me, are you?”

“We’re friends.”

“What is that supposed to mean? We’re friends and you’re not going to do anything weird to me. And you don’t do that sort of thing to friends. Or you’re don’t do creepy things.”

She takes a while just to say all that to me. I feel as if I’m eaten half a sandwich in that time.

“I don’t do creepy things.”

She makes this big face, “Are you sure? Because you took a while getting back to me.”

I can tell that she is trying to cast me in her own version of a scary movie. It’s not as if I’m really off the hook. I don’t really mean to be creepy. Joy is just looking for an excuse to take

a rip at me. And for this early in the day, she's doing a pretty good job at it.

"I'm not that kind of guy. Really I'm not."

"But everyone has something that can set them over the edge."

I challenge her, "It's one thing to get pushed to the edge. It's quite another to slip over."

I feel as if I have a story to tell. I guess that I do.

A woman wants to have her husband followed.

"It's not so much that I'm afraid he's with another woman. I just want to make sure that he's not dipping in to our bank account."

"Can't you just monitor that on your own?" I ask her.

"More or less. But he claims that he has to cover some expenses. I really haven't been able to check up on him."

Cynthia supplies me with all her receipts. I am going to do what I can to match everything.

She tells me, "I can't phone all these businesses myself."

"You want me to represent you. Why are they going to talk to me?"

"Do what you can. That's what I'm paying you for."

It's not like I'm a detective. I'm just a friend of a friend. Ultimately this is a question of the husband's fidelity.

I'm not going to pretend that I don't hold a thing for Cynthia. This is part of my motivation. Even if she is going to give me some money, I would almost do this for free. I want to get close to her.

It is in my interest to demonstrate that her husband is being unfaithful. Even if he is not, it would be better if I found something out about him. I am not above manufacturing evidence. Of course, this could be one of those massive misunderstandings where he is planning a surprise party for his wife. I figure that Kevin's heart just isn't in the right place.

I do consider the monstrous alternative. I am simply a patsy for the wife. She is the one involved in the extra-curricular. And I am there to act as a cover for her actions.

The first couple of days seem boring. Kevin runs a large construction firm. He's out late in the evening. But he's on site. So it's not as if he's engaged in any hanky panky. Nothing that I've noticed yet.

Cynthia has told me that she's paying me out of her own bank account. That way he has no idea what she's doing. This leads me even more to suspect her motives. She is trying to establish an alibi.

I begin to wonder if it might not be more profitable to begin to follow Cynthia.

Cynthia works as an investment banker. The work is lucrative for her. She works at a firm on the Northside. It is an area of significant development. A financial hub that offers an alternative to the downtown. Her building is in a complex of other large buildings.

Cynthia slips out from work to meet her friend Tracy for lunch. They meet at a Thai restaurant in the mall down the street.

"I feel that I'm being followed. I have no idea why someone is following me."

Tracy wonders, "It's not Kevin."

"Kevin thinks something is going on. But I broke it off with Ray about three months ago."

“That was a little risky sneaking around behind his back like that.”

“Kevin was being such a prick. I think that he’s been using our house money for some weird project of his.”

“But you never confronted him.”

“He’s managed the finances since I met him. He helped me through college.”

Tracy takes a bite of shrimp and rice, “Are you sure that he was messing with things?”

“He’s just so mysterious that anything is possible. I still think that something is going on.”

“You could have him followed.”

Cynthia agrees, “I know. But what really worries me is that he is having me followed. As if he doesn’t want me to find out. I think he’s paranoid.”

“He did have reason to suspect you.”

“All that’s done.” Cynthia hates to admit that things are done with Ray. He understood her a lot better than Kevin. But Kevin has always been well-to-do. She has grown accustomed to that life style.

“I don’t know why you put up with him. Divorce is not an option.”

“He’s got me on a pre-nup.”

“Those things aren’t iron clad. You could get a lawyer. I know someone.”

“I know someone too. I almost think that it would be better if Kevin weren’t around.”

“You’re not saying what I think that you’re saying.”

“Let’s just say that I’ll do what I need to do.”

Tracy drops her food and stares at Tracy, “That is ruthless.”

“You don’t have to live with the man.”

“You think that you’re being followed. So someone is trying to find out if you’re having an affair. You no longer have anything to worry about.”

Cynthia looks as white as a sheet, “I don’t think that he wants to find out what I’m doing. I think that he wants to kill me.”

Tracy can’t help but smile, “You’re kidding.”

Cynthia remains all serious, “No, really. In fact, I’m sure about it.”

“That is ridiculous.”

“No, really. I told you that I have a pre-nup. I don’t get a lot. But it is a generous settlement. And you’re right. I probably could get even more with a lawyer. Kevin has made a great deal since we’ve been married. I could justifiably argue that I helped him along the way. Because I did use my expertise. But I think that he’s hiding something about his recent deals. And that’s why he’s a little worried. He doesn’t want me to find out. Either I’ll have a bargaining chip against him. Or worse, I’ll go to the police. So he wants to shut me up.”

Cynthia has hardly eaten. She has just spoken a mouthful. Tracy looks completely surprised.

A man wants me to follow his wife. I can understand why. She has shoulder length blonder hair. I’ve never seen anyone wear clothes so well. And she has expensive tastes.

Kevin tell me, “I think that she’s up to something.”

“Why don’t you confront her?”

“She is one clever woman. If she is messing with me. She has covered her tracks.”

I really don't need an excuse to follow this woman. But I accept the assignment. It's not like I'm a pervert. I'm not going to watch her get dressed.

He tells me, "You're going to have to watch everything that she does. I mean everything."

What if she closes the blinds?

I figure this will be easy. I'll just follow her to a hotel room. Take a few shots of her going in to the room with some guy. And that's that.

"If she's with someone, I want to see everything. I mean everything. I want shots of them in bed. Otherwise, she'll claim that it's a business deal.

I consider cutting her in on the action. That ought to make it easier for me. The sooner that I get this done the better for me.

"Remember what I said. I'll pay you ten thousand extra if you catch her in the act."

I imagine my conversation with Cynthia.

"I'll pay you five thousand dollars to have sex with some guy in a hotel room while I take pictures.

"That's nothing. Five thousand dollars. My husband will divorce me, and I'll get nothing."

I need a better plan. I still want to take pictures of her in a hotel room.

She looks across the table at me.

"Honestly, are you some kind of pervert?"

"Not really. I'm just doing a job. And I'd like some money."

"I could take you back to a hotel room. And give you a little money to watch my husband."

I'm getting a little carried away. I've been following her for two days and nothing. It's not like she's going to pick up some guy and head down the interstate to some sleazy motel.

This is getting nowhere. I decide to approach her and tell her what is going on.

"You want me to sleep with some guy in a hotel room, and you'll pocket the twenty grand. Who are you kidding?"

"Maybe you. You won't do it."

"What's in it for me?."

"Some revenge. I'm sure that you'll come up with something. You know the man. You know why he's so suspicious. We could blackmail him."

She feels that she is on to something. She wants to convince me.

"Let me give you a ride back to your car." I left my car when she met me to go out to eat.

I watch her adjust her lipstick in the rearview mirror.

"Surely you don't need his money. You're an investment banker. You have a career of your own."

"You don't understand. I helped him all these years."

"He paid for you college. Aren't you even?"

She is firm about it, "You don't understand. You don't have what I have. You don't need what I need. You simply don't know what it likes."

Everything around her has this glow. Even her clothes, her car. They all radiate that same affection for power. She is simply not going to take a bump down. Her only place to go it

up to the top.

When she drops me off, she notices that I am staring, "Do you want something?"

"I was just looking."

"Make sure that's all you do. Just look. Don't touch!"

"You are a very attractive woman."

"Is that all that you've got to say for yourself?"

I want to tell her that I'd do anything for her. I'm not crazy. I don't want her to think that she's got something over on me. She already knows too much.

Joy interrupts me as she loves to do, "You're making the woman out to be greedy."

"If that's how she is?"

"But in each retelling, you keep zeroing in on the same thing. She's avaricious. She suspects her husband because he doesn't give her enough."

"Joy, it's a good story. Just let me tell it like it is."

"You're the one who keep changing the point of view every five seconds."

Cynthia spirits Tracy out of work at lunch time.

"I've got something to tell you." Tracy is a rapt listener. They are both eating chicken salad.

"I'm all ears."

"Someone is following me. I know for sure. I've actually seen him. "

"Who is it?"

"I still don't know."

"It's not the police. You're not up to your old shoplifting habits."

"I was never a shoplifter."

"What's the deal? If he's following you, why did he show his face. Now he's lost the element of surprise."

Cynthia backtracks, "Maybe I was mistaken. Maybe that wasn't him."

She starts to think that she may have made a serious mistake about the guy. But she is sure that she is being tracked.

Tracy suggests, "Are you sure that it's not the police? They sometimes have a way of doing weird things."

"I'm almost positive that it's not the police. But it could be a friend of my husband's."

"What the hell would he want?"

"I told you that Kevin wants to catch me in the act."

"But you're doing nothing at all. So let's assume that it's not Kevin, and it's not the police."

"Then it's some guy who wants to watch you do things. Some guy who gets off on watching women. Someone who plays his fantasy game just by watching."

"It gives me the creeps just thinking about it. I always draw my curtains at home."

"But consider for argument sake, that there's one moment of the day where you can be watched unobserved by you. That he's waiting for just one such moment.

She thinks about it that way. It gives Cynthia the creeps.

"I told that I was freaked out by it all."

Tracy adds, "Imagine the guy has x-ray eyes. Because in effect, that's what he has. And

he watches you. He knows everything about you. He can see everything about you as if he sees through you. And he is waiting for the moment when your guard is down.”

Cynthia recoils in horror, “I feel as if you are telling a horror tale.”

“But this is not a ghost story. This is real shit.”

Cynthia can imagine a hand reaching for her at night. It gropes in the darkness until it makes contact.

“What am I supposed to do?”

“Find him before he finds you.”

“What are you saying?”

“You have to go on the offensive.”

Joy is listening to my story. She reacts negatively.

“What are you telling me?”

I look all sheepish. “What are you saying?”

“You didn’t?”

“I didn’t what.”

“You haven’t been following some woman.”

“No, not at all.”

“You really are creepy. You have that weird look on your face.”

I try to deny her accusations. She won’t back down.

“I do admit that I keep meeting this one woman accidentally.”

“Accidentally? Hardly. You’ve followed her around. You know her every move. And now you’ve come out of the shadows.”

“That’s not me.” I confess.

Joy won’t believe me. But I never did anything wrong. It was this weird coincidence. What made it even weirder was the fact that I was writing this story.

“You’re not following me.”

“Not at all,” he tells her. They smile at each.

“I guess we keep turning up at the same places.”

“Yeah, that’s it.”

“My name’s Cynthia.”

He feels that it is a little uncanny that he keeps running into her over and over again. It seems like more than fate.

He plans to talk with her after the movie. He thinks it would be a little forward just to sit next to her right off.

“Great picture!”

“Yeah, it was.”

“Want to go get some coffee,” he invites her.

“I thought you were that weird guy following me.”

“Not at all.”

“You do look a little creepy,” she laughs.

“How creepy?”

“Like the night stalker.”

“Really?”

“There’s something weird about your eyes. But you do have a nice smile.”

He feels that she is a little uncomfortable.

“So do you want to get some coffee,” he asks.

“As long as it’s somewhere in the open. I’m not going to go with you to your castle.”

“I don’t have a castle.”

They agree on a spot across the street. As they approach it, they notice that there are a lot of people there. This makes her feel at ease. It is well-lit inside and he notices a free table.

She mentions, “I’m glad that you saw a table. I think that it’s a little chilly outside.”

They both make their way inside and order some coffee. She gets a piece of cake.

He asks, “Coffee doesn’t keep you up at night.”

“A little. I was going to read a bit before I went to bed. What do you do?”

“I’m a writer. At least, that’s what I’m trying to do.”

“What kind of books?” she wonders.

“Mystery novels.”

“I should have known. Can you tell me what you are working on now? Or is it a secret?”

“A woman is trying to escape her husband who is having her followed.”

“She knows that she’s being followed.”

He nods his head. “She keeps seeing this car. But she doesn’t see the guys face.”

“Ooh, that’s a little scary.”

“It’s really scary. I’m doing pretty good so far.”

“How much have you done?”

“I’m about half way along. The woman is trying to catch the guy. Sort of turning the tables.”

“Is it working?” Cynthia is very curious.

“Not quite. The guy is good. Almost like a professional. He does this all the time.”

“Has he ever done violence to anyone?”

“The novel doesn’t really say anything about that. It just implies a lot of shit. That’s what makes things so interesting.”

“It sounds better than what I’m reading. Are you going to work on it tonight?”

“Probably.” He’d like to spend more time with her. Maybe invite her to a bar. But Cynthia is very shy. Especially with strangers.

“How do you get you ideas for novels?”

“People that I meet.”

She wants to pry, “What about yourself? This guy in your novel sounds a little like you.”

“Not really.”

She continues, “Bear with me. I imagine that the woman is a lot like me.”

“She has shoulder length blonde hair like you. And she is very stylish. But she’s a little brassy. You seem more like the innocent typ.”

She feels demeaned. “I never thought of myself as a librarian before. But if that’s how you think about me.”

“I barely notice you.”

She sits back in her chair to look at him. “But we’ve run into each other a bunch of times before tonight. Really, what did you think.”

“I thought that you were attractive. I wanted to get to know you. But I felt a little frightened off. I thought that you might find me a little weird.”

“You have to admit it. You are a little weird. You give women these strange looks. You have a very active imagination. And you write mystery novels.”

“I’m not a freak.”

“I just have to know. Have you ever had a fantasy about me. About me and you together.”

“I don’t like to think about things like that.”

“You’re lying to me. You have those kind of thoughts all the time. Is there sex in your novels?”

“Yeah.”

“Is it graphic?”

He doesn’t want to say too much. “I feel the need to tone it down a little. I do want a larger audience. If it gets too explicit, I might offend some readers. So I do a lot with suggestion. I show things. I incite feelings. But I leave a lot to the imagination.”

“There, you admit it. You have a very sexual imagination.”

“I’m not going to hide that. We all do in one way or another.”

Cynthia feels that he has him cornered. “And when you see a woman, you think about her sexually.”

“Not my friend’s wife. Or my boss’s daughter. Or my neighbor.”

“Not occasionally when you’re alone at night. When you need to inspire one of those fantasies of yours.”

“I’ve never really admitted to any fantasies. Now you’re monitoring me in my bedroom.” He smiles. She smiles back.

“But you’re the one who’s always looking for material for your books. Mysteries. And you’re involved in this mystery, and you’re telling me that it doesn’t affect in the least your fantasy life.”

“I’ve thought about you now and then. But I’ve never really imagined you naked.”

She presses him, “Is it because I’m not sexy enough for you.”

He looks at her longingly, “Not at all. I’m just not that kind of guy.”

“What kind of guy?”

“Someone who has sexual fantasies about women that he sees on the street.”

“It’s gone beyond that now. Do you think that you might make me part of you imaginative catalogue. That you might have a fantasy about me.”

He feels trapped. “I’m not saying that I don’t find you attractive. You are very attractive. But I told you that I just see you as the innocent type.”

“Are you saying that I wouldn’t look good in a bathing suit?”

“You’d look great. You’re putting words in my mouth. I like talking to you. You’re a really intelligent woman. I’m not going to go off half-cocked and have sexual fantasies about you.”

“But you’ve seen me over and over again. I’ve seen you looking at me. You never imagined sleeping with me.”

“Not in that way. I feel embarrassed. I’m damned if I do, and damned if I don’t. We’re

sitting her having a snack. This is the first time that we've ever talked. I'm getting to know you. I'm learning how you react. I'm studying your facial expressions and gestures in reaction to things that I say."

He keeps talking, "All these things help me to get to know you better. But that's only a small part of who you are. And all that is very different than an impression that I might have when I haven't met you."

"So you weren't interested from the beginning. I didn't strike your curiosity."

"I'm not saying that at all. We exchanged glances. I'm sure that I thought about it a few times. But I didn't dwell on it. I didn't follow you. I didn't watch you from your open window and create these fantasies about you."

"You describe all that so well. It sounds like the thing that you do all the time."

"I'm a writer. I'm good with my words. I know how to describe things."

"What if I asked you to come back to my place so that I could do lines off your naked body? What would you say to that?"

"I thought that you saw me as a librarian."

"I said that I felt you were the innocent type."

"So you're not going to invite me back for an orgy."

"It was all hypothetical. I was using that as an example to prove a point."

"That you wouldn't ask me to come back to your place. You're almost admitting to me that you've had these fantasies. And by calling me innocent, you're saying that I wasn't going along. Did you force yourself on me?"

"That's not my style. Can you see what you're making me say? It's just silly."

She realizes that she has put him in a bit of a hole. But she has him on the ropes and doesn't want to let go.

"But you want it. You know that you want it."

He defends his position, "I invited you out for coffee. I like talking to you."

"If I invited you back to my place, would you go?"

"Is that a hypothetical invitation? Are you still trying to test me?"

"No, I really want to know. Would you like to go back to my place?"

"Are you inviting me for real. That seems a little strange. A little sudden for you."

"Why do you say that? Because you don't find me attractive. Because you can't imagine me naked." She has finished her cake. She makes a tinkling noise with her spoon. It drives him crazy.

He tries to change the subject, "Was the cake good?"

"Not as good as my kisses. Do you want to come back to my place and make love?"

He smiles to make her feel at ease, "Why are you toying with me?"

"Is it hot in here? Are you sweating? Do you want to come back to my place and have sex?"

"I don't see you that way. We barely know each other."

"You wouldn't like it if I fucked your brains out."

"I'm not saying anything. It's all making me seem foolish. And you're getting a kick out of taunting me."

"But you're the mystery novelist. You're wilting before a real mystery. What's the

problem? You don't appreciate a woman being forthright with you."

"I'm just not sure what is going on. You're almost taking advantage of my imagination."

She makes a face, "But you are the one who lied to me. You expect me to believe that you don't have sexual fantasies about women that you see in the street."

"I told you that I think about them. But I don't dwell on it."

"Would you rather that I was a stripper?"

"I like you as you are. But I'm just getting to know you. I don't want to complicate it with sex."

"So sex is a complicated thing for you. Do you often have trouble with your physical nature?"

He looks surprised, "You really are making fun of me now."

"Not at all. You're the one who's telling me that you don't find me sexually attractive. And now you're acting all embarrassed. That's your business. To express your inner emotions. To be on the spot."

"You're mocking me."

"Not at all. How would you feel if I touched you right now. Are you sensitive about being touched?"

"No. But you are making a sport out of this."

"So you wouldn't come back to my place?"

"I might if you were nice."

Joy has listened aptly to my story. She is finding it hard to contain herself.

"This is what really happened."

"Some of it. You know me. I like to embellish things."

"It sounds like a complete embellishment. If you were following a woman, I know that you were thinking about having sex with her. That's the first thing that you think about. And claiming to be a mystery novelist. The reason that you love mystery so much is that you are frustrated sexually. You love the pursuit. But you don't know how to act with a mature woman. Cynthia freaked you out, didn't she?. You ran away."

"There really is no Cynthia. I made that part up."

"And there is no woman."

"I met a woman. But I don't want to make light of it in a novel."

My discussion with Joy only provokes more thought on my part. I follow through with my vision for the story.

Cynthia looks at him with an air of derision. There, he is revealing himself for her, and he seems rather pathetic. For his part, he is trying to recover from her assassination of character. Either he is a psycho or he has no consideration for the feelings of his guest. She really has messed with him.

He appears confused, "What do you want to do?"

"We're going back to my place. We really have no choice."

"I really have to work on my book."

"You're being silly. You can write tomorrow."

"I have to be at my other job."

"We can have some drinks. You can crash on the couch. We'll have breakfast and laugh

about it in the morning.”

He has a bizarre desire to kiss her. He wants to use her invitation to his advantage.

When they finally get to her place, he feels a little more at ease. She brings him a drink..

They sit across from each other. He relaxes.

“You took all these photos around here.”

“That’s what I do for a living. I watch people. I even have a few of you.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’ve been following you. Quite a bit in fact.”

He looks freaked out.

“Let me get them.” She hands him a book of photographs. He starts to look through them. She comments, “As you can see, I’ve snapped you at every walk of life. Coming out of work. Meeting a date. Trying to pick up young women. Mostly girls in their late teens and early twenties. You like them young. And they don’t know what to make of you. But they are turned on by all your shit about mystery novels. They are in for adventures. I never see you with any of these girls more than once. There are loads of them. And you get them to go back to your apartment. Here’s one of you going into your apartment.” She points at the album.

“You’re really good at doing what you do. I’d call you a professional. But I’m your biographer. Your ears and eyes. Maybe even your accomplice. And you thought I was the innocent type. Think again, buddy boy!”

She has done a real job on him. He doesn’t know what to say. Not in the least. She smiles, a real big smile.