

5. THE SHEPERD'S WATCH

"Sometimes you have to leave yours crimes behind. Turn your back on your self. Go to another county."

"Are you from another country?"

"I don't know. I really can't remember."

"What about your crimes? Do you have crimes that you're trying to forget?"

"I don't have those kind of memories. Maybe I've worked it out. I've got rid of those things that I didn't want to think about."

"I wish that I could do that to? How did you manage that?"

"I think I held my breath until I passed out."

Audrey smiles, "I've tried that sort of thing. It just made me blue in the face."

He smiles, "Better blue in the face than blue in the heart."

"After all this time that we've spent together, I don't think you've ever told me your name."

"That's one of the things that I left behind."

"We could give you a new name."

"That doesn't mean that I'd answer to it. Names are difficult things. We forget them before we've even the other person say them. Think how difficult it is to remember a name for yourself."

"You're not in the habit of changing your name every time we meet," she wonders.

"I don't want to get in that habit."

"I'm Audrey every time we meet."

"I know. I've known that from the beginning."

"I'm just reminding you. I just want to get it all straight."

"Audrey, I'm not going to forget you."

"Not for now. You know what it's like. Someone stops you in the street. They know your name. But you don't know him from Adam. And he claims that he knows you from way back. He still recognizes your face. And he looks like a new person. The plastic surgery works."

"Is that what you want, Audrey, a new face?"

"Are you trying to tell me something?"

"You have a very pretty face."

"That's not good enough. Not now."

"I can't tell you any more. I want to say more. I'm just having trouble holding it all together."

He feels that he s hiding something. He is using his face as just that. The mask to hide. When he looks at her, he sees just the opposite. She is everything that he wants to know. It is all spoken in the face. She does not have a mask. This is her soul.

"I wish that I could hide things from you the way that you hide things from me. I wish my face was more complex. I have to be happy with what I've got. I've always thought that my face was so neutral. That it didn't say much of anything."

He is looking at her. She is saying enough already. Maybe for her own good, she needs

to be quiet. He wants to warn her. He doesn't know how to say it without it coming out wrong.

"Audrey! I like that name."

She smiles back at him. She is glad that she is not working today, that she is seeing him away from work.

He is staring straight ahead. She has no idea what he is looking at. She is trying to engage his vision. He is lost in space.

"We should go somewhere together. A vacation. I'm going to have some time off. I haven't been away in a while."

He is hesitant, "I don't want to appear negative. I really would like to go away somewhere with you. It's just that it was so hard for me just to come here. It would be too much of an effort to try to get away just like that."

She has no idea what he is talking about.

"Are the police after you?"

"Not that I know about."

She doesn't say anything more about it. She tries to change the subject, "I love the beach. The sand between my toes."

"I'm not too good for the beach. I love the beach. I just don't go well on the beach."

"Maybe I should have talked about something else."

"No, it's great that you want to go to the beach. I'd love to go with you. I'm not sure that this is the right time. Besides, it's so hot now."

"There really isn't a better time. We can get away where it's really nice and . That's what I'm looking forward to so much. I hate the city in the summer time. The heat just burns off the asphalt."

He is afraid to get away now. It has been a struggle just to get to this point. Sometimes he feels that he is already dead. That he is just opening his eyes to the world. Anything more would drive him crazy. He wants to take it slow. No surprises.

He shares his feelings with her, "I feel guilty. I hate it. I really don't know why."

"Is that a problem?" her reply seems so understated.

"Not at all. I just feel that I've done something messed up."

"As long as it doesn't make you do something messed up in the future."

"I guess that's a good way to think about it. But I don't know if that really helps."

"What would help?"

"Peace of mind. Sometimes I feel this chattering inside me. It is like bone grinding on bone. It is how I speak. How I measure my heartbeat. It is my point of reference."

"They often say that what we forget would fill volumes."

"Or what we remember would fill a cave. Welcome to my home!" They are sitting together at a restaurant. He is not sure if this is a literal invitation on her part. He can't understand her. He just likes being with her.

"Did you do this?"

"I don't have any idea what you're talking about."

She looks at his hands. Strong hands. He could crush steel with hands like that. She wants him to be gentle. Maybe he doesn't realize his own strength. But to wield such power, he has to know. He has to feel the wicked application of force.

His hands make his ideas count. Even when they do not speak, his words echo with that same force. That intent.

He wants her to take him somewhere. She is already feeling that sense of danger. It is hard working things out.

She wants to learn more about him. She wants to know what makes him tick. She wants to know what is his breaking point. That is his fear. He has seen that before in women that he meets. They assume that he is on a short fuse. He tries to conceal his anger. He knows that it would be the end if she knew some of the things about him. She still believes that he is an ex-con.

He feels that he has been watching out for her all this time. He has watched her from afar. And he knows all about her life. She works at the store on the lower level. It is hard to see her there without being seen. Taking the escalator down the stairs offers her a vantage point to see anyone coming. So she watches all the time. He can hardly sneak up on her. He realizes that he has to take the elevator down. Or enter from the parking lot. He doesn't want her to watch him as he does his shopping. He wants to maintain his mystery.

She believes that he is going to take her somewhere and keep her prisoner. He has shown no evidence at all of such behavior. But she always has that suspicion. It influences everything that she does with him. She is even hesitant about an elevator ride.

She is in an elevator with him. She wants him to kiss her. She wants him to turn off the elevator so that they can make love here and now.

He asks, "Do you want to come back to my place?"

"I better not. It would only keep me up all night. I have to work in the morning."

"We wouldn't do anything."

"I can't really."

She wonders how hard it would be to escape his apartment. He looks her in the face. She smiles.

"You're still afraid that I am going to do something weird to me."

She laughs, "I wouldn't mind if you did something to me. I just need to rest tonight."

He is ready to protest his innocence.

"Let's go somewhere else for another drink."

"It is getting late."

At home, she wishes that she had taken up on his offer. She hates being alone for another night. Especially when she had an offer on the table.

She falls asleep quickly and is ready to take on a new day.

He calls her at work. He wants to meet. She brushes him off. He shows up when she is about to get off.

"I have other plans," she tells him.

"Break them."

"I can't. I have to see my ex."

He realizes that he has nowhere to push.

"Tomorrow night," she tells him.

He is pouting. This is not like him. She makes him feel weak. He is so close to her already. He does not want to wait another night.

He considers following her. He could catch her in a lie. He lets trust rule the day. This is unusual for him. But he wants the same from her. He has to start somewhere.

He doesn't even know what he is supposed to say to her. Was he supposed to let her go that easily. If she had really wanted him, she would have called earlier in the day. There has to be a thousand other women who'd want to be with him tonight. He wanders the mall. He stares them all in the eye. They love to look back and smile. He could have any one of them. That is what they say with their eyes. There is no other truth.

He wants Audrey this very second. How would he handle it if he took another girl home. Would it be all fantasy? Or would he start something with her too. He can't give in to such fantasy. It is dangerous of him to give so much of himself.

The next time that Audrey sees him, he is with another girl. He came by to see Audrey. She was busy so he went to get some coffee. The girl strikes up a conversation with him. Her name is Sandy.

Audrey doesn't want to disturb them. She is on break. She rushes back to work. He doesn't show up when she is done. He calls her.

"I'm at the other end of town. I had some business to take care of. I won't be able to make it over there this evening. Tomorrow. Tomorrow is for sure."

She wants to have her own plans to wreck his. But tomorrow she is going to be waiting for him. It makes her feel helpless.

When Robert shows up the next day, Audrey hardly remembers the day before. This underlines the hopelessness in her life. Down deep she realizes that this is terrible. But it is all that she's got. So she embraces the heaven with the hell.

"Let's go somewhere," he tells her.

There's a bar not too far from the mall. It is crowded. She loses herself in the crowd. She is glad that she is not alone. She looks over at Robert. He has a big smile on his face just for her. She reaches out her hand, and he takes it.

She needs to make sure that there is a crowd around whenever she meets Robert. She needs that sense of security. The noise of the bar adds to her sense of comfort. He wants to be alone with her. He uses the time in the bar to work for this end.

He can hardly hear their conversation. They speak by the touching of their hands and glances in each other's eyes. She has trouble resisting his appeals. The drink only accelerates her feeling.

"Let's get out of here."

In the parking lot, they feel paralyzed. Things have moved too fast for her. She needs to catch her breath.

He tries to relieve some of the pressure.

"We can get together another day."

She welcomes his suggestion. She hugs him, and then drives him back to his car.

The next day, he calls to tell her that he is unable to make it over to see her. It is a very lonely day at work. There are only a few customers. She tries to keep herself busy. She spends part of the time reviewing inventory reports.

She makes herself a light supper before bed. She has rented a movie. She can hardly wait until a day off. The movie is enough to fill up these lonely moments.

The next day she is eager to see Robert. She almost feels like some kind of victim. She is surviving on what scraps that he throws her way. Nevertheless, she is a little afraid to invite him back to her place.

Audrey hates what she is becoming. She lives for those brief moments when they are together. But even when they are together, she only feels afraid. She is lost in this stalemate between her desire for him and her realization that she knows very little about this man. Her attraction is deeper than words. She can't reason it away. It is very much part of who she is. She accepts the presence of her ghost.

Late that next day, Robert rolls into the store. She perks up to see him there. Audrey becomes a different person. She bubbles over with graciousness. He feels that she finally trusts him. There is a long way to go before she will really accept her in his life. They try to find a place to hang out that isn't as crazy as the other night.

"What have you been doing?" She doesn't know where he works. He has told her little about his life.

"I've been exploring some new options for my life. Some of my investments have been a little shaky. I need to have something a little more stable to maintain my lifestyle."

What does he mean by *maintaining his lifestyle*? She doesn't want to ask. For the time being, it is enough that he shows up. He has his own car. He pays for the drinks. He complements how she looks.

She can't contain herself, "I saw you the other day. You were supposed to meet me. But you told me that you got tied up at the other end of town."

"Oh that."

"Yeah, I saw you in the mall."

"Yeah, I was there."

"You told me that you weren't. Why did you lie to me?"

"I didn't want to make things complicated. I was coming to see you, and I met this girl that I used to go out with. She wanted me to come back to her place. One thing led to another. I went back with her. But we didn't do anything. We talked. We ended badly. I had to go away. We never really closed the book with each other."

"Robert, you're just so mysterious about everything. You tell me about investments. About how you had to go away. You make it sound like you're a spy."

"We all have our secrets."

"How can I give my love to a man who doesn't answer my questions?"

"I told you all about her. You need to trust me."

"You didn't trust me. You never told me what really happened between the two of you."

"You asked me about her, and I told you."

"I shouldn't have needed to ask."

"My life is sometimes too complicated for even me to understand. I live with that. I'm not asking you to accept that."

"But we spend time together. I want to figure out what's really going on."

She realizes that he can't be any more forthcoming. She doesn't want to pry. But there is so little that he will tell her. So much that she wants to know. She has to be so accepting. She doesn't want to let go of him.

She looks at this face. He is her light in the darkness. Her life is lived in the darkness. Her days are surrounded by artificial light. Artificial smiles. Then she comes out to emptiness of the city night.

She could tell him to go from her life here and now. She could refuse to forgive his silence. But she doesn't want to lose what little that she has. She has promised herself that she will continue to resist his advances .

Audrey know that she will be alone again tonight. She wishes that it was time to let him in to her life. It is still a long way off before she can trust him completely. Until that point, she can only satisfy herself with the small promise that he holds out for her. That is not enough, but it is something.

“Why don't you let me spend the night with you?”

“I want to. Let me tell you that I want. But I can't give in. There is so much about myself that I am learning. I need to figure out what is really happening in my life.”

He doesn't want to pressure her. There is a hollow in his life that he cannot fill in. He pretends that love might offer him the balance that he needs. He knows that he will not share of himself with her. There is a part of himself that he cannot admit to himself. This only makes it more difficult to be with another person.

She asks for a few days to be by herself.

“I don't want you stopping by the store. I just need to think about things.”

He feels that he is being punished. He doesn't even know why he hid things from her. But he doesn't want to give up his freedom. He takes for granted the fact that she accept him as he is.

He thinks about the girl that he met at the mall. She was so easy. None of the complications of Audrey. He didn't feel as if he was under a police interrogation. Everything was so automatic. He loved how it transpired.

When she took him back to her place, there were no questions about his plans for life. He didn't have to tell her about his past. They lived in each other's eyes, and that was enough for him. It would have hurt Audrey if he had told her the full story. How he has been seeing the other girl since their meeting that day. How he is leading double life. That this is who he is. He thinks about the other things in his life. He wonders what he will be doing in a month. He is always looking behind his back.

He doesn't know if he can hold out for Audrey. He wonders if it is worth it.

“I don't have all the answers. I can hardly keep my own life together. I'm probably not the guy that you're looking for.”

When she hears him say these words, she can feel the knife go through her heart. This is hardly what she wanted to hear. She has been waiting days to get back with him.

“Is this it? Is that what you want to tell me.”

“Not at all. You're looking for me to be this magic man for you. That's not what I am at all.”

“Who are you?” Who are you really?” She feels a little hysterical. From the moment that she hears herself speak, she realizes that this is all wrong.

“I can't take this anymore.”

She is ready for him to stand up and walk out.

“What do you want to say?”

“This is new for me. I’m not used to this pressure. I don’t like someone else basing their whole life around me. I can hardly base my life around myself.”

She glares at him, “Are you just looking for a way out? If you want to leave, now it the time.”

Since they have started meeting outside of the store, she can feel the pressure for something to change. He realizes it too. From his point of view, he is used to going back to the girl’s place. He doesn’t understand all this talk about a relationship that doesn’t even exist yet.

“You’re used to younger girls,” she tells him.”

“Maybe I am.”

“Where have you been all these years?”

The question seems strange, but there is this gap in his experience. He doesn’t show signs of maturing. He is living out his childhood as if all this time has been erased from his life.

Her questions only add to his confusion about himself. They are not going to resolve the impasse between each other tonight. She is unsure what to make of his revelations tonight. There is a lot that remains unsaid.

When she returns home to her apartment, she no longer feels that sense of emptiness. She has taken a stand for herself. That has been sufficient.

She is glad that she doesn’t see him for the next few days. Even the tedium of work is a reminder to herself that she is alive. She has not given in to her loneliness. She feels nobler about her sense of purpose. Fundamentally, this is her life. She embraces what it means for her. She doesn’t need him. There is no sense of longing.

Her strength is short-lived. Her days off are approaching, and she knows that she is in for a real let down. She does all that she can to put him out of her mind. She needs to get away.

After a glorious mini-vacation, Audrey is able to face her world again. She never realized what a little sun might do to revive her from her doldrums.

Just as mysteriously as he left her life, he reappears.

“I tried to contact you on the weekend.”

“I went away. I left my phone at home. I needed to be alone.”

“I’ve missed you.”

That doesn’t seem enough. She wants him to suffer.

He adds, “I didn’t mean to hurt you if that means anything.”

He did hurt her. But she doesn’t want to give that much of herself back to him.

“I’m OK. You don’t have anything to worry about.”

“You want to get a drink after work.”

“I’ve got plans.”

She met a guy on her vacation. She’s going to see him for a drink. She wants something a little more positive from her life.

Audrey tries putting Robert out of her mind. Her new catch seems like he might be perfect. But he seems even more impatient than Robert. For all his supposed good breeding, he is just a monster waiting to strip off his designer suit. She feels suffocated with her new man. His hands seem to grip her throat and prevent her from saying how she truly feels.

When he disappears, she feels as if she has been tossed back into the world from where

she escaped. She doesn't let it bother her. She has really appreciate the rest from Robert. Now she feels that she is back in the pressure cooker.

Robert plays the part of the reaper as he attempts to work his way back. She agrees to meet him after work.

She asks him, "What have you been doing?"

"Nothing major. Just wandering. Trying to find new purpose to my life."

"Have you been picking up young girls in malls?"

There is an element of trepidation that has overtaken his life. He is hanging on. The world has changed too much for him. He watches all the lights flash around him. But he no longer grasps the substance behind it all. There is real life behind those signs and those windows and doors. He loves the surfaces.

Robert finds Audrey particularly stunning this evening. He recognizes a magic in her personality. And he knows how her life has been spinning in circles. She needs someone to bless her.

If Audrey had been resistant to Robert before, she feels even more that way this evening. She has already been through days of empty flattery. Even Robert's heartfelt comments are not going to do the trick.

"I don't feel like I used to. There's meaning in my life. Which is more than I can say for you."

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"That you're going to have to do a little better this time out."

"I didn't know that you were going to shake me down for comments."

"We're putting up fronts for each other. Can't you be honest for me just this once?"

"Honest about what?"

"What do you want from me?"

"I don't want anything. I just like being with you. Isn't that enough for you?"

It really isn't. Audrey realizes that he can say the same thing to these other chippies that he meets. She wants something more.

"What do you want from me? I can't rescue you. I need to be rescued myself."

Take the romance out of their relationship, and they face something frightfully raw about each other. They both are desperate about their own lives. For her, it is a little different. She feels as if she has not given up. That is why he is secretive. He hides a deeper despair about himself. That is makes him so prone to risk. He has nothing to lose.

She loves that about him. It makes him so romantic. She has no idea what he will do next. He could even disappear again. She is holding on to thin air.

"I want to go back to your place. I want to show you what you are missing."

"You can't waltz back into my life and hope that I'm just going to take you back."

Audrey feels one of her nightmares flash past her. For a brief instant, she sees him in a very sick and frightening way. Then that flash vanishes as quickly as it appeared.

"I want to be with you night and day."

She is stoic in her denial. It is not going to happen tonight. She know how she can sacrifice for a greater promise. That is what she is holding out for at this moment.

At work, the next day she does not suffer for her decision. She scurries around to make

herself busy. Today, she feels that he is spying on her. She looks around and doesn't see him. But she has that feeling.

She tries to imagine herself in the place of one of these young woman that he meets in the mall. What can she hope to glean from such a rendezvous? The fury only lasts for so long. She wants that excitement if only for a brief moment? But she is realizing how she is setting herself up for disappointment. He can never live up to this ideal that she is setting for him. And she is not even deriving the pleasure from their encounters. He is not able to offer anything more.

Audrey is again in her cage. She looks around at her place of employment. These walls seem to enclose her. She has seldom gazed at her imprisonment with such enmity. She realizes That even when she is off work, she is only preparing to come back to this place. It has penetrated every inch of her being.

The corridors seem to go on forever. They have even anticipated her desire to escape. The outside is the inside. The door lead nowhere but back inside. She wants to scream out but the walls muffle her cries. And the store patrons are only mannequins who react coldly to her appeals. There is nowhere to go.

Audrey overcomes her attack of panic. This is not something that usually gets to her with such a bite. Her struggles with Robert have left her somewhat war weary. She he is doing everything that she can to recover.

The Shepherd is up to his old tricks again. He like to see without being seen. He has found a place that he can observe her without being seen. He is clever about his movements. No one seems to bother him. And he has the perfect vantage point. She knows that he is there. But there is nothing that she can do about it if she can't pinpoint exactly where he is hiding.

He surveys the floor. He watches the coming and going of all the patrons. He notices if anyone is talking to her. He tries to restrain himself from reacting. He wants to make sure no one threatens her.

She is on display for him. He watches from a distance. She is so uninhibited. He loves watching her. It is like eating sweet candy. He can't get enough. She smiles. He is in heaven.

She goes back to keeping track of inventory. It has been a busy morning. She has been running around. He has followed her every move. Even when she goes to the back, he is only a few steps behind her. He knows where she is and what she is doing.

She is always looking around. She is naturally suspicious. She doesn't notice a thing. He stays well out of sight.

He wants to move closer. He keeps her close to his heart. He weaves his way through the rows of shelves and hangars. He is getting nearer and nearer. She can feel his moist breath on her neck. She wants to get away. She wants to run.

She tries to map her escape. For the time being, it is a straight shot to the door. All she has to do is take off. But he could be waiting just behind that door.

The Shepherd pulls back so he is not seen. He does not want his hunters to stalk him. He has to observe them not vice versa.

Above all, he must hide his face. No one knows who he is. No one recognizes him. For the time being, he could be anyone. If he needs to, he will even assume a disguise.

His eyes travel like a spotlight throughout the space. Nothing eludes his glance. He finds

what he is looking for. His eyes caress her form. It only heightens his desire. He wants to approach her.

“I feel like a politician. I shake so many people’s hands, I can’t keep track whose hand I’ve shaken last.”

“I’m always careful whose hands I shake. I wash my hands right afterwards. You never know who’s watching you. You never know when your photograph is going to turn up at the center of some scandal.”

He can smell his prey. It gives him confidence. He moves in to attack.

I have marked my territory with my heat, with my breath. I have been in your bed. I have been close to you. I need to tell you that I will be back

I have my eyes on you. I know what you are doing at all times. I am waiting for you. I am waiting for the right moment to introduce myself to you. I know where you live. I know where you work. I know where you are at every minute of the day. We will meet. You will welcome me in your home because you do not even know who I am. You will even find me charming.

And then I will show myself. I will show you my hidden character. And you will scream out in terror at such knowledge. But it will be too late.

I will have taught you one lesson. Those who are supposed to protect you are the very ones that you are supposed to fear.

Audrey tells herself, “You gave me words to say about myself. Your words gave me pleasure. Just to speak like you made me feel that you were alive just for me. You helped me understand that my solitude was not a disease.”

This is the end. There is nothing that you can do to stop me. I love you.

She can feel the words penetrate deep into her being. She feels touched by his will. She welcomes him into her midst.

“Do you think that you could ever trust me again?”

“Not in the dark. I need to see your eyes first. I need to know who you really are.”

She wants him to feel the way that she feels. He needs to know what it is like to be trapped in these walls. She has to turn her fear against him.

She is getting to me. She is under my skin. She has reversed the process. I only feel her negative emotions. She wants to mess with me. She is in my thoughts.

“I feel like this all the time. It gives you some kind of pleasure to think that you are doing this to me. That is not how it is happening. I feel like this anyway. There is nothing that you can do to me anymore.”

“You’re not that good. You can’t protect yourself”

The building has security all around. They have cameras. There is a record of everything that happens inside. Only security can get away with mischief.

“He’s got to be working for security.”

“Or he’s a cop.”

Audrey gets a cloth to clean a smudge off of the counter. She bends down. He watches the line of her clothes. There is such grace in her every move.

He has her body on his mind. It is all that he can think about it. He needs to tell her how he feels. He will approach the counter.

"I'm all out of those fragrances. Would you like to try another?"

"No other will do?"

"Are you allergic to the others?"

"None of the other fragrances are right for how I feel."

She sprays another cologne on his wrist. It makes him feel nauseous.

"I need to go. I need to breathe some fresh air."

She can feel herself suffocating in here. She has been doing this too long. She sprays the cologne on her wrist and breathes deep. She can feel the scent deep in her soul. This is almost more satisfying than the man who might wear it.

She needs to clean up for the evening. She wants to go out tonight. She wants everything to be perfect here before she leaves. Everything must shine.

I am waiting in the shadows for you. I do not want you to go out with someone else. We are meant to be together. You are in my thoughts, and I am in yours. I wear my lucky cologne, the one that you gave me.

"It was only a sample. It was nothing!"

"You smiled at me. I could feel you touch my soul."

"I understand the words, but the meaning makes no sense. It makes me do things that I don't want to do."

"Give in to your feelings."

"You are holding me too tightly."

"I'll let go, but you might fall."

I've got my eyes on you. You are special. You are mine/ you cannot escape my watchful eye. You can't do anything about it without revealing where you are. I know that I am the one that you want.

"It's my place. Now you are in my place. I can see in the dark here. And you can't do a thing about it. I have you tracked down."