

THE PAWN SHOP



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An electric buzzer sounded as Arthur Stone pushed the glass door of Al Shop open with his hip. He carried a box large enough to block his view, and he craned his neck around to see where he was going. The smell of stale coffee and something moldy hit his nostrils, like it had on his previous visits, and he tried breathing through his mouth. The store was too bright, fluorescent light mixing with the morning sunshine streaming through the front window, bouncing off the glass cases and shiny objects that lined the walls.

The kid looked up at him for a second and then back down. A pudgy finger pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose as the fingers of the other hand turned the pages of a comic book. He had to be at least twenty but the impression that Arthur got had been in the cold trenches of a foreign country, fighting a war. the rim of the glasses and he only looked up as Arthur placed the heavy box on the counter in front of him.

said, trying again to make eye contact.

Arthur

toward him. The box gave a loud squeak as it moved across the glass.

Arthur looked down at his feet, and then toward the opposite wall.

The kid snapped his gum and began pulling things out of the box and spreading them out on the counter. Arthur watched for a minute as items piled up in front of him an empty old photo frame that used to hold a picture of him and his wife Virginia on some beach holiday he barely remembered, a black hat with delicate beading around

Arthur glanced at the oval shaped locket and thin strand of gold in his fat fingers.

waiting for Arthur

Arthur stood at the counter for a minute, absently fingering a pair of silk gloves in front of him, and then turned toward the far wall, crossing his arms in front of him and pacing the length of the shop slowly. His eyes moved from shelf to shelf, but he barely saw the musical instruments, antique jewelry, and baseball cards contained there. His mind wandered aimlessly, in a kind of haze that had become a part of his daily life since the diagnosis. that

locket, but the thoughts were barely forming as he cut his path over the aging carpet.

The buzzer on the door chimed and Arthur slowly turned to see wh The fog that had crowded his thoughts instantly cleared as he saw the two men rush in and the gun being pointed at his head.

silver and black Halloween mask. He had a black hoodie pulled up over his head and moved quickly toward Arthur

second he was having a heart attack. Before going down on his knees he saw the other

man, in a tan leather jacket, mean looking work boots, and a ski mask creeping toward the opening to the back of the shop where the kid had gone a just a minute before.

A sharp pain shot up his leg and into his spine as his knees popped and crackled but Arthur to lay himself on the carpet. If have tried to stop what was happening, but all he could do now was rest his forehead on the back of his hands and wait. sure if he cared to survive this.

* * *

Arthur had stood outside the dance hall and opened the locket with shaking hands one more time, looking quickly at his picture inside. He frowned, wishing his He was nervous about giving it to afraid it was too forward after only knowing her a few months, that he was assuming too much. He had decided, though, to take his chances. His ship was leaving in two days for Europe and it was now or never.

The room was hot and crowded, plenty of men trying to make the most of their Virginia with a group of women near a far wall. Her light hair was pulled back into a chignon showing off her long neck. He caught her eye and watched her face light up one of the most beautiful things he would ever see.

* * *

Sixty-five years later, the thought of that kiss could still melt him at his hardest. He sighed into his hands on the pawn shop floor, feeling tears gather in the corners of his eyes. He fought them back but a few drops hit his sun-spotted hands. The old carpet was suddenly overwhelmingly nauseating and he turned his head so the smell would not make him pass out. It seemed to Arthur that the man was his own, but he was not. He wondered if the cops might be on their way.

Don't get any smart ideas old man, the masked man behind him warned, closer to him now, practically kneeling over him.

Arthur began looking through the cases, raising his head every few seconds to watch Arthur.

Arthur turned his head to the other side so he would not have to look at the man.

He certainly had no intention of doing anything. What did it matter anyways?

* * *

The gravity of the situation weighed on Arthur. On the way home from the doctor, Arthur remembered, he and Virginia had talked about dinner. His thoughts kept returning to the appointment though. The doctor had been clear about it. Six months,

probably no more, before the cancer would take her. As they neared the home they fallen into an uneasy silence.

street.

She had sighed. Looked away out the window.

Arthur was surprised by the ease with which normal life had continued. The days s, haunting their small world. Arthur busied himself with the small necessities of life; the yard still needed mowing and groceries bought, regardless of the fact that he was losing his wife a little more every day. The television punctuated the pervasive silence.

The hutch with antique plates caught his attention first. thought, just an urgent desire to clear the clutter, be rid of the excess. One day, he waited until Virginia headed out to lunch with her friends and then wrapped up a few of heir absence. Walking from the dining room to the front

quickly and into his old pickup.

It took three more weeks of silence, of boxes removed from the house, of hair falling out and late-night sickness, before she confronted him.

view of the t.v.

about the cancer that ate her up from the inside out. He had continued to pile boxes with old things to take to the pawn shop when she was out or lying in bed, pretending that the robbery and commotion had never taken place.

The only thing that changed, becoming a constant companion in his quest to rid the house of her presence.

* * *

He heard the sound of sirens approaching. He watched as the man ran, his hand on his hip, his ski-

gun pointed out and pointing the gun absentmindedly backwards toward where Arthur lay, no longer concerned with the old man on the floor. At one time Arthur might have taken advantage of this moment, but now he just shifted his weight onto his other hip. All he wanted now was to get out of this place alive, go back home and tell Virginia how sorry he was.

Arthur heard a commotion in the background, a scuffle or grunting. It was hard to hear anything at all from where he lay on the ground. A minute later the other man ran out, gun in one hand, large bag in another.

Arthur moved slowly to his knees, feeling a pain shoot through his hip, and then steadied himself up onto his feet just as the kid ran into the room from the back of the store.

The kid moved carefully toward the window and looked out. The sirens continued against, his legs moving back and forth beneath him, fingers drumming on the glass.

nose for a second before
all he could detect was time, a faint mustiness from it being packed away for decades.

now toward Arthur where he
stood at the counter. y, really buddy, are you okay? You need a doctor or
break.

Arthur shut his eyes for a second. Sighed. He gathered the box in his hands and walked quickly toward the door. The loss of the locket was a damn shame, but there was no time to worry about it. He needed to get home.