

Shoplift Standstill

by F.R. Southerland

There were some businesses in town that Casey liked more than others. Some places had a better atmosphere. Some places had nice employees. A few had bathrooms you were allowed to use without being a paying customer. And some places had food.

This place though? This place had comics.

She accidentally found the shop one afternoon, shortly after first arriving in town. It was a refuge from the downpour outside then and was now a refuge from worry and fear. It was just something about comics she liked. They weren't like real books. Easier to read and follow along, and not as boring either. She could lose herself in them.

One day, she'd have a collection of them. Casey had already started acquiring them. As she roamed down the aisles, she kept a look out for the owner, or the manager who ran the place. The owner was a demon and Casey avoided him on principle alone. She might get along with his daughter, Kat, but he was creepy. Worse than creepy if the rumors were true.

The manager wasn't around either. Casey didn't mind her so much, but she'd heard that Carla didn't take it lightly when people stole things. That was another reason why she wanted to avoid the management today. A new issue had just released today and she intended to get her copy.

The shadows were darkest near the back of the shop, where the light didn't quite reach. More than that, it was where Dylan was, immersed within those shadows. He'd popped in only for a minute, but opportunity presented itself when the girl entered. She was a shoplifter, he knew. He had seen her take comics from the store before, but he'd never confronted her. Maybe he should. It was bad for business. Supposedly, if he were to care for such things.

Her aura was bright, reds and oranges and the yellow of concentration. She looked over her shoulder, spotted no one near her, and made her move.

It was as good a time as any—ideal, actually, for busting her—to emerge from out of the darkness. The girl was distracted with slipping the comic into her open bag, a few seconds before she looked up, wide-eyed, and realized she'd been caught.

Startled by his sudden appearance, Casey took two steps back, and uttered a not-so quiet curse, that echoed in her head. Shit. Caught. Now what? Was he going to call the police? Have her locked up? Seemed a small price to pay for a comic—or twelve, if he counted her previous shoplifting—but some folks took that shit way too seriously.

Or, considering he was a demon, he might just kill her. Suddenly, she wished it was Carla who had busted her. The abrasive manager would've been preferable to this.

She didn't even have an excuse, or a lie, for why she was stuffing it in her bag. She just pulled it back out, the cover wrinkled now, and held it up along with her other hand in a gesture of surrender. "Hey, man, hey. Take it. Sorry. Sorry."

Fear had a lovely tinge. It was not always the same for every person—colors varied, but the feel, the motion of it, was always the same. Bright, spiked. Dylan was more interested in her aura than the comic she presented him, but he took it all the same and idly flipped through the colored pages without looking at them. It took a moment before he tore his gaze from her aura to study her face.

Now that he really looked at her, he recognized her as one of Kat's friends. Well, that was disappointing. She wouldn't like it if he took her soul now, would she? He made a note to double check the 'No-Kill' list pinned on the cork board in the back. What was her name? Cassie? Something like that.

He didn't say anything, and that was weird to her. She waited for an admonishment, lecture, yelling or shouting—nothing. He didn't even look angry. Instead, he smiled. And that was way more unsettling.

Finally, he spoke, giving a wave of his hand toward the door. A single word. "Shoo."

That was it? Shoo? Casey didn't question it and turned, hightailing it for the exit. Somehow, as she headed out the door and out into the afternoon sun, she knew she'd gotten lucky this time and it left her with one certain thought—she really needed to stop stealing from the places she liked to hang around, before she ended up in jail or worse. Maybe even stop stealing in general.

She could still feel his eyes on her as she walked briskly away, and she didn't dare look back.