

Four Years Ago

They were back.

Display advertisements in the San Francisco papers seeking Calypso Swale, a missing heiress, preceded the watchers by two weeks. Only six months before, Calypso was sunning herself on the deck of a borrowed villa in Mustique when she noticed binoculars trained on her. She disappeared with the help of friends, landing in San Francisco clutching a passport bearing a new name and the take from her father's safe. She rented a house and found a job at the Dolce and Gabbana store on Grant Street. She loved working, she hadn't thought she would, but she did. She met the right people, many on the Social Register, wormed her way into their graces, and got paid for doing so.

Now, the watchers were back.

She spotted the first one gaping at her via her reflection in a store window as she passed. Every day since, she had been surveilled as she arrived for work and at the end of her shift as she trotted to catch the bus at the corner of Geary and Kearny. No matter which watcher it was, he wore casual dress clothes with sneakers. Who does that? Someone sent to return her to the East Coast to take her lumps, that's who.

She was prepared to run if need be, her camping gear, hatchet, just-in-case knapsack, and parka, all from REI, were in the trunk of her silver Lexus sedan. What remained of her father's cash and the envelope he handed her fourteen months ago were sewn in the lining of her purse. Not much of the money remained, she had wasted it on the feel of silk against her skin, cashmere over her shoulders, and chemicals which she kept dry in a tin lunchbox bearing a portrait of the young Captain James T. Kirk. The colorful box with the plastic handle was wrapped in lingerie from Victoria's Secret, stuffed in a tote, and tucked behind the front seat of her car.

She scurried through her workdays. At night, she prepared to be a bridesmaid for a co-workers wedding at the Bellagio Casino in Las Vegas. She had her favorite Gucci dress cleaned at a laundry specializing in haute couture. The dress and the matching slingback Jimmy Choo shoes were boxed and on the backseat of her sedan. She dreamed of watching the Bellagio water jets at the front of the casino dance to soaring music while holding her dream man's hand, knowing it was a chimera. She would never make her friend's wedding. The tall, dark, and handsome dream man with his well-cut jaw and broad shoulders might never be. Still, she kept up pretenses, meeting with friends, speed dating guys, planning for the wedding, and checking items off her get-out-of-town list.

The Thursday before the wedding, she hustled to her Muni stop, had her pass ready, then jammed herself up and into the bus before her watcher crossed Grant Street. She trotted from the bus stop to her rented home on Noe Street, changed into jeans, a heavy sweater, and hiking boots, grabbed her luggage, and rushed down the interior stairs to the street level garage.

A footstep, her name, her real name, a hand over her mouth. She spun kicking. The man stepped back. Her knee rammed home. The minute his hands lowered to his crotch; she slammed her elbow into the bridge of his nose. When his back met the garage wall, she climbed into her car and tore into the San Francisco night.