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At Shadows End

by **Angel Woodings**

Chapter Two

Yes, please.

"Hello?" I called rather uncertainly into the inky black darkness. "Hello?" I repeated a bit louder.

Everyone was in my living room at the moment, waiting for me to change my clothes before we left for The Alamo Drafthouse. Kathy, using her creativity and the Force, had arranged it so that Cody and I were driving together in his car into downtown Austin... driving in his car *alone* into downtown Austin.

Back in my bedroom and with shaking hands, I had put on my jeans and my black babydoll T that read "Send More Cops." I chose the babydoll T as it was the only article of clothing I owned that was even remotely feminine, despite the fact that it had a saying from a 80s cult zombie film on it. I was too nervous to return to the living room, so I had laid down on the bed with my eyes closed, trying to calm myself with deep breathing.

And that's where I found myself wandering around in the dark recesses of my mind, calling out for help. "Excuse me? Is anyone here?"

A light clicked on from a lamp that hung out of the darkness. It was swinging slowly, casting shadows into moving eerie shapes like an old black and white thriller. A thin woman with a hard face, severe pulled-back hair, and a stylish pin-striped suit stood inside the swaying circle of light. "Yes," she said in an unemotional voice, "may I help you?"

"Uh, yes," I replied. I had met her before so her appearance didn't startle me, but she still made me nervous. "Yes... I would like some sanity please."

She pulled a clipboard from nowhere and looked over it. "I'm sorry. There's none available," she replied in her unemotional, business-like manner.

"But you see," I began to plead my case, "it's *very* important. There is this man I like, and well... he's quite normal. I need to be normal. I *really* want to be with him."

"I'm very sorry. There is simply no sanity available." Her expressionless face never faltered.

"Please," I tried again – my eyes, my body, my voice, anything within my power – begging with this woman. "Please. He's so wonderful. He's... he's... he's everything I want to be. He's kind and trusting and –"

She interrupted me. "There is nothing we can do. If you like him so much, you'll have to take care of it yourself."

"Take care of it myself?!" I felt a tinge of anger rise in me. "If I could have taken care of it myself, don't you think I would have done so a long time ago?"

"Well, then, apparently you should try something different if what you are doing now is not working." With that, she reached up and pulled the chain on the light in a clipped and matter-of-fact manner. And I was back in the darkness.

People assume that crazy people don't know that they are crazy. We know we're crazy. And we're not happy about it. It's just that we don't know how to fix ourselves. So, through a lifetime of human interaction, we have learned to conceal our craziness. It's very tiring though. Very tiring.

"Take care of it myself," I muttered under my breath as I rose from the bed. "What the fuck good is it having all these multiple personalities in my head if none of them can help me?"

Technically, I knew they weren't multiple personalities – more like faces to the various aspects of my own unexplored psyche – but it was fun to give them each their own life.

I took a final look in the mirror. "Send More Cops." Maybe he would think I was cool. This was Austin after all. We take pride in our knowledge of zombie trivia.

In the closet were the only two pairs of shoes I owned: black Converse high-tops and black Doc Martens boots. Apparently, my fashion sense had started and ended in

the 80s with The Cure and Violent Femmes. I scooped up the Converse high-tops and returned to the living room.

"Hurry hurry hurry hurry," said Kathy as I sat down on the couch to put on my shoes. She was pacing behind me.

"The movie doesn't start for an *hour*," I said while tying my shoes.

"I know, but we are going downtown and to the Drafthouse on a *Saturday night*... we'll be lucky to find any parking or seating," she replied.

"What movie is Mister Sinus Theater doing tonight?" asked Terry to no one in particular.

"Dude, it's *Master Pancake* Theater now," said Thomas in his typical pejorative sys admin voice. Sys admins, in case you didn't know, are all about accuracy. "And it's Jurassic Park," he continued. Fortunately for most sys admins, they tend to be funny, kind and dead useful when it comes to computers, so their friends tend to forgive their pedantic reproofs.

I jumped up from the couch and grabbing my keys and purse from the coffee table as I stood, I presented myself to Kathy for approval. "About bloody time," was her only comment.

As we walked out into the claret dusk of Austin, the temperature had cooled off into the upper 90s with a pleasant southerly breeze. Kathy hollered "See you there," as she, Pete, Thomas, and Terry climbed into her car.

Then there it was: Cody's car – Cody's enchanted, scary white four-door sedan, my own personal microcosm contained within the shell of a Honda Civic. As Cody opened the passenger door for me and I stepped into the magical world of romantic hope, I felt like I could vomit right then and there. You never really see Cinderella vomiting in front of the Prince, but I guess that's what makes her a Disney princess and me just a girl who probably should have had something besides Taco Cabana for dinner.

With Cody sitting beside me in the driver's seat, even the most mundane of movements, such as putting on my seatbelt, was distressing. My hands shook, and I only hoped he didn't notice as he started the ignition and pulled away from the curb to fall in behind Kate's car.

Excitement, fear, anticipation, hope... so many emotions squeezed into such a miniscule moment of time. If time wasn't the physics heavyweight that it is, I'm sure it would have ripped apart from the pressure. I know that / certainly felt it.

However, Cody seemed quite relaxed. "Have you seen Mister Sinus Theater before?" he asked casually. I noticed his complete disregard for Thomas' earlier correction. Was this hubris or just a poor short term memory?

"Uh... no," I replied, "no, I haven't."

"Neither have I," he replied. "Sometimes I don't feel young enough or hip enough to live in Austin."

"Young enough?" I asked. "How old are you?" I assumed that he was in his late twenties; at least he *looked* like he was in his late twenties.

"Thirty-three," he replied.

"Thirty-three's not that bad," I said reassuringly. "I mean, you *will* have to move to northwest Austin soon – you're getting too old for central Austin. But you don't get kicked out into the suburbs until you get married and have kids."

What is this? I thought to myself. Am I... flirting? If I am, I hope I'm good at it.

He was smiling. That was a good sign. Of course, Cody smiles all the time, so that isn't quite the coup it would have been with another guy. "I noticed that you didn't comment on how hip I am," he said.

"You seem hip enough for Austin. You can make a margarita and you're heavily involved in the computer industry. I mean, aren't those the only two requirements? Of course, you could replace music or film industry with the computer industry and that would still make you a hip Austinite. And if you're gay, you're definitely hip enough. I think the city planners feel that if we attract more homosexuals to Austin that we'll become the San Francisco of the southwest. Every hip and funky city has a strong gay community." It's at this point that I realized that I was rambling, and the flirting came to a lurching halt.

With a sideways glance, I saw that his smile was even larger than before. Strangely enough, this both reassured me and made me more nervous.

"I don't know," he replied. "I spend most nights just watching movies and reading Java books."

"I think you just defined half the population of Austin with that statement." For the first time since I developed this insanely annoying crush on him, I smiled at him. At that moment and in that tiny nondescript Honda Civic, I was the happiest I had ever been, and a little bit of the sentiment that was making my entire body glow on the inside was leaking through the armor that I had spent years building.

Now it seemed to be his turn to get a bit nervous. His smile faded a bit, and he turned his head to study the traffic on Mopac. Our little world was silent for a few moments before he asked, "Whatever happened to that lawyer?"

"That lawyer?" I was genuinely confused.

"The lawyer you were seeing."

"Oh." He was talking about John. "Oh... he was an experiment, but now I'm certain that lawyers aren't for me. I thought I would try middle managers and salesmen next, sort of complete the triangle of moral turpitude."

"So... you aren't going out with him anymore?" he asked.

This topic was making me very uncomfortable. "No... no, I'm not."

Cody was silent for a moment, as if thinking, and then he said, "Turpitude? Not many people can work that word into a conversation."

My relief was instant. The topic of dating had been closed, so I relaxed again and replied, "We *were* talking about lawyers." Feeling such a wave of relief, I couldn't help but smile again at Cody.

And then he said very suddenly and awkwardly, "Go out with me."

I was completely at a loss for words. Here was the moment that I had been fantasizing about for the past few months, and when it actually came true, I completely froze. All the graceful and clever replies I had said in my fantasies disappeared instantly from my mind.

Cody turned his head forward again, and in the bare darkness of early evening, I could see his cheeks become flushed. He was embarrassed. So, without any forethought, I said very suddenly and awkwardly, "Yes." He looked back at me. "Yes." His beautiful smile returned to his face. "Yes, please."

End of Chapter Two

Thank you for listening to *At Shadows End* by Angel Woodings released through RomancePodcast.com. All materials associated with this podcast are copyright 2008 RomancePodcast.com. Please look for Chapter Three to be released on Friday, September 12th. We hope you have a wonderful day.