

THE THYME KEEPER

23-DE04-W19

A young girl finds out that time cannot always be counted in seconds, minutes, and hours but through births, deaths, and love.

FADE IN:

INT. BARE ROOM - DAY

Bare room, no window. Only a scrubbed wood table and two ladder-back chairs fill most of the space. On the table is an ornately carved clock detailing flowers, vines, and hunting dogs. Beside the clock, laid out in structured order is a small collection of watchmaker's tools. A man's dark gray wool felt hat in the prohibition-era detective style is pushed to one side.

Sitting at the table is, ALFRED, a slender gray-haired man, his head bowed, his eyes closed. His lips move silently as if in prayer. Moses, a blue tick hound presses against him, leaning into his leg.

Alfred picks up a screwdriver and reaches for the clock.

There is a soft KNOCK and a GUARD opens the door and ushers in DORA, a young reporter from a local paper.

Alfred jumps up.

ALFRED

Sit here my dear.
(pulls out chair)
I'm so glad you came.

Dora hesitates but sits, flips open a notebook and CLICKS her pen, the sound loud in the quiet room.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Are you nervous? Don't be. I
promise you I am harmless.

DORA

I think Congressman Wicks would
disagree.
(under her breath)
If he were still able to disagree
that is.

Alfred ignores her. He takes a pocket watch out of his jacket and checks the time before slipping it back into his pocket. He then returns to his chair and sits, facing Dora.

DORA (CONT'D)

Why did you ask to talk with me?
Why not some well-known newscaster
like Lester Holt? I mean this is a
national story. I'm just a small
town reporter.

ALFRED

I've read your work. I think I have a story only you can tell. But, I have some "rules" before we get started.

DORA

And what might they be? You know we don't have much time. I have tons of questions. What made you do what you did? You were a model citizen. Why...

ALFRED

You will sit quietly and listen until I finish then you may ask me questions. Are we agreed?

Dora nods and settles back in her seat, crossing her legs and getting comfortable.

DORA

Agreed.
(looks at her watch)
Maybe we better get started. Tick tock.

ALFRED

Sometimes a real story starts at the end but you have to go back to the beginning to understand it.

Alfred's eyes tenderly travel to the past.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

I was all of eighteen and so excited I thought I'd literally burst.

FLASHBACK

INT. CLOCK SHOP - DAY

The clock shop walls are covered in clocks all set to go off at different times. A sign in the center of all the clocks reads in bold black letters, THE THYME KEEPER. A young Alfred erupts into the shop and has to impatiently wait while his father, CHRISTIAN, who is behind the counter finishes with a customer.

Christian speaks with a slight German accent.

CHRISTIAN

What is it my son? Why do you come bursting in this way? Scaring my customers.

YOUNG ALFRED

Papa I just asked Evelyn to marry me. She said yes. YES to me -- a nobody!

Alfred grabs his dad and dances him around the room.

CHRISTIAN

You're not a nobody. You're my son. A fourth generation watchmaker. When is this happy event to take place?

YOUNG ALFRED

I...I don't know. She said yes and I came straight to tell you. I hope it's soon.

(blushing)

The sooner the better.

Christian laughs and slaps him on the back.

CHRISTIAN

I have something I've been saving for you for when this occasion happened. Just a minute.

Christian goes into the back room and returns a few minutes later with the same clock as seen in the opening.

CHRISTIAN (CONT'D)

This is a very special clock. It has been handed down in our family for over a hundred years. It is given when the son marries and he then becomes the Keeper of Time.

Alfred reverently takes the offered clock.

ALFRED

So that's why you wouldn't let me touch it.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BARE ROOM - DAY

DORA
What is a keeper of time?

Alfred holds up his hand, palm out to remind Dora of "no questions".

DORA (CONT'D)
Sorry.

ALFRED
The Keeper of Time promises to use his time on earth wisely. To spend time with his family - not to work every single moment. My Papa once asked me why I thought all the clocks in his shop were set to go off at different times? I thought maybe he just liked the noise, but he said it was to remind him that everything has it's own season.

Alfred looks away as if seeing something in the distance beyond Dora's view.

ALFRED (CONT'D)
Let me tell you about my Evelyn. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

FLASHBACK

EXT. SMALL CHURCH - DAY

Young Alfred and Evelyn are standing on the church stoop. He beams in a new suit and she glows in a beautiful white wedding gown. They walk forward amid cheers and pelting rice and make a dash for the waiting car.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BARE ROOM - DAY

ALFRED
When Evelyn and I got married I thought it was the happiest day of my life. But, I was wrong. That came later.

Alfred is quiet for a few moments then seems to come to himself.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

I bet you're wondering what my happiest day was?

Dora nods but remains silent.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Well, my happiest day was also my saddest day rolled into one. Dora was pregnant. It had been an uneventful pregnancy until she went into labor about a month early. It happened so fast.

Alfred's eyes fill with tears.

FLASHBACK

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Evelyn is in a hospital bed. Labor pains are coming fast and furious. She pushes and her beautiful baby girl is there. She is half crying and half laughing when suddenly, she screams and blood soaks the sheets faster than it can be stopped.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BARE ROOM - DAY

Alfred looks up. The tears stream down his face.

ALFRED

She died and so did my heart.

Moses whines and pushes his head into Alfred's lap. Alfred absently strokes his ears. Alfred is silent for so long, Dora finally speaks.

DORA

Mr. Alfred, is there more?

ALFRED

Yes. My daughter, Katrinia was as beautiful as her mother. She looked just like her--too much like her.

FLASHBACK

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

A beautiful teen girl, KATRINIA, with blond hair and sparkling green eyes is walking in a flower garden. She carries a basket and is randomly adding flowers to her growing bouquet. She is followed by a menagerie of dogs and cats.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BARE ROOM - DAY

ALFRED

I found myself aloof with her because she reminded me so much of her mother. Yet, I was proud of her too. Then one day she came to tell me she was pregnant.

FLASHBACK

INT. CLOCK SHOP - DAY

A middle-aged Alfred and teenaged Katrinia are alone in the clock repair shop.

MIDDLE-AGED ALFRED

You're what?
(yelling)
How could that happen?

Alfred grabs Katrinia's shoulders.

MIDDLE-AGED ALFRED (CONT'D)

You were molested weren't you? Who did this? I'll kill him.

KATRINIA

No, Papa. I...I loved him. I thought he loved me too. But he didn't. At least not real love.
(sobbing)
I'm so, so sorry.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BARE ROOM - DAY

Alfred and Dora still sit at the table. Alfred looks into Dora's eyes.

ALFRED
Your eyes. They're ...

DORA
What? What about my eyes?

ALFRED
They're just like...they're so clear. Anyway, forget it. I didn't handle my daughter's news well at all. But I still loved her and I would've taken care of her and the baby. But she ran away.

DORA
Oh no.

ALFRED
I tracked her down, but it was too late. She had died shortly after giving birth. I finally found the baby, but by then she was three years old and had been adopted by a good family and was very happy.

Caught up in the story, Dora forgets she is not to speak.

DORA
How do you know she was happy?

ALFRED
I watched them. I just couldn't hurt her or her new family. I left them alone but I've checked in on her from time to time.

Alfred and Dora look at each other.

ALFRED (CONT'D)
And then a year ago, I found out who the man was that hurt my daughter. He did rape her but she didn't want me to know. I tracked him down. He bragged about what he had done. It was time someone gave him what he deserved. I found out Katrinia wasn't the first or the last one he had hurt.
(MORE)

ALFRED (CONT'D)

I really lost it this time. I didn't plan to.... Well you know the rest.

Forgetting herself again Dora asks a question.

DORA

But why not take him to court? Why murder him?

ALFRED

Murder! It wasn't murder, it was retribution. It was time he was stopped.

With one finger, Alfred traces one of the clock's carvings.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

I've made my peace with God and now I only have two more things to do.

Alfred picks up a screwdriver and inserts it in a slot on the back of the clock. A drawer pops out. Inside the drawer is a folded piece of parchment. Alfred takes the paper out and carefully holds it.

DORA

What is that?

ALFRED

This is a list of family members who have had the clock in their possession. It also lists marriages, births and deaths.
(hands the paper to Dora)
Read the entries on the last page aloud.

With suddenly shaking hands Dora unfolds the paper.

DORA

Alfred Thyme married to Evelyn Bandy on August 27, 1980. One daughter, Katrinia, born April 9, 1983. Evelyn died from complications of the birth the same day.

Dora looks up from reading.

ALFRED

Please continue.

DORA

Katrinia Thyme gave birth on December 5, 2000 to a daughter she named Dora who was given up for adoption. Katrinia died a week later.

Dora gasps and drops the paper to the table. She sends a questioning look to Alfred.

DORA (CONT'D)

That's my birthday! Are you.... Are You saying I'm that Dora? That I'm...

ALFRED

My granddaughter? Yes.

Dora jumps up, pacing the room. She spins back to the table and picks up the parchment again.

DORA

I knew I was adopted but I never dreamed this. Why should I believe you?

Alfred pulls a photo out of his pocket and slides it over to Dora.

ALFRED

You're the spitting image of your grandmother and your mother.

DORA

(looks up)
If I didn't know better, it could be me in that picture.

Alfred puts the parchment back into the clock.

ALFRED

(glances at his watch)
We need to hurry. Ask your questions quickly.

DORA

Why did you wait till now to tell me all this?

ALFRED

Since your adoptive parents have both passed away, I thought you should know. And you're older.

(MORE)

ALFRED (CONT'D)

I thought you could handle it now.
Next?

DORA

Is there anything I can do for you?
Notify anyone? Any family? Friends?

ALFRED

Yes, I want you to promise me
you'll take care of Moses.

Alfred pats his old dog on the head.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

He's been a good boy--a true friend
who's given me unconditional love.
He deserves a good last few years.

DORA

I will. I love dogs. I promise you
he'll be treated like a king.

ALFRED

I want you to know that I'm leaving
everything I have to you. My
lawyer, Bob Rossiter is a good man.
He'll guide you honestly. He has
all the documentation proving who
you are and stating my wishes.

DORA

You make it sound like you're going
to die. You haven't been tried yet.
We can get you off. We can fight
this. We...

There's a KNOCK and the door opens revealing the uniformed
guard from earlier. Alfred stands up.

ALFRED

You can ask one last question. Make
it good.

DORA

Can I hug you?

A big smile spreads over Alfred's face as he embraces Dora in
a bear hug.

DORA (CONT'D)

It's not fair. There are so many
things I want to know. I just found
you.

ALFRED

Don't despair, Dora. One way or the other I'll see you again. But you've got a lot of living and loving to do. Both good and bad.

DORA

I wish we could stop time.

ALFRED

If we did some people would suffer forever and we'd never get to the really good stuff. Now you are the Keeper of Time -- the clock is yours.

GUARD

Sir,
(taps his watch)
We have to go.

Alfred gently eases Dora's arms from around his neck, picks up his hat, pulls a letter out of his pocket and hands it to her.

ALFRED

Read this after I'm gone. For now stay here with Moses. I have to face this alone.

He looks back.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Forgive me for killing your father.

The door closes behind Alfred.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

As Alfred and the Guard step outside the building, they are surrounded by REPORTERS all shouting questions at once.

REPORTERS

Is it true? Did you confess to killing the Congressman?/Why did you do it?/Can you give us a statement at least?/Why haven't you been arrested yet?

Alfred looks at his pocket watch again, tugs his hat down, squares his shoulders and walks toward the waiting police car not making eye contact with anyone and gets in the back of the vehicle.

Dora runs out of the building clutching the letter and pushes her way to the car. She bangs on the window.

DORA

Wait! I forgive you. I forgive you.

Alfred looks out the window and once again smiles at Dora. As the car drives off, Dora sees the crumpled letter still clutched tightly in her hand.

ALFRED (V.O.)

For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under
heaven. Now is your time, Dora. Use
it wisely. Love, Grandpa.

FADE OUT.