

ATTENTION

I had a co-worker who wouldn't leave me alone. She kept putting love notes in my mail box.

"You've got an intimacy problem."

"I just need you to leave me alone."

She didn't take rejection very well.

"What's your problem? You can only make it with underage girls."

After she said this to me I saw her pin a newspaper article to her cubicle wall: "WOMAN FINDS FINGER IN A CARTON OF ORANGE JUICE."

I wondered if she had returned the carton of juice.

I went back to working on a computer layout. It would be a good morning if the woman could leave me alone. I hardly found her repulsive. In fact, from her first day, I had been interested to learn more about her. But it didn't take long before she started prying into my private life. Now I was thankful that she didn't clip naked pictures of herself to the cards that she kept sending me.

"This isn't going to get any better."

"If you don't like it, why don't you just report it."

I was certainly on the verge of telling our supervisor. She also had the habit of stretching her legs out so that they would creep into my cubicle. On the surface of things, this might have seemed cute. But it started to get on my nerves.

"Why don't you just leave me alone?"

"I would, but you seem so lonely. Don't you want a woman to curl up to at night?"

If I had felt desire for another person, I was starting to lose interest in sex altogether. This was aggravated by my stalker's attractiveness. What had formerly been my clue into a woman's inner mystery, now struck me as an irritation. I felt that I would never be able to sort through things emotionally.

I think that she secretly understood my difficulty. She would taunt me to no end. This only made me feel more helpless. I was almost ready to seek professional help. After all, it was like discovering that you were allergic to oxygen. It was a good day if I saw neither hide nor hair of her. Of course, that didn't mean that she didn't have her eyes on me. I could only hope.

I was good at my job, and I enjoyed it so much that I didn't consider a switch. But my admirer kept pushing me. She may have been a rival for my position. Although she really didn't have the skills to match mine. My boss knew this. He told me to ignore her advances.

"She's only trying to flatter you."

I think that he wanted me to make short shrift of the young creature. That was all that I needed. I would have had an anchor for life. Instead, I would have rather drowned myself in the Pacific ocean. And if she had her way, that would probably be my eventual fate.

The next morning she was waiting for me when I arrived.

"I bought you some coffee and a doughnut.

"Thanks so much," I tried to be polite. I knew that she was only fattening me for the slaughter.

"What did you do last night?"

I really didn't want to share anything more about my personal life. But the night had been rather dull.

"I watched a movie and fell asleep."

I opened my computer and got to work before she could comment. She was still staring into space in the hopes that she might get rise out of me.

At lunch, she was even more charming, "Darling, it's a beautiful day. How about a picnic?"

"I'm really too busy for lunch. Don't deny yourself on my account."

She felt that she was denying herself, but she accepted my pass on the picnic.

Most of the other workers left, and I enjoyed my quiet time alone. When she came back, she was the loudest one of the bunch.

"I brought you some dessert."

"I'm trying to cut down on sugar. But thanks."

It was mini pecan pie. I just had to look at it to crave it. If only I had found her equally delectable.

"Are you doing anything after work?"

"Going to the gym."

"You should tell me about your plan. I really should join a gym. I did gymnastics in college."

I had seen enough of her back flips to last me a lifetime.

"I don't understand you. I get a woman to look at me sideways. And you're just fighting them off."

Weldon was another associate. We worked closely together.

"You have no idea what she is like."

"I've never seen a girl wear a shorter skirt in my life. If my wife saw me staring at her, she'd take a .44 and blow my head off."

"Looks are deceiving!"

"You really believe that."

"You don't know the half of it."

Weldon and I went out for after dinner drinks.

"You're telling me that she's harassing you. I'd have to see it to believe it. That girl could stick hot pokers up my ass, and I wouldn't complain."

"Weldon, you are one strange dude."

"Open your eyes, my man."

"My eyes are wide open. And I see every trick about that girl."

"It doesn't hurt to wet that wick of yours."

"I am not going to lead her on."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I've seen enough movies. She's going to drown my pet canary in pot of tomato soup, and my fiancée is going to be hanging from the flagpole of our office building."

"You don't have a fiancée, we don't have a flagpole."

"You know what I'm getting at."

He took a sip of his martini.

“Do you want seconds?”

“My wife is waiting for me.”

“Just hang with me a little longer.”

“My wife is going to know for sure that we’ve been talking about your secret crush. I’m not usually this perky.”

“Tell her it’s stress at the office.”

“She’s on to all my tricks.”

I hoped that the weekend might be the remedy for my secret love. I didn’t hear from her at all so I thought that I was home free. But I still couldn’t settle down. I was jumpy every second of the day.

On Saturday, I played basketball with some buddies. I let out all my steam, but I still felt encumbered. At a bar that night, I kept seeing her everywhere.

“I am losing my mind.”

I had this weird dream that she was doing a strip dance in my room.

“You’re always the pervert.”

Monday morning, she seemed as wiry as ever. I only wanted her to calm down. I didn’t need her rubbing it first thing of the week.

“Did you miss me, lover?”

I thought about firing back with a vulgar comment, but that would have only encouraged her more. Instead, I just started working hard.

Later, Weldon told me, “Every guy in this office is jealous of your *Office Fan*.”

“Shut up!”

He faked me out with a basketball move.

“Saturday.”

But it was still Monday, and I was unsure how I would make it through until five.

I knew I was losing it when I found myself staring at her body and remembering my dream.

“You’re a man; it’s only natural.”

“Every psycho-killer looks attractive to someone. That’s how he gets the job done.”

I only feared that she would now come to me as a nightmare. What kind of monster had I created? At this rate, I was going to have to get a new job. I supposed that I wasn’t the first person who had to face a situation like this.

Weldon asked me, “What’s troubling you again?”

“Imagine if your wife became your ex. And every time that you got interested in another woman, she’d show up for one of your dates. Wouldn’t that kind of ruin things for you?”

“I love my wife.”

“Weldon, it was a hypothetical. Just suppose!”

“If my wife wanted to join me in my fun, I wouldn’t have an objection.”

“Weldon, just put your wife out of your mind for a little while.”

“That wouldn’t be the loving thing to do.”

“If absence make the heart grow fonder, then more absence creates super fondness.”

“Maybe you’re around your girl too much to realize what she’s really got.”

“She’s not my anything, so quit trying to tease me.”

“Maybe you should give her a chance. What are your options?”

“I am running out of options. I’m not sure if I’m attracted to anyone.”

“That’s the spirit. If you can’t have what you want, then what you can have isn’t worth having.”

I told you that I’m not interested.”

We were both tipsy.

“I’m taking a cab home.”

“Have him drop me off too.”

“I thought that she invited you over for dinner.”

“Don’t get started now.”

The next day, she looked angry.

“You missed dinner. You didn’t text. You didn’t call.”

“We didn’t have dinner plans. Is this some joke of Weldon’s.”

“Weldon’s?”

What started to scare me was the fact that I began wondering if we really had made plans. I couldn’t remember a single time when I had actually responded favorably to her advances. If this kind of confusion kept up, she would eventually have me. Oh no!

She was sitting on my desk.

“I have to get back to work.”

“Not before I get an apology.”

“Work is not a place to work out lovers’ spats anyway.”

“So now you’re finally admitting that we’re lovers.”

“I’m not admitting to anything. I’m just telling you that I would like to get back to work.”

She huffed and went back to her cubicle.

I had this vision of her in a formal gown waiting for me to show up for a candlelight dinner. I felt guilty. If she thought that I was leading her on, I only wished that she wouldn’t take it all so seriously.

I was becoming afraid. I was softening to her. Why hadn’t I been able to resist?

“Would you like to come with me bowling?”

“I’m not really a bowling sort. Besides, I have so much work that I may have to stay late.”

She made me want to come up with an excuse. I couldn’t envision us bowling together.

“They have delicious wieners at the alley. They taste great with lots of relish.”

“You’re a relish girl?”

I had this image of relish dripping down her chin.

“Here let me get you a napkin.”

She gave me the strangest look.

“I thought that I was imagining things,” she replied.

I felt as if we were about to change roles. I was getting desperate.

“We could do bowling another night,” I reassured her.

“Whatever,” she replied sharply.

Maybe she was losing interest in me.

For the next few days, she was ignoring me. It was as if she was punishing me for my bad behavior. I tried not to respond. That would only make her want to come back to me.

I hated to admit it to myself, but I had become used to her constant attention. I ceased seeing her legs stretching into my cubicle. We were no longer an item.

“I think that I got rid of her for good.”

Weldon spilled part of his martini on the table.

“You don’t look so happy.”

“You were right. You don’t know what you’ve got until it’s gone.”

“So does that mean that you’re going to try to win her back.”

“At this point, I’m just going to leave well enough alone.”

That was exactly what I did until the weekend. I still had no more fun Saturday night. I couldn’t get my groove going.

“She’s got your mojo.”

“That’s a weird way of putting it Weldon.”

But he was right. I had this feeling that if I was with another woman, that my admirer would mess with my performance. I was really in trouble.

I saw her in the office. She was still ignoring me. She went about her business. She scurried back and forth as if she was in the middle of some serious work. She was doing all this for my benefit.

I tried to see her in more flattering light. She still repulsed me. I couldn’t help but think about her all the time.

She knew what was going on. She kept prancing around the office. She knew that I was looking at her.

I was having trouble getting my work done.

“I can get some things done at home. Can I get out of her early?”

I asked my boss if I could leave. I had been here late the last few nights.

“Just remember those deadlines.

I knew that I could stay on schedule if I could just get out of there for now.

“I didn’t see you yesterday afternoon.”

“My little lovebird was driving me crazy. I just went home.”

“You have to quit making excuses. She’s going to drive you over the edge.”

“I’m already at the edge.”

I wasn’t handling this well. I had only missed part of a day. And I more than made up for that. She was trying to throw me off my rhythm. I was fighting back.

Thursday I was just slammed. She did what she could to shake me up. It perturbed her to no end that she couldn’t get a rise from me. I totally ignored her. I knew it wouldn’t last. But I held my head down and pushed ahead.

Weldon had to rush home after work so we didn’t have our venting session. I went back to my place and made myself some dinner. I felt as if I was in prison. The four walls were getting to me. If I went out to party, I would be wiped out for the next day. I poured myself a stiff drink, then I went to bed.

All the projects were due Friday. I had a head start, but it was still balls to the walls. And I banged out one after another. At one point, I thought that I saw her smile at me. But when

I looked back, she had turned her head.

She was acting as if we had broken up. I dealt with it.

“I think that I’m all done.”

“Are you leaving?” my boss asked.

“Did I forget something?”

“All clear with me.”

It was close to six. No one else was in the office. It really felt eerie in here. If she had suddenly appeared, I would have jumped. I passed by her desk on the way out. I wanted to take a look. I stood there in front of her little empire and let my eyes wander over her doo-dads. It was all so quaint. I saw a little snowman on the desk. I put it in my pocket. In the elevator, I took it out and held it tightly.

I was alone in my apartment. It had been a difficult week. Even without her interference, work was overwhelming. I needed some way to relieve the stress. Weldon had been goading me about her. And I had done my best to think about her in a positive way.

I kept having this image of her sitting on my desk. Usually, I focused on her face. She wore glasses that gave a stridency to her tone. Her head would rock back and forth as she made her point.

I started to move my eyes down her body. Her legs were right in front of my face. She adjusted them slightly when she realized that I was looking at her. I could see the outline of her panties. She looked back at me and smiled. Then her modesty took over, and she moved just enough so that I no longer had the same vantage point.

I usually had been quite smug as she made her appeal. Today, she knew that she had me. She turned her head slightly with a coquettish air. Then she touched her right thigh with her fingers.

Her skirt was especially short. This was a habit of hers that Weldon had often noticed. Her fingers were so close to my face that she was almost touching me. I was having trouble resisting the temptation. I wanted to caress her legs with my lips. Not an insistent kiss. Just a sloppy effort on my part. She moved her hand as if she was pushing me away.

Her calves dangled at the edge of the desk. It was obvious that she worked out. There was pronounced definition to the muscles. And her heels were extra high. She wanted me to look at her. I couldn’t help noticing.

I wanted to grab both of her legs and rock her on the desk. I was having difficulty restraining myself. She knew that she had me going. She licked her lips in agreement. She took off her glasses, and shook her hair. It floated in the air. When it came to rest, it flattered her face to such a degree that I was overpowered. I wanted to kiss her lips.

My fantasy was gripping me. I wanted to fall with her to my couch. I put my hands on her hips as I worked my way down her body. She cooed excitedly. She adjusted my right hand until it was resting on the edge of her skirt. Then she moved closer to me until my hand drove right into her.

I could feel her warm breath on my neck. Her kiss felt so close. I wanted to scoop her up and take her away.

She looked back at me. She had already succumbed to her passion.

“I’ve always wanted you. From the first day.”

She was turning me on. I couldn't restrain myself. I didn't care who found out. It didn't matter what she was going to do to mess up my life. I wanted her right then.

She opened her jacket, and I glared at her. Her blouse was tight and revealing. She undid a couple of the buttons. I could think about nothing else. I was willing to throw caution to the wind.

I made myself a drink and sat back down on the couch. My ardor quickly passed. And I stretched out. I had no feelings of regret. I marveled at the intensity of my desire. If this was all my imagination, how intense would the actual experience be.

I wanted to call her. I had no doubt if she heard my voice that she would be right over. I could think about nothing else. I needed to contain myself. I had avoided her for a reason. I couldn't let my hunger get the better of me. It would be better to take a shower and get in bed early. I wanted to believe that I was totally in control of the situation. I had no idea what I was doing.

Weldon and I got some breakfast after playing basketball. I wanted to say something.

"I'm not sure if I'm doing the right thing."

"You're going to report her after all."

"I don't know. I have no idea what is happening."

"A bad dream."

"Worse."

I told him about my fantasy.

"It was bound to happen."

"What do I do now?"

"You're a single guy. Is there a question?"

"I work with this woman. I see her everyday."

"Are you afraid that she's going to have the upper hand?"

"I'm afraid of what is going to happen after it's all over."

"You're going to forget about her. And the book will be closed."

"I'm still going to see her everyday."

"What's the big deal? She's going to ignore you. Isn't she giving you the cold shoulder already?"

"That's not what I mean."

"Would there be some kind of legal case? I've been there for a while. Technically, I'm her superior."

"You're not her boss. It's that simple"

"Listen to us. We're plotting how to screw this girl over and not get caught."

"You're just using your head."

Weldon was making it way too easy for me.

"Why are you even telling me this?" he asked. "You want me to give you my permission. Go nail her. Enjoy yourself for once."

"You're making it sound so impersonal. Like I want to assault her."

"Look at the situation honestly. She's a total nut job. But she's a tiger in bed. Take one look at that body. Is there anything to wonder about?"

"I still have a conscience. And you do too. Otherwise, you'd be in the same predicament

as me.”

“I’d love to be in the same predicament.”

“What are you saying? You have a wife?”

“Have you seen my wife?”

“She’s lovely.”

“Exactly, but this girl puts my wife to shame. If she was coming on to me, I’d take care of it in a heartbeat.”

“You’d cheat on your wife!”

“It wouldn’t be cheating if you spend a night with a goddess. Where do you think morality comes from?”

“Juno is going to bend the rules.”

“Sounds good to me!”

“Too good, buddy boy. You’re only making me want her more.”

“You’re like a stallion. You’ve had a good work out. Now you want to show her what you’re made of.”

“I feel more like a snail than like a stallion,”

She had me meet her at a house in the suburbs. She sent me the address and directions. We came in separate cars.

“Why did you bring me here?”

“I wanted to see if you would come.”

“I was curious.”

“Are you glad that you came?”

“I don’t know yet. What is this about?”

“You’ll find out in good time. You ask too many questions.”

“Does a friend of yours own this house?”

“I got the key from the real estate agent.”

There was no furniture inside. We were standing together in the living room.

“OK, what’s next?”

“What do you want to happen? I can tell that you’ve been thinking about me.”

“How’s that?”

“Just the way that you look at me.”

“What do you want to happen now? Do you want me to vanquish you on the plush carpet?”

“I want answers.”

“What kind of answers?”

“I want you to tell me why I feel the way that I do. One moment I love you, the next I want to kill you.”

“We barely know each other.”

“We know each other better than you want to admit.”

“What do you want from me? When you started, you wanted me to love you. But you really don’t want me to love you. You want me to suffer like you.”

“I’d only ask you to suffer like me if you were the cause of my suffering. Are you ready to admit that?”

“How long have we known each other? Three months. How did I make you suffer during that time?”

“In another life.”

“You’re almost as old as I am. Where did you know me in another life?”

“I was a child, and you lived next door. And you played this sick game with me.”

She told me more details about her life.

“That’s impossible. We were never in the same city.”

I felt as if I had walked into a bad horror movie. The killer was confronting her final victim for all his past offense.

“You made me the way that I am.”

“And that’s why you pretended to love me.”

“I wanted to love you. You can’t be loved. I gave you gifts. I was nice to you. And you never even noticed me.”

“Do you want to hurt me for now or for my past?”

“It’s all the same.”

“It may feel the same for you. But I can hardly answer for something that I can’t even remember if I did.”

“Is your amnesia a convenient way of trying to forget?”

“I’m not suffering from amnesia.”

“Then how do you explain the fact that you can’t even remember anything about what happened between us?”

“It never happened.”

“But you said that your memory is cloudy. Mine isn’t.”

“Then offer me more substantial proof that I was involved.”

“I don’t need proof. I know how I feel.”

“But that doesn’t mean that I have the same feeling. And if I don’t, I can’t accept blame for what did happen to you.”

“You’ve always been like this. You try to use logic to argue against me. But I know that it was you. I just know it!”

I couldn’t deal with hysterics. I needed to find a way to get out of here.

“You’re not going to do something to me if I try to leave.”

“I want to burn down this house.”

“All because I won’t believe you.”

“This is where it happened. This is where you did all those thing to me.”

“I’ve never been here before.”

“This is your house. Don’t you recognize it?”

I looked around. Nothing seemed familiar. Why was she pressuring me?

“I’m trying to remember. Nothing is coming back.”

“Look at me. Look in my eyes. Now try to imagine what it was like years ago. Can’t you remember?”

“What do you want me to see. An image of you as a child.”

“Can you see it?”

“I don’t want to see it.”

“You’re not playing according to the rules.”

“What’s that smell?”

“Gas.”

“What?”

“I told you. It’s gas!”

“Is there some kind of gas leak?”

“No, it’s gas from the gas station. I’m going to burn down this house, and with it, all my bad memories.”

“Do you always do this to people that you love?”

I wanted to close my eyes. I wanted the nightmare to end. I was being punished for having erotic fantasies about her.

“Do you want me?”

“Want you how? Are we going to buy this house and live here happily ever after?”

She collapsed on the floor.

“I want you to help me!”

“I’m trying!” I got down on my knees next to her.

“What am I supposed to do now?”

“Kiss me, you fool!”

I couldn’t take it any longer. I went to see my supervisor.

“What do you want me to do?”

“I want my life back.”

“There is nothing that we can do. This is something personal between the two of you.”

“I have evidence.”

“She’s teasing with you.”

“It doesn’t feel like teasing. She won’t leave me alone.”

“So you want to make a formal complaint.”

“I do.”

“I really wish that you could have been more of a man about this.”

“I come here to do my work, not to get harassed by a fellow employee.”

He agreed to follow up on my complaint.

“Why didn’t you say something about this earlier?”

“I did. But you kept on telling me not to make a fuss about it.”

I waited a couple of weeks. I was moved to another part of the office. She stopped bothering me. For some unexplained reason, she stopped coming to work. A little after that I was called into my supervisor’s office. The investigator was with him.

The investigator was very succinct in his report, “Her name is Eve Martin, And she appears to have a history of this sort of thing.”

“So I’m not the first.”

“I guess that you’re asking the question that every guy seems to ask about her: why me?”

“She made me feel special. And that was the scariest part of the experience. She did such a good job at it that I started to believe her.”

“You have to be careful who you give your heart to.”

“Are you telling me that it’s the same with everyone that I meet. That any of them could

be like Eve Martin.”

“I used to think that the Eve Martins of the world were unusual. A mutation of normal development. Now I’m suspicious of everyone. I guess it comes with the job.”

I started to believe that Eve had a point. I really was instrumental in her development. It was as if something that I said to her triggered a reaction. It may have had nothing to do with her actual experience. She had brought me to a house where she claimed to have suffered abuse. But that may have been a prop to help explain her confused feelings. Things didn’t add up. The house wasn’t even in the same city where she told me that she had grown up.

When I was with her, I had started to believe everything that she said to me. I became part of her story. I was not simply a concerned observer. It appeared to me I was actually implicated in what had happened to her. Memories that I had which contradicted her story seemed less credible. I started to doubt my own identity. If I had based my personality on a certainty about my own experience, then that certainty had been challenged.

The investigator appeared to offer me some comfort. But Eve Martin would still do what she could to impeach my testimony. She would contend that the investigator was in my employ. I had supplied him with a script, and he fabricated the appropriate evidence to go along with my assertions.

“What if I told you that my name wasn’t even Eve Martin?”

“That wasn’t what he said. The investigator simply told me that you used the name Eve Martin, and that you acted this way on a number of different occasions.”

In my mind, I tried to meet all her objections.

She no longer worked at the same place that I did, but that didn’t mean that I wouldn’t see her again. She knew where I lived.

“What if my name wasn’t even Eve Martin?”

“What is your name? What name did you put on your job application?”