

7. EVA

More than anything else, envy is the emotion that can inspire our darkest hatred. It can work stronger than jealousy as it strikes at the heart of what makes us jealous. Not that we lack what we love. But that we lack what can make us loved. It gives us motive. It makes us the prime suspect to violence.

I meet her in the park. I am returning from my daily walk.

“I always see you coming as I’m leaving. I’m Wallace.”

She has a bright smile. She is dressed in a green dress with white shoes. She shows her bare legs, long and lanky.

“My name is Eva. Maybe you’d like to extend your time in the park today.”

I decide to take her up on her offer. It seems to be more than an offer. We walk along for about five minutes. We exchange pleasantries. Then she turns to me, “You look like someone that I can trust.”

I am. I feel like a trusting soul.

“I am in a terrible marriage. I really should get a divorce right away. But my husband has my hands tied. Most of his money is untouchable. It’s spread out in various off shore entities under the names of different partners. I know that I can eventually get some of it out. But it’s going to take some doing.”

She has picked up the pace a bit. I work to keep up with her, “I don’t really have any financial skills. I wouldn’t know the first thing how to help you.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about. I’m afraid that my husband is going to hurt me.”

“Has he threatened you?”

“Not at all. But if he knew that I wanted to leave him, he might try to do something. When we met, he was such a devoted lover. But as time has gone on he takes me for granted.”

She slows down as she said this until she comes to complete stop. She is staring me in the eyes. Her gaze was hypnotic. Her lips have that pout; I want to reach over and kiss her.

I comment on her situation, “That seems difficult.”

“I need your help.”

“I still don’t know what I can do.”

“I need you to watch him. To watch us both. I have a place across from where we live. From there you can see into our window. I need you to keep an eye out on what’s going on.”

She seems at wit’s end. I don’t want to send her on her way without doing something.

“I don’t have to be at work for another few hours. Let’s go get something for lunch.”

Eva agrees to my suggestion. We head over to my favorite restaurant. They have a great selection of light fare. Perfect for early in the day.

“Wallace, the reason I need you to do this is I can’t have a friend take care of it for me. Tom might recognize him. I need someone who doesn’t know me at all.”

“Why don’t you go to the police?”

“What am I going to say? I have a hunch that my husband might hurt me.”

“You could get a detective.”

“Tom gives me money for the things that I need. He lets me buy clothes. But I’m not going to get money for a detective.”

“I have my work.”

“I don’t need you there all the time. Just enough to make sure that I’m OK.”

“If you don’t have any money, how did you get the apartment across from your place?”

“My friend is in real estate. They have this one place that’s eventually going to go as condo. But there’s still some maintenance to the building before it’s ready.”

“The electricity works?”

“Everything’s taken care of.”

I think about the intent of my prospective job. She’s offering me the chance to spy on her every move. Simple idle curiosity makes this seem enticing. As she is talking to me her legs are crossed. I am looking at her finely painted toenails. A subtle pink.

She speaks to me. I am distracted looking at her.

“Eva, I missed what you said.”

“From the little that you’ve told me, I guess that you do a lot of writing at home. You prepare for class. You read. You do your research on the computer. You could do all of it there. There’s even a computer there.”

“Is there furniture?”

“The place is furnished. Or there’s furnishings there from the last tenant. It’s spotless. You have to see it.”

It would be strange to ditch my place. But it isn’t as if I’d object to something a little more luxurious. By the way she explains it, it’s actually on the train line to work. It’s almost easier than where I am now.

“Why do I always see you over here?”

“I’ve got a friend in the neighborhood. I’m over there a great deal.”

She doesn’t say whether the friend is male or female. I don’t ask. I am already interested in her life. Her request hardly sounds like much of an imposition. It will give me a reason to stay in during the evening. I have been getting a little caught up drinking with Nick every night.

She tells me about college. She never finished her degree. She got married.

“I regret it now. I really thought that I’d be married to Tom all my life.”

“Surely, you could get a lawyer who could break all of his finances down.”

“I have someone working on it. But it’s still going to be tricky.”

She excuses herself to go to the bathroom. She has the most graceful walk. I sense her walking on air. When she comes back, she wants to tell me more about the marriage.

“You’re not really going to be watching us have sex or anything. We hardly do anymore. And Tom’s going to be away for almost a week. So you can get used to the place before you have to go to work.”

I am agreeing to her plan even though I’m clearly getting nothing in return.

“If I get a good settlement, I will get a good settlement, I can give you something for your troubles.”

“I’m only glad that I can do something for you.”

At this point, I can’t say no. There is nothing that I can do.

Tom and Eva live in a lovely three story town house. The apartment that she offers me is in a building next door to the row of town houses. It gives a clear view of the windows in the south side of their house. I can see the bedroom quit clearly. The master bathroom is further in

the distance, but it is also visible. In the daytime, I can make out vague shadows. At night, it is like watching a television. It is crystal clear. They have decorative curtains on the window. It obstructs enough of the view to make the occupant feel that they can't be seen from the outside. But it is hardly the case. I still see everything.

She has arranged a blind on my window that doesn't allow someone outside to see in, but it gives me a perfect view of the outside. I can even see onto the street if I turn my head. The desk is directly across from this window. I have the ideal vantage point for her show.

Once I am installed in the apartment, Eva leaves me on my own. Her purpose is not to pester me. She just wants me there. She also doesn't want to draw attention to my presence so it is better for me if she acts as if I'm not there.

She doesn't change her routine with me watching. She is often in her chiffon robe circling her room. She leaves the bathroom door half-closed when she is there. Occasionally she leaves there wearing a towel. But that is generally the limits of her show. I meet her later in the week to discuss our progress.

"Tom's going to come back on Thursday. You have to be prepared."

I wonder what I have to do to get ready. I imagine a regimen of calisthenics.

She corrects me, "Just keep your eyes open for anything unusual."

She is particularly vivacious today. I feel that my being in the apartment has given her a confidence that she never had before.

"I'm only glad that I can help you."

"How is your work going?"

"I've started a book. It's on Shakespeare's Sonnets. It's more a work of philosophy than literary criticism."

"I studied English Literature in college. Did I tell you that?"

"I can't remember."

"I really liked D. H. Lawrence. Do you like Lawrence?"

"Yeah." I'm not a big fan of Lawrence. But I listened to her talk about him.

"He's so sexual. He understands that our inhibitions have created this well of sexual energy. When we are liberated, this well just gushes and takes us over with its power."

"Does that mean that the repression is necessary for the liberation?"

"I think that Lawrence would have denied any attachment to psychic bondage. But if he didn't first give his characters that yoke, they couldn't cast it off with such fervor."

"It sounds like Prometheus."

She also expresses a love of Yeats and Wordsworth.

"I love the images of mythic power. The visions that take us to another form of existence."

Eva feels that she has a spiritual gift. A form of enlightenment.

"Do you write?"

"I keep a notebook. I have since I was in college. I should show you what I have. Maybe you could help me get something published."

I am interested to see her writing. This seems more exciting than the plan that she has concocted for me.

"Do you write poems?"

“And stories. I love to write stories. Mystery and love stories. I’m influenced by all the writers that I love to read.”

Eva seems to be troubled soul. She is so much like that characters that she admires. In her dreams, she inhabits a world of passion. But she is condemned to an exile in an ordinary life with mundane expectations.

She wants to tell me more, “When I met Tom, I thought he was my savior. He talked about taking me around the world. I wanted to go to Ireland. We even thought about it for our honeymoon. Then he got caught up in work. He practically forgot about me. There he is going around the world on business. I’m staying at home all the time by myself. It was terrible.”

“Why didn’t you work?”

“Do what? Work in a bookstore. I’ve never needed money.”

“You could get out. And the money you earned would be your money.”

“He’d still need to keep tabs on it. Not for any cruel reason. It would be for taxes. It’s almost better for the both of us that I don’t work.”

“But you have all this time on your hands. You know the saying an idle hand is the devil’s playground.”

She gives me this gleeful smile. Then she turns her head.

“I’m not the devil.”

I want to find out.

When Tom returns, things change. The welcome home is not as icy as I would have thought. There is no sense of estrangement in their company. Nothing appears unusual except that they don’t make love that night that he returns. She does come out of the bathroom in her robe and engage in a passionate kiss. But he turns in early. She battles a touch of insomnia. She is pacing in the room underneath the bedroom. The den. She has the television on, but is not watching. After she starts to doze, she heads up to bed. Tom is long for sleep.

“Do you really need me to do this.” I feel like I am taking advantage of your hospitality.

“No. Please stay. You just can’t see what is really going on. I need you to be there to let me feel safe.”

“Did you bring your notebooks?”

“I forgot. Next time.”

I am fascinated by her poetic touch. Even the way that she expresses things with her hands seems so tender and provocative. She is always gesturing with her hands. Sometimes reaching over to touch me. I imagine that her husband is incapable of showing her love. I want to hold her in my arms. I want to be with her tonight.”

“What do you have for me?”

“I had a dream last night. I could tell you the dream.”

I am anxious to test her narrative skills. How has her poetry extended her imagination.

“Tell me the dream.”

She appears slightly embarrassed.

“There was this girl at college. She was so proud of her body. I never had that vanity that she did. She would prance around the locker room naked. If you visited her in her room, she would hesitate to change in front of you. She’d walk around her room looking for stuff and not have any clothes on. I used to think that she was a bisexual. That she was making a play for me.

But nothing ever came of it. I was glad. Last night I dreamt that I saw her. She was taking a shower.”

“Have you ever tried it?’ she asked me.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Love with a woman. There is nothing else like it.”

“I’m afraid”

“It’s like your Lawrence. You have to give in to your passions.”

“I felt this weird tingling inside me. It was the same feeling that I used to get when I was younger and first having sex. That overpowering feeling. The sense that I was doing something wrong, but nothing could stop me. I would have to do it like that anyway.”

“Wow!”

“I’m in my clothes, and she is in the shower. Naked and all wet. She pulls me over and gives me this kiss. I just felt wonderful all over.”

“Then what happened?”

“I woke up. Or rather Tom made some noise that woke me up.”

“You’re sure that none of this ever happened with your friend.”

“No, never. I had thought about it before. I never did anything like that.”

I am shaking with excitement. Her lips are close to mine. I want to hold her close. Take her warm body and press it close to mine. I want to kiss her.

That night I watch her make ferocious love with her husband. I can see them from the light on in the bathroom. He has no inhibitions. They move so naturally together. I can almost hear her sighs of passions through the wall. I notice that I am looking more and more intensely at them. I am not even pretending to do my work.

He seems gentle with her. He takes time to offer her pleasure. He is not just about himself. Where is the selfishness that she attributed to him.

I watch separated by the walls of the two buildings. Their place is magnificent. I am doing well. But I could never keep her in the style to which she is accustomed. Just her clothes bill.

She has transferred her insomnia to me. I get to sleep when the sun is coming up. I have a late seminar and hardly have the time to prepare. I make it back around 7. She is waiting for me outside the door.

“Why are you here? Isn’t your husband going to come home soon?”

“He has a late meeting. I need to come in. I need to explain. I’m sorry that you had to witness that last night. We haven’t been that passionate in years. I think it was my dream. The fact that I told it to you got me all excited.”

“Sometimes our imagination can make sex seem so much more arousing.”

“That is what I mean. I didn’t feel like I was having sex with him. I felt that I was with you.”

I have been sitting next to her. I get up and turn my back to where we have been sitting.

“I don’t know what to say.”

“Don’t tell me that you haven’t thought about me?”

She is trying to provoke my voyeuristic impulse.

“You’re an attractive woman. It’s only natural that I would get these feelings. But I’ve

got a conscience. I just can't give in to every feeling that I get."

I am now looking at her on the couch. She seems so scrumptious. I feel paralyzed. I want to do something about my affection for her. This has become such a mess.

"I'm just a feeling."

"I like you a lot. I don't want to take advantage of this situation."

"I'd be angry if you did."

She actually seems angrier that I have done nothing. She looks at me to make me feel smaller. She is challenging me. This is all a test. If I fail, I'm going to lose her for good. This is not my style. I am seeming weak in her eyes.

"I'm really glad that you came over here. I'm not sure that I can keep doing this."

"You've just started. You don't know how things might change."

"You might fall in love with him again."

"Are you jealous of him?"

"I'm just envious of what he has to keep you suspended in mid air the way that he does. You can't move forward or backwards."

"There's nothing that he has that can hold me. Nothing that he has that I want."

"Why don't you just leave him?"

I am now sitting in the chair across from her.

"I can't leave him. Not like this."

I wonder if she is leading me on. If she is, what is her motive. I still haven't seen any of her writing. I wonder if she made up that story to peek my interest.

She looked at me expecting me to do something.

"What?"

"Are you going to stay and keep watching for me?"

"Yeah. You need to bring your writing to me."

Her husband comes home a little later. He remembers the night before. But she is resistant to his advances. Maybe all the alienation is from her side. She likes to explore. She likes to play games.

The next day she disturbs a late sleep to show me the notebooks.

"I have to go out," she tells me. "But I wanted to bring these for you."

I have some writing to do, but I put it aside. I feel like a detective, a literary detective. I open the first as if I am opening a sacred text. The writing is uneven. She has the beginnings of some good stories. But nothing seems sustained. There are a lot of confused women caught in hopeless affairs. Some of it reads like dime store romance novels. I want more from her.

In the third notebook, I stumble on some love poems. She is starting to have a voice. Starting to come alive. The poems are very physical. She is not ashamed to talk about her own desires in very graphic terms. She does the same for her lover. She talks about what she wants from her lover and what he cannot give her. She moves on to betrayal. She sees it in his eyes so she decides to strike first. She is a hard lover to please.

The notebooks do the trick for her. I am again becoming involved in her life. I am thinking about her. I am imagining her in my house. The house across the way is my house.

My fantasy is imperial. It is more than wanting her. I want to make love to her in the bed that I have been observing night after night. I want to conquer that room for myself.

That night she continues the game for me. After her shower, she has dispense with the towel. She knows that I am watching. She bends down in a suggestive pose. Her performance is precise. She does not let on that I am watching. She just gives me her show without any constraints. She goes about her business and lets me watch. She only makes me want more. Sight is not enough. I want to touch. I covet. I want to own.

When she lies down on the bed, I can feel myself inside her. That still is not enough. This is all about possession. It is more than Lawrence. Sex does not liberate. It imprisons me more in a perverted greed. I want to hold this thing that keeps her life together. I want to break it with my hands. I want to mold it into something that I can know and love as my very own.

My desire is insatiable. It makes itself known by watching her. She has become an art for me. I worship it. I am on my knees in idolatry. I want to pass over into that other world, the world of super nature.

As I fall asleep, I feel that we are together. Nothing that he does can stand in my way. I will break down the walls.

In the morning, I realize how I have worked myself up. I am embarrassed. I want her to come over. But I don't see her in person for days. She is making me want her more by this tease. At this point, I would do anything for her

I can sense her taking into her world. I feel so complete. All these feelings of worthlessness, all my doubts, all my imperfections are taken away. I float with her. We sail on in this ideal. Our bodies know no limits.

I have to spend longer at the University today. On my way out a man stops by my office. He tells me that he is a police lieutenant.

"Can I ask you a few questions?"

"No problem."

"Do you know a woman named Eva Czerny?"

I pause.

"I've met her. She sometimes goes to this park near my place. We've talked."

"That's all?"

"Why?"

"She was murdered."

I am shocked. More than that. I am mortified. I feel like my world has crashed down. The detective looks at me.

"You said that you only knew her a little."

"I had a crush on her."

"That was all."

"You never were in her bedroom."

"No, I never was there."

"You never made love to her."

"No, I never did."

I wonder how they have connected us. I need to get to the apartment. I have all my things there. I have my notes. Are the police watching the apartment?

"You wouldn't mind if you came down to the station. We'd like to ask you some more questions. Conduct a blood test."

“I have a seminar in a bout an hour.”

“It’s just routine. We have to explore all leads. You could come in tomorrow. Here’s my card.”

I am elsewhere during the seminar. I go back to my place to collect my thoughts. None of this makes sense at all. Now I feel that if I go back to the apartment that I am really committing myself. I am exposing my vulnerability to the cops. I wonder if I can just leave my work. Most of it is on back up disks. I can work from those.

I feel that it is all incriminating. I realize that there is a file about her on the computer. I have collected everything that I know about her. The police can link me back to her.

I even wrote an erotic story about her. It gave me the chance to live out my fantasy.

“Did you ever meet her husband?”

“She told me that his name was Tom.”

“His name is Nick. He’s a very good friend of yours. You never met his wife. You never had designs on his wife.”

Now I feel like the prime suspect. My story says just that. I had plans to kill her husband. It was just a weird fantasy. Something to while away the hours. It actually brought her closer to me.

“Did you say his name is Nick? Her husband’s name is Nick?”

I don’t get an answer.

My friend Nick lives in the house next to mine. Nick is a successful screen writer. He likes to make up stories. I teach at the American University in Washington. We both live in a subdivision in Alexandria. He lives with his bewitching wife Eva.

I have been fascinated by Eva since I first met her. She helps him with his screenplays. She wanted to be a writer in college, but she never pursued her skills.

I watch her all the time. The bedroom window is next to my study. She is immodest. She knows that I am watching, but she likes to prance naked before the window. She even inspects herself in bathroom with the door open. She has no shame.

She hopes that I am touching myself. I am not. I just keeping working on my writing. But she knows that she is casting her spell over me. I am helpless. I just sit in my chair and watch. I think about my friend Nick. He has tried to play tricks on me since we became friends. I am getting him back. This is my revenge. I sit outside his window and take what he values most.

“Wouldn’t you like to see more?”

“I can see it all. I can see it in my head.”

“But I could help you see it in my head too.”

She is making me more excited. I cannot stop.

“Maybe you could come over when Nick is out.”

I could leave my grubby fingerprints over the mirror. Touch everything in the house.

“Wallace, you are greedy. You need to give in to your feelings.”

“I do need to give in.”

That night Nick and I go out for drinks. We head into Washington. It was our favorite bar when we were living in the city.

“Wallace, what is your ultimate temptation?”

“You, your life. I want your life.”

“You’re kidding me. What do you want?”

I hesitated.

“I want Eva.”

He looked at me with a bizarre stare. I couldn’t tell if he wanted to kill me. Then I started laughing.

“I’m messing with you.”

Nick recovered, “You really had me going.”

“What would you have done?”

“I think that I would have hit you.”

“I slept with your wife,” I spoke the sentence in a monotone. He didn’t get me.

“I slept with Eva.”

“What are you saying?”

“You were away. She came over to my place to talk about her writing. It’s not that good but it’s really sexual. She talked to me about these feelings that she has. She really like D. H. Lawrence. He feels that we just have to live for the moment. We can’t hold our feelings in no matter who they hurt. Because in the end, we are going to be with the person that we’re meant to be with. She told me that the last time that you had sex with her, she was thinking about me. I was getting so hot just thinking about it. I couldn’t hold myself back. I got up from where I was sitting and just jumped on her. She was ready for me. She had on a short skirt and her bare smooth legs. She wasn’t even wearing panties. She’s been teasing me for months. Just performing for me naked in front of the window. I was getting hard just hearing her talk that night. Nothing has ever seemed so easy, so automatic. She told me about your little problem. I had no problem. We made love all night. She was ashamed to sneak back to your place.”

“What do you expect is going to happen now? That she’ll leave me for you. She doesn’t dare. You have no money.”

“You’re the writer. You tell me what she’s going to do.”

“I could kill you right here with my bare hands.”

“We love each other. I’ve always wanted her. She’s wanted me. You should have never left us together.”

“Doesn’t being a best friend count for anything?”

“She doesn’t want to be with you anymore. You need to be honest. I was doing you a favor.”

He wants to kill me. I let him direct his hate towards me as I have towards him.

“That is a good story. I wish I had thought of it.”

“It’s not a story. I saw her tattoo. It’s a firefly.”

“You’ve been to the beach with us. You could have seen it then.”

“Her bikini covers it up.”

I could see his rage building.

I close my eyes.

“You did kill your wife Eva.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Nick, you kept her in this house like a possession. You caught her looking at your

neighbor, just looking and wondering. Then you took her upstairs and beat her to death.”

“That is the silliest thing in the world. I loved my wife. Some monster did this to her. That neighbor. He was envious of everything that I had.”

I don’t want to let Nick off the hook. We have the evidence on him, but most of it is circumstantial. I want a confession.

“What if I ask to see my lawyer?”

“Are you asking?”

“Do I need him?”

“I can’t answer that. You have a right to an attorney. But we’re just asking you some questions.”

“Am I free to go?”

“You can go now. But we will have to get back to you.”

I don’t want him to leave the lair. I am ready to strike. But he can smell the blood, his own.

“Do you like these sorts of games.”

“Games were always your sort of thing. You’re the writer.”

He stands up.

“You really had me going with that story about Eva.”

“What story?”