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Marty

HE HAD been standing there nearly fifteen minutes, deep in the shadows of a doorway, directly across the street from the apartment building. He was watching the two windows on the second floor. It was Saturday night and almost nine o'clock, but he knew she was there. And he knew she was alone.

For the tenth time he brought his wrist up to within a few inches of his face to look at his watch again. Then he took a deep pull on his cigarette and snapped the butt into the street.

He stepped out of the darkness and stood



Joe was a big man, and he could take Marty apart if he wanted to. But Joe wasn't home, and his wife was a beautiful woman.

BY

ROBERT S. SWENSON

for a moment on the sidewalk looking up again to the two yellow squares of light on the second floor. Then he walked across the street and into the building.

As he walked up to her door on the second floor he could hear her moving about inside, and he could hear her humming something soft. He stood listening to her for a long moment with his ear cocked toward the door. Then he knocked three times. They were soft, light taps, intimate and self-assured.

From inside the apartment his knocking was received with a sudden silence, and then, after a long pause, he could hear faintly within the room the hiss of slippers moving across the floor. The feet stopped at the door and again there was silence.

The man looked down and saw under the door the thin crack of light broken by the shadow of her feet. He reacted faintly with a smile, and he knocked three times again. This time the knob turned slowly and the door opened part way.

"Marty!"

The word was sucked in with her breath. She pulled the door open wide and stared at him. Her mouth fell open slightly and her eyes, like bright blue agates, registered, not fear, but the extreme in incredulosity.

She was young, remarkably blonde, and she wore a faded blue housecoat, worn and washed almost to whiteness. She had the coat

pulled tightly around her body and in such a way that it left no doubt that her body was beautiful. It left no doubt of her nakedness underneath.

Marty acknowledged her greeting with a slight nod of his head, and with exceptional self-assurance he walked past her into the room.

She closed the door and with her hands flat behind her, she leaned back against it. The initial shock of seeing him was fading and there was the beginning of anger now in her eyes. She watched Marty as he made a short tour of inspection of the one room apartment.

At the far side of the room he stopped and stood in front of the big double bed that was pushed up against the wall. There was a six-months-old baby in the bed, and Marty watched it for a moment as it slept. Then he sat down on the bed.

He took a wooden match and a cigarette from his pocket and, leaning back across the bed, he scratched the match along the iron bedpost and lit his cigarette. He flicked the match onto the floor, took a deep drag, and blew the smoke into the room.

"Somehow I thought you'd done better than this, Eva," he said.

She stared at him breathing deep controlled breaths. Then she spun around and gave the key a vicious twist in the lock. She dropped the key into the pocket of her housecoat, turned, and walked a few steps

toward Marty.

"If Joe ever found you here he'd kill you," she said.

Marty laughed. "Take it easy, baby. Nobody's going to find me here. Joe doesn't get in until 11:20, and it's only nine o'clock. I know all about Joe. I know every move he makes for every minute of the day. Why, honey, I even know —"

"You haven't changed," she said. She took a step toward him again and stood behind the metal kitchen chair. She squeezed the back of it with a grip that would have splintered a lesser thing. "Still the same old Marty. Still got everything figured out, haven't you?"

He rolled over on the bed and propped himself up with his elbow. "And still the same sweet little Eva," he said. He was smiling at her. "I see marriage hasn't changed you any. In fact, I think it's done you good."

She moved toward him now with her clenched fists pressed into her thighs. "I mean it, Marty," she said. "You'd better not let Joe catch you here. He's a big man, Marty, and he's strong. Six feet four in his stockings and with an arm as fat as a watermelon. And you should see his hands. They're like baseball gloves. He could twist your head off just as easy as he'd twist the cover off a jar of mustard. And he'd do it. You don't know him like I do, Marty. He'd kill you if he ever found you here."

"I know him *better* than you do,

Eva. He'd kill us *both* if he ever found me here." Marty laughed again. "Aw, take it easy, honey. Nobody's going to find me here. It's only nine o'clock."

He sat up on the edge of the bed and reached his hand toward her. "Come here, baby," he said soothingly. "This is your old Marty. Remember? It's like old times."

"Old times!" She walked up to Marty and stood over him pointing her fist at the baby in the bed. "There's your old times," she said. "Sweet, innocent, little Eva. I actually believed you, Marty. Everything you said."

She looked at the baby and, as she did this, the tenseness began to drain out of her body. "He was six months in me the last time I saw you," she went on softly. "Six months, Marty. I could have killed you."

Marty squirmed slightly. "Aw, Evie, baby. That's a long time ago. You're not still mad at your old Marty, are you? Why, you never had it so good. You've got a guy that's as steady as a rock. And as for the kid — what was the matter with Joe? He had money."

"It was too late, Marty. Anyway, he didn't want it that way. He loves me, Marty. He wanted me and he wanted the kid. You wouldn't understand."

Marty looked up at her when she said this and there was amusement faintly evident at the corners of his lips. "Do *you*, Eva?" he asked. "Do

you understand?"

She didn't answer him. She just stood there in front of him looking down at him, And when she didn't answer, it made Marty smile again. He reached out his hand and grabbed her by the arm, pulling her down onto the bed.

"You're rotten, Marty" she said. "You're stinking, filthy garbage."

He put his arms around her and kissed her throat. "Remember what you used to say about me, Evie? Remember?" He tried to kiss her on the mouth but she turned her head away.

"Garbage," she said. Her breath was trembling.

"You've missed me, haven't you, Evie? I can tell. There was nobody like you and me."

"Stinking, filthy garbage." It was a whisper.

"Yeah," Marty said. "You and me, baby. Stinking, filthy garbage."

He found her mouth and he crushed his lips against hers, and her resistance, feeble at its best, evaporated.

When she awoke, she came out of her sleep slowly, and she lay in the bed with her eyes closed listening to the baby's soft breathing. For a long time she didn't move, and then suddenly she came to life. She ripped the sheet off her body and sat bolt upright in the bed.

"Marty!" she called.

He was over by the sink combing

his hair in front of the mirror. He looked back at her. "It's after eleven," he said.

She took a deep breath and relaxed again, and for a moment she watched Marty as he combed his hair. Then she swung her legs around and sat on the edge of the bed.

She stretched out her leg and hooked her toe under her housecoat. It was on the floor a few feet in front of her. She pulled it toward her until she could reach it, and then she picked it up and stood in front of the bed. She pushed her arms into the sleeves and then wrapped the gown tightly around her body.

She walked over to where Marty was, and standing behind him, she pressed herself against him, putting her arms around his chest and resting her head against his shoulder.

"Baby, it's after eleven," he said.

"It's still early. He doesn't get in until nearly eleven-thirty."

He turned and faced her and she put her arms around his neck.

"He gets in at eleven-twenty give or take exactly one minute. You're married to a clock, baby."

She pulled his head down until her lips were on his and in a moment she found the co-operation she was looking for.

The silence they had created was broken finally by the dull, muffled thud of the downstairs door. They broke apart instantly and stood listening. They could hear the distant, heavy tread of feet coming up the stairs.

Marty pushed Eva away from him and looked at his watch. Immediately he went gray with fear. "It's Joe," he said. "It's almost eleven-twenty." He sprinted to the door of the apartment and pulled at the knob, but the door didn't open. He began yanking furiously and pulling at the door with both hands but still the door didn't open.

He spun around and faced Eva. "Eva, it's locked!"

They could hear the steps clearly now. A slow, heavy pounding already beyond the first landing. It started Marty trembling violently, and, almost crazy with fear, he began yanking at the door again.

"Eva," he pleaded. He turned back to her. "Eva, give me the . . ." But he didn't finish. His words

faded off into nothing and he just stood there, trembling, and staring at Eva.

She was laughing.

It was a quiet, vicious laughter, and Marty just stood there watching her. He watched her as she reached up and grabbed the frayed collar of her housecoat. With one quick motion she ripped down on the coat, tearing the old cloth of her gown like it was wet paper. It left one whole side of her naked to the waist.

They could hear the footsteps now at the head of the stairs in the second floor hallway. It was a heavy powerful step, and Eva was still laughing. She was still laughing when she reached into her pocket and took out the key. She tossed it to Marty and he caught it.

And then Eva began to scream.

