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DOPE TO KILL

by
Edward Wellen

"The
Nude
Next
Door"

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The girl removed her dress slowly, tantalizing him as if she knew he was there watching

BY

IVAN

LYONS-PLESKOW



HE PROMISED himself that he'd never look again. He swore it, and he had meant it. But Thursday night, after the card game, long after the smell of stale smoke and warm beer had swept out through the open window, he felt himself weakening. Sitting in the worn leather armchair, he stared at the window with the drawn blinds, the blinds he had drawn the last time he saw her.

He promised himself that he'd never look again. Don't do it, George, he said to himself. You're only looking for trouble. Remember

THE NUDE NEXT DOOR

the promise. Be strong. But his strength was as flimsy as the smoke that swept out through the open window, and as he sat there in the worn leather armchair, he wanted to open the blinds more than he wanted, or had wanted, or would want, anything else, ever again.

With a start, he got up, turned out all the lights and then slowly, softly, so as not to make any noise, he raised the blinds, his hopes rising with each tug of the cord.

Her light was on. The alley between the two buildings was narrow and he could see her window clearly even if he moved back and lay on his bed. That was when he first saw her, he was lying in bed one night and her light went on, some of its rays spilling onto his window sill. It was as if an angel had appeared, his angel.

He moved back to the bed and sat there not daring to light a cigarette. He was afraid she would see the flame. He sat there, still and quiet and sweating. A moment later she appeared. Her jet black hair caressed the shoulders of her tight red dress. He caught his breath as she turned and stood profiled in front of her mirror. The sight of her breasts, encased in the redness of her dress, covered over and shaped by the warm fabric started his pulse beating. Her face was small and white, and she looked like an illustration from a children's book, perhaps Snow White or Rose Red. She was alone

tonight. Other nights there had been other men with her, and never the same man twice. He began to cough softly, nervously, as he thought that maybe tonight would be his night.

She began to unzip her dress and let it fall from her pale white shoulders. George got off the bed and took off his shirt. She removed the dress slowly, almost as if she knew someone were watching, almost as if she knew he were there. George took off his pants.

He crawled over to the window, his chin resting on the sill. His eyes widened as she lifted her leg and began removing her stockings, once silken and tight and then as she took them off they became soft and shapeless, but still warm from her body. George took off his socks. She sighed heavily and stretched her arms in the air, as if reaching for something, almost as if she were reaching for George. She wore no slip, and in a moment removed her bra and panties. George ripped at his underwear and tore it from his body, his chin pressed hard against the window sill, his knees aching against the wooden floor.

She was nude. His mouth was dry and he moistened his lips with his tongue. His heart was beating wildly, and unconsciously, he put his hand over his heart for fear she'd hear the beating and look up and scream and run and put on her clothes and draw the shade and lock the window and Lock George

Out. Lock George Out. Lock George Out.

He had to know. To hell with promises and oaths. He had to know. George walked over to the light switch. He turned it on and walked slowly to the window. His eyes were closed. And he stood there, naked in front of the open window, his eyes clamped shut, his mouth open, and his fists clenched.

It was like in the dreams, he thought. Only this was no dream. This was happening, like they said on television, this was live. He, George, was standing naked in front of the open window, naked in front of a woman for the very first time. He opened his eyes slowly, the light filtering through his bruised lids, and his head and heart melted together into the pounding and surging within his bare body.

She was smiling. Smiling, he thought. Not laughing or frowning, but smiling. He smiled back weakly, and she stood up and walked closer to the window. She opened her mouth slowly and said, "Coming over?"

"Meet you downstairs," he answered thickly. And then she drew the shade. But it didn't matter now.

The corner was dark and a few people strolled by without noticing George. He turned away from them, almost afraid they knew who he was meeting and what he was going to do. And then suddenly, he became angry. What if they did

know? And then, just as suddenly, he realized that he was angry at himself, angry for feeling awkward and clumsy and afraid. But then he thought of tomorrow, and how after waking up for twenty-seven years alone, tomorrow morning he would wake up a man.

His eye was caught by a bright spot on the pavement. He bent down to pick it up and as he began to straighten up, he saw her standing in front of him. His throat was tight and he held out his hand to show her what he had found.

"Found a penny," he said.

"Keep it. It's lucky," she answered, and as she spoke he noticed the hard lines around her mouth.

"You wanna come up?" she asked, her eyes covering his body in a single swift glance.

George nodded.

The room was small and the flowers on the wallpaper seemed to be reaching out for him. There was a chair and a bed and a table in the room. And then he saw the mirror.

It was in back of the bed, covering the entire wall from ceiling to floor, but it wasn't a single mirror. It was made up of jagged bits and pieces from different mirrors, all hung up next to one another. Some of the pieces were round, some were ragged squares, others triangular, all shapes, all hung up to cover the wall in back of the bed.

As George stood there, looking

in a large broken piece of mirror, he saw her reflection as she began coming closer. Each mirror caught her image and held it fast as she came to him, dropping her clothes along the way. It was as if any army of naked women were approaching. Suddenly her arms were around him, and he turned, pressing his lips to hers. He could feel her teeth against his mouth, biting his tongue, scraping against his gums.

He took her to the bed, and they lay down. But as he went to embrace her, as he moved closer to her, she turned and sat on top of him, her thighs straddling his stomach and pressing his ribs with her knees. She opened his shirt and he looked up surprised. This wasn't the way, he thought. But before he could say anything, she reached over to the wall and took off a

piece of mirror. She put it close to her face and looked into it for a long moment. George was breathing heavily and she was beginning to hurt him. Then she spit into the image on the mirror and brought its sharp jagged edge down across his chest, leaving a trail of blood. George moaned and tried to get up, but he couldn't move. He looked up at her, into the small gray eyes narrowed with rage.

She looked at him and bent down to kiss him. Her lips touched his softly and for a moment the pain in his chest was gone. The warmth of her breath was over his face and he thought that it would begin now.

He didn't mind the ripped flesh on his arms, or the slashing at his throat. He felt nothing but the heat of her breath against his face. And as he began to die, he heard her whisper, "I love you."

