

—THE RHYTHM METHOD

by Mikal Trimm

This is how it was when Evelyn Deacon decided to change the world: autumn leaves held captive by a bitter November wind, forced to chase each other across cat-vicious gusts and eddies; sleet-heavy clouds hefting slowly across the sky, threatening to unladen themselves at the most inconvenient moment on the heads of those below; puddles of slush lying in wait under sidewalk-gray camouflage, delighting in the unexpected soaking of a once-warm foot.

No, Evelyn thought, and *enough*. She stood there, the fury mounting, and even the weather seemed to know her name...

“Jesus, Evvy.” A rough tug at her arm, the thinsulate jacket was not heavy enough to keep the grip from bruising her. “Get your ass in gear, woman. It’s freaking *cold* out here! I get sick because you’re screwing around, I will *not* be a happy camper, got it?”

“Got it, Peter. I’m sorry.” The world shuddered, went back to its work, and the weather followed suit. She whispered, “Master,” but the wind stole the word before Peter heard it.

Sometimes even foul weather knows what it is to play fair.

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Peter Anson Cullford was a really nice guy. Everyone said so. When Evelyn met him at a party one evening at her friend Joy’s apartment, she believed them, those nameless everyones, trusted them with a passionate naiveté.

He stood there in the living room, handsome but not pretty, funny but not manic, charismatic but not overbearing. When he talked to her, smiling as Joy introduced her, Evelyn understood the appeal. When he pursued the conversation in small, comfortable tidbits as the night wore on, she appreciated his attention. When he asked her for her phone number, late in the evening as the party showed signs of irreparable wear, she wrote it on his forearm. *Don’t wash until you call me*, she said.

She *needed* to believe.

Loneliness, a cruel lover, beckoned.

Evelyn checked herself in the mirror that night before going to bed—much too late, her internal clock would be ruined for days—and made a list of faults. Her body worked against her, stealthily, in cruel increments. Breasts, too large for her frame, hung before her, their nipples peeking downward in shame. Her waist tapered ridiculously, as if setting up for the punchline that was her hips—too full, overbalancing her slim legs and tiny ankles. Tits and ass stacked on top of each other with something balanced precariously on top of the whole snowman-like arrangement.

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She always left the *something* for last. Her little moon-shaped head, sprouting black weeds for hair--not dark brown but *black*, not touched with blue highlights as it cascaded in waves around her face but falling like drips from an inkwell, straight and thick and black black black. Which served to make her pale face even whiter, her blue eyes even icier, her puffy red lips even fatter--blood-engorged slugs crawling beneath her knife of a nose.

Why do I even bother to wear contacts? Just give me some big old horn-rims and send me to the nearest library.

Her mother--tall, willowy, graceful and gorgeous--looked nothing like her. Her genes left no mark on Evelyn, unless she counted the painful obviousness of their absence. Evelyn squeezed her eyes into slits, picturing herself taller, slimmer, glamorous...

Not a chance, she told herself. This is what you're stuck with, sweetheart.

By the time she'd finished categorizing her blemishes and thrown herself into bed--heavily, so she could hear the springs creak under the pounds she must've gained with all the alcohol and party snacks--Evelyn had forgotten all about Peter and her phone number and any hope of a future.

Almost entirely.

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Peter stopped, his hand still gripping Evelyn's arm painfully. "Oh, hell. You go on from here, Evvy. I'm not going anywhere near those people."

Those people consisted of a small, sniffing group of protestors outside the clinic, holding signs with mottoes like "HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT *THEIR* CHOICE?" or "EVEN TINY SOULS ARE PRECIOUS" or, on a sign that struck Evelyn as utter nonsense, "WHAT IF MARY HADN'T WANTED A SON?" The signs shook in the cold hands holding them, and snow started falling again, as if the weather had its own opinions.

Evelyn stopped dead. "You promised, Peter. You *swore* you'd come in with me." Hating the sniveling sound of her voice even as it came out.

Peter released her arm with a twist, tweaking the bruises he'd already left on her. "I can't deal with this, Evvy. Hell, you're the one let yourself get knocked up. You're the one who said she didn't need *the pill*, she knew all about body rhythms or whatever. Who you gonna blame for this, Evvy? Should I have to put up with these idiots?"

Evelyn didn't answer him, but she must've shivered with the cold, because he took it as a head-shake.

"That's right. Now you just go in and do what they tell you. I'll be waiting across the street," and he gestured broadly, but Evelyn saw the bar sign not a block away, "until they're done with you." Peter turned to walk away, then spun around and kissed her on the cheek. His special girl, the one who'd do *anything* for him. She knew the mood, knew how nice he got when things were going his way.

"You be good now, baby. I'll make it all up to you later." Then he walked--no, *sauntered*--away.

Be good, baby. Baby.

Bastard.