

Fuzzy Mollis

by Diana Adams

I had a strange sensation in my apartment at around 9 a.m. after I returned from taking my garbage to chute. It was a quick jolt of suspicion. My small kitchen has barely enough room to turn around in, yet I had the feeling I was being watched. When I experience it again, just seconds later, I realize it was eyes watching, actual eyes, not a camera or machine. *You're being weird*, I tell myself. For the first time in my life I am living on my own. I am proud of this. It has only been a month and so far it was quite a relief after all the trouble with my previous roommate, and her inability to manage her life or her finances. Except there was this new hollow taint to my days off. I experience it most on Mondays, when I am not at work, or going to the market, or having lunch with my friend Tara. Today is Monday, I look at the microwave, the toaster and the stove wedged against the back wall. Nothing. No little eyes or red lights blink at me. Who would even want to watch me? My one-bedroom flat is on the 11th floor, and there are no buildings close by that are high enough to see in the windows. The semi-reflective surfaces of the appliances in my kitchen now are metallic and menacing. Are they hiding something?

There is a moment of cold fear and I realize I need to get outside. I put on a pair of jeans and a loose light-checked yellow blouse, it was time to wear something other than sweatpants. I stuff my book into a large satchel and take a deep breath as I step into the hallway. Nerves. My nerves are sneaking up on me again. Breathing helps, but doing something, as little as shuffling my feet out the door is enough to make me move on.

At the elevator my kind and aging neighbor Fern is leaning on her walker. Fern is more often than not quite a talker, but today her

watery eyes move restlessly from the walker to the floor and she is trembling. Her curled white haired head is bobbing a little. The smell of lavender and talc wafts around us, masking the musty smell of the carpet. I was about to ask her if she was alright when the elevator arrives and she waves me on, she does not get on it herself. She refuses to meet my eyes, keeping her own on the dark green carpet. I reason that something serious must have upset Fern, someone she knew died I suppose, as so often happens at that age, or has contracted yet another disease or was about to.

Outside the air is foggy and humid from an early morning rain. It is already warm for an early June day. I like the smell of the wet pavement. The city appears deserted. I was more comfortable when it was busier with people jogging and or walking their dogs as they did on weekends. Most people were at work, or at their summer homes, just a few hours north of the city. I walk for about an hour to the park, enjoying the exercise, and then sit on a bench to read under a large twisting elm tree. I am still on edge and keep looking up from my book to see if anyone is around. A middle-aged man runs loop after loop on the dirt path around the park, his gangling long legs make scuffing sounds on the dirt. I'd had enough of that sound after a while, so on impulse and headed for Main street.

I liked to frequent a small bar called The Skylark, sometimes with Tara, and sometimes alone with a book. Today felt like I needed to go to a place both familiar and relaxing. Skylark was a small eclectic bar full of wood tables, a low reggae beat, and it also doubled as a juice bar, they make great cocktails for the regular bar and vegetable shots for any passerby's out the side window.

'Fresh tomato and vodka?' The bartender is in great shape, his grey-black shirt looks like it could rip on his muscled torso, and his dark hair is slicked back in a retro style. I'm glad he remembers my last order. After too many drinks a few Friday's ago I tested his biceps and asked him to squeeze my own. It is not often I flirted this

way. He simply kept up his jovial style as if it was nothing at all that I had freely felt his body.

`I'll try the special. How do you pronounce it--Fuzzy Mollis?

`You got it. It's a type of flowering plant, I just looked it up. I like the way it sounds.'

I want to talk to him more, but he has left to go the side window to take an order. A solid two-person wooden table is free by the window, I pull out my book. I'm having trouble reading this novel, but when I get deep into it and can focus, it reads like the best story in the world. It is a bit like fishing, putting in the hours for the catch that only comes with patience. The Golden Bowl by Henry James is a whopping 600 pages of descriptive psychological interactions. This is obviously not your usual plot based structure. It described an entirely different reality, and something about it felt so right that it kept me reading looking for my own recognition points. The ah ha! moments that were both true to the story and true to me. I fall so deeply into it that as usual for this state--I forget where I am. I lurch at the sound of a voice beside me.

`You're going to want another of these. Take your time though, they pack a punch.'

The drink is a pleasing yellowish-pink, with flecks of green. The ice-cubes have peach slices in them. He brought me a small bowl of cracked walnuts, only a very attentive bar tender would think to pre-crack them. They were slightly salted and went very well with the drink. After a few sips I notice that someone else has come into the bar. I hear a deep male voice, they some talk about cell phone reception. Then I am back into the book again, crunching nuts. I don't know how much time has passed, my drink is finished and he brings me another in a gold-rimmed hour-shaped little glass.

`Hey, what's your name again?' He searches my face for clues,
`Something like Sari?'

`Safari. Sari is what most people call me.'

`That's it. How did you get that name?'

`It's complicated.'

I have long learned that it is easier to say that, then go on to a long story about how my mother had always wanted to conceive a child on an animal laden African adventure, and that when she did conceive me, god knows where, she decided to live a lie and tell everyone I had been named after a visit to the Serengeti Plain. Now she was gone I wasn't quite sure whether it is easier to pretend I was a product of a lustful safari, or somehow change the topic so the details could slip by.

`Complicated. Oh, that's what I don't like to hear. I thought you wouldn't be. You seem like one of those happy-go-lucky-good-morning kind of girls.

`Well, I try at least, I guess.'

The mention of the morning brings back the sense of being watched, Fern shaking, the way even the elevator seemed slow, so slow it was like I was caught in time. I try to remember the bartender's name and the image of Spaceman came to mind. I push the image around to think about it. The drink is working, my shyness was waning away into a calm pool.

`Your name is Vader?'

`Yup. Kris Vader, not Darth. Everyone in bar business seems to go by last names. So Safari, sorry Sari. We close at five, any chance we

could get together and go for a walk? There's something I want to ask you.'

`Sure. A walk would be nice, I think.'

`You think? Ha. Ok, good enough for me. Do you want to meet here then?'

It was 2 o'clock and I was glad to have something to do later in the day. Now I could go back my place, ignore the spooky appliances and take care of some cleaning. I walked back home in a kind of misty rain that stayed on my face and made it itch. After spending most of the afternoon in the laundry room, it was a good time to write in my journal. I wasn't sure what to write, the best part of the day hadn't happened yet -so I wrote about the weather and the man jogging in the park, and how my annoyance with him actually lead me to a date of sorts with my favourite bartender.

At five o'clock he has already locked up and is waiting for me by the front door. His hair is different, it hangs down ragged like an unkempt dog. He leans against the building as though it is the only thing keeping him up, the collar of his black leather jacket rides up against the bricks as though on a hook.

We walk towards the same park I read in earlier. All around are doves, purple-brown, grey-green jewel-like beings that poop and hop on the walkway. He walks so slow I struggle to match his pace. He must be dead tired, I reason. At the bar he moves so fast all day, I realize this is his down time.

`Can I ask you a question?' He starts.

`You just did.'

`Ha. No seriously. You like to read don't you? I see you with books all the time.'

`Yes. I read when I'm not doing anything else I guess.'

`Ok, bear with me--I'll get to the point but have you ever thought about physics, that parallel life stuff that everyone is talking about?'

The newspapers have been buzzing with a new theory, so I have an idea about what he is talking about. Recently there was a startling extension of the Copenhagen Theory, which suggested people could be in two different places at once. When I first saw it in the news I laughed it off, how could a string of math equations solve anything. The world, to me, was far more complex than math could prove or even begin to solve.

`I don't believe in it. I don't read that type of stuff. I read fiction, not science.'

`O.k. this is going to sound crazy.' He put his head in his hands, and I don't like the way things seem to get serious. I want him to be the bartender again, agile, happy and free.

`Somehow I know I am supposed to be reading too. I get this sensation when I see people with books. There's this huge pressure. Then when I see what they are reading I have this feeling I have already read the book. Do you see what I mean?'

We sit on the park bench right next to the one I sat on earlier, underneath another massive elm tree. The air is still heavy with moisture but it's not raining. The shadows of late afternoon are creeping in, and the light is tinged with purple.

`I have these thoughts, at random, that something is going on elsewhere, and that I am part of it too. And when I make up names

for drinks, it's like the names are already there and coming to me.' Finally he took his head out of his hands, expelling a breath sharply. He leans over and picks up a leaf, his hands are strong and finely veined, they remind me of hands I've seen in old paintings.

`I don't know. You sound like a creative person, maybe you should do more with it. You are reading too much about this stuff, and you are really need to be doing something else. We could talk about writing if you want.'

`That's why I asked you I suppose. You seem nice, don't you ever think about things like that, wouldn't it be great to have more than one life? What kinds of things to you think about when no one is around?'

`Well, this morning I thought I was being watched-- real eyes, watching my every move.' I blurt it out as though the words have been hiding in my mouth since morning.

For the first time in our conversation he faces me and his eyes narrow into mine.

`Maybe you want to be watched?'

`No. I find it somewhat scary. Then again, part of me wonders if the idea of someone watching is kind of comforting? I don't know. It's confusing.'

He seems to be listening, but is also still intent on his own thoughts. Whatever his other life was, it was quickly to starting to upset mine. I didn't know where this was leading. What I did know was that I had had enough of uncertainties for the day. I don't want to talk to him anymore. There is no point in talking about writing, because I am just trying to figure it out myself. It would take all night just to try to explain the weird `realism' in my novel. In fact

this reality is getting more tedious by the minute. It is a disappointment in fact.

I wait until the evening has landed directly over us and try to think of some excuses. Just as I as I expect, Vader stands up, takes my hand, and pulls me up with him. I extricate my hand and shove it into my jacket pocket.

`Let's get a bite to eat?' He asks slyly, `I haven't had a thing to eat all day.'

`Sorry. I've got plans. My neighbor is expecting me, and she is quite elderly so I don't want toÉlet her down in any way.' I say coolly, the lie coming to me as quickly as the odd names for drinks came to him.

`Shoot. I see. I think did it again, I got too heavy. I won't do it next time, I promise, if I can see you again.'

`O.k., I understand.' I say, `Just not our night I guess. You can reach me here.' I hand him my yellow and blue business card with Account Manager scrolled in gold, glad that the evening is coming to an end without any pressure.

He walks me back to my building and when we part he holds both my hands in his, he seems to want to scrutinize them for clues as to what to say next. My hands are simple, small and childlike. He shakes his head, dissatisfied, and walks away.

The building is quiet and the elevator empty as I made my way to the 11th floor, I am oddly pleased with the evening, at least I hadn't been sitting alone flipping channels. As I open the door total darkness engulfs me, I make my way to the hallway table and switch on the lamp. Something furtive darts out and runs behind the sofa, and I shriek with the surprise of it, thinking it must be a mouse.

I make my way with timid steps, holding my heavy book over my head in case I have to drop it on the critter, only to find the grey-green eyes of a Siamese cat looking back at me. Unwavering eyes with a touch of sweetness. A small sized cat that I recognize as Fern's pet named Luco. I've seen the cat run the hallways from time to time and it has somehow got into my place. It must have been when I took out the garbage in the morning. I pat him and he purrs a little, the soft body collapsing into my arms with easy trust. I think about keeping the cat for the night until I remember Fern's crumbling disposition, the fact that her cat has gone missing has most likely deeply upset her.

Something strong is holding me back from returning the cat, the eyes are so compelling that I sit down, plop him on my lap to pat him for another few minutes. These are the eyes that followed this morning. For once things were falling into place, and it was a Monday. There is no doubt in my mind about a few things that had been obscure to me until now. A few clear true facts. The reason I didn't want to return the cat is because I am becoming a lonely person, not the confident independent apartment owner that I had hoped to be. This I now know is an important realization. Even the cat knew this. Was I going to turn into a sad, empty shelled walnut of a person? Most likely, unless I change a few things. I would most definitely go and adopt a cat tomorrow after work, before that I would visit the Skylark bar to have another strange drink, followed by a slow walk with my inventive and double-lived bartender.

