

JULY 2017 EDITION OF DELMARVA TODAY: WRITER'S EDITION
DELMARVA PUBLIC RADIO

AND NOW FOR OUR DRAMA:

The Portrait

By Robin Hill-Page Glanden

Adapted for Radio by your host.

MUSIC –

NARRATOR: Eva was deep in thought as she drove from her Manhattan apartment to the rental cottage in Delaware. Her recent divorce and the death soon after of her best friend had left her sad and emotionally exhausted. Now, the final chapter of her second novel was due in ten days and her mind was paralyzed with a bad case of writer's block. After the great success of her first book, Eva was terrified at the thought of disappointing with her second. How could she top or even equal her first novel if she couldn't find a strong ending for the sequel?

She had been working on the book for months in the apartment she once shared with her ex-husband. Every corner held a memory. Lonely, depressed, and unable to concentrate, she had logged onto Facebook to take a quick break. That's when she saw the ad:

DANIEL: *Daniel Wedgeworth's voice:*

Quaint Victorian cottage in a private setting, minutes from Rehoboth Beach. All amenities, but with Old World charm. Two bedrooms, one

bath, well-appointed kitchen and lovely front porch. Cozy, quiet retreat. Low off-season rates.

NARRATOR: Before she had a chance to change her mind, she dialed the listed number.

DANIEL: (*a sexy British accent*) Daniel Wedgeworth here. May I help you?

EVA: Yes, my name is Eva Markwell. I saw the ad for your cottage and I'd like to rent it this week if it's available.

DANIEL: Well, hello, Eva Markwell. I'm the owner, and it is indeed available. When would you like to check in?

EVA: Well, how much is it for the week?

DANIEL: How much would you like to pay?

EVA: Well... Uh, I don't know... How about \$500 for the week?

DANIEL: That will be fine. You may check in this evening, if you like. I'm occupied during the day every day, but I'm always available in the evenings... after seven.

EVA: Perfect. I'll arrive around seven.

DANIEL: Yes, then. When you turn in the driveway, the cottage will be on the right. Continue up the drive to my home. I'll give you the key.

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NARRATOR: Eva packed quickly, put the address into her GPS, and followed the driving instructions to the property in Rehoboth. The cottage was beautiful. Surrounded by trees, hydrangea, and rose bushes, golden lights shone in the windows, and two lanterns on either side of the front door illuminated the porch. A flagstone walkway with a rose-covered arbor led to the door. It reminded Eva of a scene in a Thomas Kinkade painting. She continued down the driveway and there, partially obscured by stately trees, was a huge Victorian mansion. Although the exterior was a bit shabby and the yard needed some care, the building was magnificent.

Eva parked in the circular driveway and a man stepped out onto the wrap-around porch. He was tall, slender, and handsome, but his attire, black trousers, a starched white shirt, gray pin-striped vest, and a wide tie that looked more like a silk scarf seemed oddly formal for someone who lived at the beach.

DANIEL: Welcome, Miss Markwell... Please excuse the shabby appearance of the property. My gardener has taken leave and the exterior of the house needs some attention, but sadly I just haven't had the time nor the inclination lately to address those issues.

EVA: It's lovely, Mr. Wedgeworth. And please, call me Eva.

DANIEL: I certainly will, if you agree to call me Daniel. Now please come in.

EVA: It's a deal, Mr....er... Daniel.

NARRATOR: The luxurious foyer featured a sparkling crystal chandelier and led to a spacious parlor with high ceilings, and arched windows. A marble-mantled

fireplace with a discrete fire took the chill off the late-September evening and offered a reassuring welcome. Oil paintings adorned the walls of the room, and complimented its elegant Victorian furniture.

DANIEL: Please sit and have a cup of tea. Or would you prefer coffee? You must be tired after your long drive.

EVA: Tea would be lovely Daniel. Thank you.

NARRATOR: Eva settled on a tapestry loveseat and Daniel brought in a silver tea service with china cups and saucers.

DANIEL: A teaspoon of sugar, no milk.

EVA: How did you know?

DANIEL: A lucky guess.

NARRATOR: Daniel sat down across from Eva in a leather wingback chair.

EVA: Oh, let me pay you for the rental. \$500 I believe we said.

DANIEL: Yes, thank you, Eva.

NARRATOR: Daniel accepted the envelope with Eva's check and placed it, unopened, on the end table beside him. He studied her so intently that Eva felt uneasy.

EVA: So, Daniel...please tell me about these paintings.

DANIEL: Yes. I'm an artist you see, and these are paintings I've done since moving to Rehoboth. My wife and I were born and raised in London and we fell in love with this town and this house when we visited on holiday. We moved here and I began to paint seascapes. I'm a bit of a local celebrity you know, so please don't mention that I'm here or that you're staying at the cottage. I'm trying to get a special painting completed. Since my wife died, I like to be left alone to work.

EVA: Oh, Daniel, I'm so sorry about your wife.

DANIEL: She went back to visit her family in London one summer and was killed in a motor car accident... She was so beautiful... I loved her dearly and miss her so. (*Clears throat*) Well now, enough of that. Let me show you my work.

NARRATOR: Daniel led her around the room, pointing out details in each painting. With a wave of his hand, he indicated a portrait bearing his own likeness.

DANIEL: I always thought that every artist should paint a self-portrait. I was going to paint my wife's portrait after I finished mine, but, well, there was the accident before I... After her death, I just couldn't bring myself to do it. (*Pause*) I would very much like to paint you, Eva.

EVA: No, I don't think so.

NARRATOR: Eva felt panicked now. She thought that she might be in some danger. Here she was, alone with a strange man in his home at night. Now, after a brief conversation, he wanted to paint her? With or without clothes?

EVA: I think maybe this was a mistake. I'll stay at a hotel in town.

DANIEL: You misunderstand, Eva. Your portrait, that's all. I would just like to paint your portrait.

NARRATOR: Daniel went to a closet and took out an exquisite, dark-purple velvet cape.

DANIEL: I can see you wearing this—with your blond hair and blue eyes, it would make a lovely portrait. I have no sinister motives, I assure you. Look at my work. I don't paint nudes, if that's what you're thinking. If you feel uncomfortable, Eva, about sitting for the portrait, I understand, but please do stay.

NARRATOR: Their eyes met and she knew that she had nothing to fear.

Eva: OK, Daniel, I'll stay in the cottage. And I'll think about the portrait.

DANIEL: Think about it overnight, and if you decide yes, just come by at seven tomorrow evening. After seven. Here's the key to the cottage. Make yourself at home and if there's anything you need, please call. I'm always up late.

EVA: I shall. I'm a night owl, too.

MUSIC

NARRATOR: Eva drove back to the cottage. It was immaculately clean and tastefully decorated in soft blues, seafoam greens, and buttery yellows. There were china vases full of her favorite flower—pale pink roses—in every room. What a lovely coincidence, she thought.

She brought her suitcases in and set up her laptop on the dining room table. The kitchen cupboards were well stocked. Again, another curious coincidence: on the table were a china tea cup with a pink rose pattern and a small matching plate with her favorite cookies—shortbreads. She made a cup of tea and took her snack to the dining room as she powered up her laptop. Suddenly, an idea popped into her head and she started typing. Words flowed out of her mind and into her fingers as they flew across the keyboard. At 4:00 a.m. she stopped, exhausted. But she nearly had the ending for her book.

The brass bed in the master bedroom was soft and comfortable. For the past few months, Eva had been plagued by insomnia, but she fell asleep immediately and slept soundly. When she woke, the sun streamed through the window. Eva made a pot of coffee and went back to work, refreshed and inspired.

At five o'clock Eva drove into town. She chose a restaurant on the boardwalk with Victorian décor and an ocean view. The combination of the mansion, the cottage, and the restaurant made her feel as if she had been transported back in time to the Victorian era.

After dinner, she sat on a bench on the boardwalk and looked out over the water as the daylight faded. A warm breeze stirred and Eva felt a peace she had not known in a long time. She returned to the cottage having made a decision. She would let Daniel paint her portrait.

When she knocked on the front door of the mansion, Daniel appeared immediately.

DANIEL: You're going to let me paint you? Wonderful! Wonderful!

NARRATOR: He set a blank canvas on an easel and posed Eva on an emerald-green velvet chaise in the center of the room next to a small table with a vase of pink roses. He draped the purple cape around her shoulders and tied her hair back with a satin ribbon. Each time she felt his cool touch, a shiver ran through her body. He meticulously adjusted the lighting, then stepped back.

DANIEL: Perfect! Yes, absolutely perfect.

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NARRATOR: That week was one of the best of Eva's life. Her writing flowed effortlessly as she worked during the day. The final chapter seemed to almost write itself. Then, each evening she walked to Daniel's house. First they worked in the studio, then retired to the parlor and talked over a glass of wine or a cup of tea. She told him of her distress after the disintegration of her marriage and the death of her friend. Daniel spoke briefly about his wife. They had been together nearly twenty-five years but had no children. Eva asked to see pictures of her. He said they were all put away because looking at her brought back too many memories and made him too sad. Eva told him about her life in New York and about her passion for writing. Daniel recounted stories of his wealthy family and growing up in London. Painting was always his passion and his only career.

All too soon it was Eva's last day in Rehoboth. Her novel was complete and the manuscript off to her editor. She wasn't ready to leave, but there was no choice, her publisher had scheduled a meeting with the Times for a potential review. She loved the cottage and Rehoboth and she had also grown very fond of Daniel. That he felt the same way about her, she was sure. A special bond had been formed, and

she was certain their connection might lead to something deeper. She pushed that thought to the back of her mind, not wanting to get her hopes up.

That night, Eva strolled down the driveway at the usual time. Daniel was seated in one of the wicker chairs on the porch and greeted her with a warm embrace. Her heart skipped a beat.

DANIEL: Your portrait is finished, Eva. Come in and see.

NARRATOR: Daniel led Eva into the parlor. The painting was on an easel by the fireplace. The colors were rich and vibrant and her likeness had been captured perfectly. Her skin appeared luminous and Daniel had painted her eyes with such depth that they seemed to peer out from the canvas and look around the room. The pose on the chaise, the way Daniel had styled her hair, and the velvet cape with its black lace collar made her look as if she had just stepped out of a Victorian romance novel. Once again, as in the boardwalk restaurant, Eva had a strange yet familiar feeling that she was living in a bygone era.

EVA: Oh, Daniel, it's beautiful. I love it!

DANIEL: Thank you, Eva. You're a beautiful subject, so it was easy to create a good piece of work.

NARRATOR: They sat together on the loveseat and talked late into the night. Finally, Eva looked at her watch.

EVA: I hate to go, Daniel, but I'd better get some sleep. I have a long drive back to the city tomorrow. What time should I check out?

DANIEL: Whenever you like. There's no hurry.

EVA: Well, I have to be back in New York in the afternoon, but after that I'm free. I'm relieved to have my book finished. It was so easy to write once I got here. I love Rehoboth and your cottage. I feel right at home here. Perhaps I could get back after my meeting.

DANIEL: I'm glad it worked out so well. And so pleased I was able to create this painting of you. I believe I'll hang it in my next exhibit.

EVA: How exciting. Please let me know the details and I'll be there.

DANIEL: It will be somewhere local. I'll be sure to let you know.

Silence.

EVA: Would you like your key now?

DANIEL: Yes, I won't be available during the day tomorrow when you leave. Just lock the door from the inside and pull it shut behind you.

NARRATOR: Daniel took the key and Eva felt that same light coolness when their fingers touched. He kissed her lightly on the cheek.

DANIEL: I enjoyed our time together this past week, Eva. You don't know how much it's meant to me.

EVA: I've enjoyed it, too, Daniel... Very much.

NARRATOR: After another awkward silence, Eva walked to the front door and Daniel followed her onto the porch. She paused to take one more look at the mansion. He was standing on the porch watching her. She waved, hoping he might call her to come back, but he just returned her wave, turned and went into the house.

Eva wondered why he hadn't seized the opportunity to suggest a plan for them to meet again in Rehoboth. She thought there was a strong, mutual attraction. Perhaps when her portrait was on exhibit, he would call and ask her to come back for a visit. Her sleep was fitful that night and she dreamed that she and Daniel were dancing in a grand ballroom. He was dressed in a tuxedo and she was wearing a lavender satin gown and the purple velvet cape. An orchestra played a waltz as they glided along the dance floor. And then he was gone and she was alone on the dance floor, turning, turning.

Suddenly, a loud noise jarred Eva awake. It was morning. She dressed quickly and went outside. Engine sounds were coming from the direction of the mansion. She ran down the driveway and saw construction vehicles. Workmen were fencing in the area around the house.

EVA: Excuse me...Excuse me... what are you doing?

JOHN: Hello, Ma'am, I'm the foreman here. Name's John. You'll need to stay out of the way. We're taking this house down.

EVA: What? There must be a mistake. Daniel Wedgeworth lives here. I saw him just last night and he said nothing about this. Are you sure you have the right property?

JOHN: Yes, ma'am. This old mansion is structurally unsound. The property was bought by a developer and he ordered the demolition. He's gonna build townhouses here.

EVA: That can't be. Daniel lives here—this is his home.

JOHN: You mean the artist? Yeah, I heard about him. Saw some of his paintings once. This *was* his home, but that was a long time ago. It's been abandoned for years. Story I heard is his wife died and then he died soon after. Died of a broken heart is what the story says.

EVA: But I rented his cottage this week. I've spent every evening here with him. He painted my portrait.

JOHN: I don't know what you're talking about, lady. This place might a been something back in the day, but it's a mess now, as you can see. No, you couldn't a been inside it recently.

EVA: But I was. Go inside; it's beautiful. You'll see. It was just last night.

NARRATOR: John sighed and took a key out of his pocket. He opened the front door and stepped aside so Eva could enter. The interior was in shambles and a musty odor hung thick in the air. In the foyer, strips of paint and chunks of plaster had fallen from the walls and ceiling.

Eva ran to the parlor and steadied herself against the doorway as she gazed at the bare walls and the empty easel next to the fireplace. All the paintings were gone. Every piece of furniture was draped in sheets and covered with dust and cobwebs.

JOHN: You all right, Ma'am?

EVA: I don't know. He finished my portrait yesterday. It was on that easel last night and his paintings were on all the walls.

JOHN: I don't know what to tell you, ma'am. Why don't you go to the Rehoboth Museum? Martha Williams knows local history and might be able to help you.

NARRATOR: Eva ran back to the cottage loaded her suitcases in the car, then with one last look at the cottage locked the door and pulled it shut behind her.

An elderly woman behind a desk in the museum looked up as Eva entered.

EVA: Ms. Williams?

MARTHA: Yes. May I help you?

EVA: I hope so, Ms. Williams.

NARRATOR: Martha listened politely to Eva's story and looked increasingly perplexed. She shook her head.

MARTHA: Daniel Wedgeworth's wife died in 1902 and Daniel passed away the following year. His sister came from London to clear out his personal belongings. She donated all his paintings to the museum. The property has been tied up in red tape for years, but a developer finally purchased it. A shame that charming home is being taken down, but come, we have a room devoted to his paintings.

NARRATOR: Martha led Eva to a room in the back of the museum. The paintings were those she remembered seeing at the mansion. But in an alcove were two paintings that took her breath away—Daniel’s self-portrait and the portrait he had painted of her.

EVA: That one of Daniel was in the parlor and this is the portrait he painted of me this past week!

MARTHA: I’m sorry, dear, that’s a portrait of Mr. Wedgeworth’s wife, Evangeline. But my goodness, you do bear a strong resemblance to Evangeline Wedgeworth.

NARRATOR: Eva trembled and tried to speak, but the words wouldn’t come.

MARTHA: See the pink roses in the painting...they were her favorite.

MUSIC

A GREAT THANK YOU TO OUR CAST:

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|-------------------|--------------|
| Narrator | Judy Hearn |
| Eva Markwell | Megan Davis |
| Daniel Wedgeworth | Tom Welsh |
| John, the foreman | Jim King |
| Martha Williams | Robin Finley |
| Music | Emma Driban |

AND THANK YOU ALL FOR LISTENING TO DELMARVA TODAY:
WRITER'S EDITION. I'M YOUR HOST, HAROLD WILSON.