

# countering Eve

**Judith Nolan**



*“The way I figure it, everyone gets a miracle...”*

*John Green*

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The sunny, spring day was warm and inviting. The Greenwich Village streets bustled with their own unique style of life. A night-time shower of rain had left the air fresh and washed clean. It was a great day to be alive, or at least so it seemed to most members of the noonday crowd, as they hustled along the city streets, each intent on their own business.

Spring had its own kind of energy. The sunlight seemed brighter, and felt just a touch warmer, even down at street level. Coats were worn open, and hats weren't necessary, even if a scarf was still a good idea. Warm weather was on its way. You could see it in every smiling face.

Catherine paused to breathe it all in. She had been hurrying alongside an impatient Joe to grab lunch, but the communication of another frustrating continuance had allowed her the time to stop and take stock of her surroundings.

She lifted her face to the sun and closed her eyes, wishing Vincent could be beside her at that moment. He would appreciate everything.

She opened her eyes and considered her frowning companion. Instead, she had Joe. She smiled at him. Down-to-earth, practical Joe, who was too harassed to see the beauty of the day.

“Radcliffe... what gives?” her irascible boss demanded, standing beside her, glaring at both her and his wristwatch. “Okay, look, I’m gonna forget about lunch. Even with this blasted continuance, I’ve still got work still to do.”

He waved her away. “You go on and eat if you want. But don’t be late in getting back. I know I said we had an hour, but I’m counting on you.”

“But it’s such a lovely day, Joe,” Catherine complained, looking around at all the shop windows. “Can’t you at least *try* to enjoy it?”

“What’s to enjoy?” Joe cast a jaundiced eye over their surroundings. “People and sunshine, I get it. But I’ve still got a mountain of work waiting on my desk. And you’ve got forty-five minutes left on the clock. I expect to see you back at *your* desk on time. No excuses.”

“But I had planned on looking for a gift... for a good friend.”

“*No* excuses and *no* side trips.” Joe wagged a warning finger before turning away. “And I want the Piper breakdown completed before you even think of going home, tonight,” he called back over his shoulder, as he hurried away down the sidewalk.

“Yes, Oh Master.” Catherine saluted his back-view as he vanished into the crowd.

She sighed, shaking her head. She’d been planning on getting her lunch to go and using the time to search out a good second-hand bookshop to find a gift for Vincent. Now even that simple mission was in jeopardy.

She sighed again. “Maybe I’ll ask Jenny tomorrow about where to look. That’s if she’ll answer her phone.”

She laughed ruefully, knowing her good friend was as busy as herself. She continued down the sidewalk, heading for their favourite sandwich bar. She’d barely gone a few steps when a well-dressed, smiling woman crossing her path, caught her attention.

On impulse, Catherine put out one hand to detain her. “Hey, Eve Thornton...? Is it really you?”

The elegant woman stopped and turned, looking startled. “Cathy...?” She frowned. “Good Lord, I don’t believe it. It’s been *ages* since we last saw each other.”

“Almost two years.” Catherine nodded, fully remembering the last time they’d met. The very same night Vincent had saved her life...

“That’s right,” Eve replied slowly, looking her up and down. “You were at that party Tom Gunther threw for the planning commission.”

She paused, looking confused. “Are you still with him? I mean, I remember seeing some headlines about how you disappeared for ten days. They said you were his girlfriend and he was frantic to find you.”

“That’s ancient history,” Catherine interposed quickly. “And no, I’m no longer seeing Tom. I...we were never going to work out.”

“Well, I’m grateful you took the time to talk to me that night. I was a real mess, wasn’t I?” Eve lifted her shoulders apologetically. “Frank had just left me, and I was struggling to keep it together. I shouldn’t have been there at all.”

“Look...” Catherine glanced around. “Why don’t we find somewhere to grab a cup of coffee and we can talk over old times.”

“I don’t have long... I’m meeting my husband downtown.” Eve glanced at her wristwatch. “But I would love to. I know this great coffee house just down the street.”

“Looks like we’re both on the clock,” Catherine admitted ruefully. “My boss will kill me if I don’t get back to my desk on time.”

“Let’s get that coffee, then,” Eve linked arms with her, drawing her down the street beside her. “And, by the way, my last name is Barnes now. I got married again a couple of years ago. He is such a wonderful man. I am very lucky.”

She held up her ring finger where a gold band and a very impressive diamond ring caught the sunlight. “I couldn’t be happier.”

“Then I’m happy for you,” Catherine acknowledged. “You deserve it.”

“Thanks.” Eve led her to Café Arpeggio, an old Village coffee house. Even though it was crowded, they found an empty table and a waitress took their order.

“I used to come here all the time when I lived in the Village.” Eve sat back to look around. “Before I went away to Radcliffe. It’s great to be back and find it hasn’t changed.”

“I’m sorry we never caught up after college,” Catherine apologised. “We lost touch. I was surprised to see you at Tom’s planning party.”

“Oh, that was the old Eve,” her friend told her airily. “Frank had just run off with his secretary and told me he was dead to me. That he never wanted to see me again.”

Her lips compressed. “I thought going to that party might cheer me up. How wrong I was. When you saw me, I was so heartbroken I just wanted to crawl inside a bottle and die.”

“But you didn’t,” Catherine observed gently, as the waitress returned with their order.

“No, I didn’t.” Eve sipped her coffee. “But soon after that night, I found some much-needed inspiration in getting my life back on track. To me, it was a true miracle of survival.”

“I’m glad,” Catherine stirred her coffee. “You look so happy, now.”

“I *am* happy.” Eve leaned closer. “In fact, I have never been happier, thanks to you.”

“Me...?” Catherine’s eyebrows rose in confusion. “I don’t understand.”

“That night at the party, when I was so down, you said you would call me tomorrow. But you never did.”

“I... I’m sorry...” Catherine shook her head quickly. “But, let me explain –”

“Oh, Cathy, there’s nothing to explain, or apologise for,” Eve was quick to reply. “Your unexplained disappearance was all the talk of the few friends I had left. You took my attention right away from my own miserable life and gave me a whole new focus. And then you returned, and you didn’t hide yourself away.”

She reached across the table to take Catherine’s hand between her own. “I’ve followed your story ever since, and I so admire you. You faced the world, and whatever happened to you that night, and got back in control of your life. I was never as proud of you as I was at that moment. That was the push I needed to take back my own life and make a difference.”

She smiled. “And look at me now. Look at you. Radcliffe girls made good by circumstances beyond their control.”

“Yes, we are, aren’t we?” Catherine returned her friend’s grip on her hand. “I’m so happy for you.”

Eve glanced at her watch. “Oh, sorry, I wish I could stay longer, but I’m going to have to run. We must do this again, soon.” She got to her feet, digging in her purse to pay the bill.

“Call me.” She handed Catherine a business card.

“You can count on it.” Catherine finished her coffee before she stood to embrace her old college friend.

She watched Eve walk away, and out into the sunlight. It was symbolic for both of them. They had been through some dark times and found the light again. Catherine glanced around the café, with its old-fashioned décor and eclectic crowd of patrons. The place was really charming and she knew Joe would hate everything about it.

Her irascible boss had formed a code of what he liked to call the three B's. Any eating establishment he frequented had to be busy, bright and bland. Joe hated fuss of any kind, and he detested frills. Just give him his food hot, and leave him alone to enjoy it.

"I must come here again..." Catherine murmured, smiling as she paused to contemplate a painting on the wall of a beautiful, red-haired mermaid rising through sunlit water.

"Someone certainly has an eye for the dramatic and unusual..." she observed before turning away and going out into the sunlight of the spring afternoon and continued on her way back to work.



*"I only want to write. And there's no college for that except life..."*

*Dodie Smith*