

The police came and¹

¹ Throughout Eva's *Man*, Eva's relationship with the police and other positions of authority is marked by silence. In many ways, this silence mirrors Eva's interactions with other people in her life, including those who have hurt her, both physically and emotionally. But while Eva's silence and reluctance to tell her story seems to come out of a place of trauma, it is also a way for her to maintain agency and control in the face of a world where she has had little of either. In this way, Eva's silence is paradoxical: it is emotional and unconscious, and at the same time deliberate and forceful. Throughout *Eva's Man*, Eva is asked to give a part of her self to others, usually sexually, and she often has no way of stopping them. The people who ask Eva to speak, and to tell her story, recall these past traumas, and seem to trigger pain in Eva, which leads to her vulnerability and silence. At the same time, however, being silent becomes a way for Eva to gain agency by being able to make the decision not to share.

Eva's reluctance to share her story is often marked by literal silence, such as when she refuses to speak at the Detective Bureau's Office (51), or when she refuses to divulge information about her dating life to Alfonso (58). These interactions are themselves powerful, and by keeping all of her "stories" private, they become a way for Eva to protect herself against what others might do with her words. Other times, however, Eva's refusal to speak is loud. She tells her psychiatrist, in a moment of questioning that conjures up memories of both Davis and her mother, "I don't want to tell my story...why don't you go away" (77). Likewise, her silence with Davis is often very much articulated. Eva repeatedly tells him "I don't like to talk about myself" and (73) "there's nothing" (121), verbally expressing her ability to refuse him. Eva has been dominated and hurt by many people, and often seems to be passive in her spoken interaction, but her refusal to speak is just as radical as her violent action.

What I remember about²

² Eva's silence is also very much tied to the complicated role that memory and identity has throughout the book. Eva relays her history in a stream-of-conscious manner, abruptly shifting from one period of her life to another. At times, there seems to be a silence within her own head about what has occurred in the past, and confusion about how her life experiences have shaped her into being who she is today. David asks Eva, "Who are you? Where did you come from?" and she replies by explaining that "Sometimes I wonder myself" (20). The duality of Eva's silence - an involuntary reaction to trauma and a way for her to assert control - is even further complicated by the fact that Eva herself seems unsure about what aspects of her life relate to one another, and what would be relevant in telling any specific "story." In some ways, an even stronger silence exists internally than in Eva's interactions with other people. She describes, for instance, Freddy Smoot looking her in the eyes right before he intended to rape her, and says "I didn't know what he'd seen in my eyes, because I didn't know what was there" (120).

Although there is no evidence that Eva's memory is not intact, she does have a strong reaction to her psychiatrist's concern that her memories are somehow skewed. She explains, "I tell the psychiatrist what I remember. He tells me I do not know how to separate the imagined memories from the real ones" (10). Later, she recalls him having a breakthrough, and telling Eva that Davis "came to represent all the men you'd known in your life" (81). The psychiatrist's reaction to this revelation is to say "I got something out of you," and Eva does not correct him. It might, therefore, be impossible for Eva to tell a standard linear story about what occurred during any particular situation (including when she killed Davis), because no one moment can be isolated from the rest of her experiences.

A naked hanging³

³ Eva relays many instances throughout the book when she is asked to talk about herself by a variety of different people, but what almost all of these interactions have in common is that Eva is asked to speak about her sexuality and sexual experience. Just as Eva is asked or forced to be sexually intimate with a long list of people in her life, all of these conversations require an incredible amount of intimacy. Eva's physical body has been violated and taken many times, but the act of requesting Eva to divulge these memories is also a form of violence against her. Eva's silence, therefore, is not just a way for her to maintain privacy and protect herself against unwanted attention, it is also a self-defense mechanism against real violence which would traumatize her even further.

Throughout the book, assumptions are made that Eva is willing and eager to be sexual without any consent coming from her. She is referred to as a "savage woman" (141), conjuring up stereotypical images of black women who were thought of as wild and uncivilized, with unquenchable sexual appetites. Eva's silence becomes a way for the reader to see that, despite her very real sexual desire, she has limits on what she wants to do, and tries to mediate her sexual activity based on her own wants, not the requests of others. This is especially important, given the many times that Eva's verbal "no" has not been heeded. Eva tells Tyrone "I didn't feel nothing," but he insists, arguing "you felt me and you can still feel me" (34). Later, Moses Tripp refuses to listen to Eva's "no" - at least until she stabs him in the hand. Eva's silence is a reaction to the pain from these events. It is a traumatic reaction to past suffering, but it is also an important way of regaining command. It is a way of dealing with her complicated memories. Perhaps most importantly, it is a sign of autonomy and power despite past violations. Eva is silent, but she is still strong.