

# Adventures of an Old Dude

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**B**odil, the woman you've lived with for fifteen years, asks if you will have time within the next week or so to listen to a few things she would like to talk about. You are sitting on one of the plush sofas in the high-ceilinged living room of your rent-controlled apartment—her apartment technically—your wall of bookcases behind you, alternately gazing out the tall windows over the broad, bright boulevard and editing the manuscript of the novel that's just earned you a lucrative contract—things finally beginning to turn your way, albeit at an advanced age.

What about right now? you suggest.

Are you sure? she asks. I'm not disturbing you?

You could avoid this, but your curiosity has the better of you. Something has been working behind her baby-blues of late. You want to get this out of the way so you can get on with your novel. Also, her analyst, Alphonse, who has taken to hanging around rather often of late and involving himself in your conversations, is not here at the moment.

No, really, you say. What better time than now?

She goes to her desk and opens the drawer, removes a notebook. She sits in the armchair opposite you on the

sofa, and you don't like the awkward way she hunches over the notebook. She is nervous about what she is going to say, and suddenly you realize that something is coming that you are not prepared for. She opens the pad, runs her finger down the page while you observe her hair, which would be gray if it weren't blond, her face, which is still attractive though handled by time, her body now round at the middle but the body you love.

One red-pointed fingernail stops at a line and taps. She looks up at you. With breathy resignation, she says, Yeah. Then begins.

And suddenly you are without a woman, living elsewhere, in cramped quarters, beneath low ceilings, behind windows that look out on a ground-floor bicycle rack, your books stacked two rows deep in half as many bookcases as you are accustomed to, no room for your dining table that seated twelve. Anyway, with your new appliances, if you try to make dinner for more than one, your electrical system blows, as you learned on Thanksgiving Day when your son and daughter came over and the three of you wound up in darkness with a half-cooked turkey in the oven, pots of half-boiled potatoes and yams and peas on the electric stovetop just as the turkey pan should have been raked for the gravy.

You did not expect this.

You did not expect that she would be sending you and others strange, vaguely poisonous letters.

You did not expect to dine alone on Christmas Eve on pork belly and chopped cabbage in an upscale diner by the harbor, the only restaurant in the city serving on this holy night, at a one-man table amidst a scattering of commercial travelers stranded for the holiday in a foreign port. You did not expect to spend New Year's Eve sulking over your champagne and marzipan cake or New Year's Day alone in your pajamas watching *Quo Vadis* on TCN.

People pose indiscreet questions. The woman who cuts your hair—who also “does” Bodil’s—asks boldly, What in the world happened?

Happened?

Between the two of you?

Well, you say, I don’t think I’d like to discuss that.

Well you left her, anyway. Always easier for the one who leaves. Left her explosively! Bodil told me. One day to the next. So I guess it’s easier for you. What happened, anyway?

Well, you say, I don’t think I’d like to discuss that.

The haircutter nudges your shoulder with her slinky hip. So you’re free now, ey? Maybe I should start playing matchmaker?

Well, you say, I don’t think I’d like to discuss that, but you wonder who she might have in mind.

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