

THE OLDER MAN—Ten Years On

Written by Michael Cook

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(Continued from last month)



Well, the Ferrari's gone and now it's just me and a failing memory. Names of film stars and authors keep me awake, as I go through the alphabet trying to recall. It's a lot more difficult than counting sheep.

And when I wake I feel in a catatonic state until my morning Joe. Then almost campus mentis I am ready and capable of making momentous decisions as to whether my silver stubble needs attention and the wisps of baby hair need to be wetted to my scalp. My khaki trousers resemble

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my wrinkles as I pick them up off the bedroom floor and say *does it matter?* I am going nowhere.

As I look at Guinness, my black lab, wagging her tail, she gives me unconditional love. And that I have no answer for but to give what I should have done when I was a young man. I am on my second cup and my pills line up like soldiers waiting to defend this aging body against the ravages of time. Aspirin, blood pressure and cholesterol meds mixed with vitamins and cod liver oil in a breakfast of survival. Guinness sits near, quiet and patient knowing her old man will eventually get his act together.

Knowing that I have a responsibility for my dog's well being and happiness gives me great joy even if the conversations are one way. We love each other but I know she loves me more.

“Are you ready”?

We seem to have this routine that even I can remember. Third tree is a pee then a stifled growl at Mrs. Lomax's boxer, another sniff and a pee. Were walking now side by side after the initial excitement until we come to an intersection.

Guinness wants to pull me left towards Mrs. Anderson's house. She's in love with Reece a Pekinese. I like Mrs. Anderson and it would be an excuse to be in her company. We seem to get along fine and have lots in common and josh a lot, but my courage seems missing when it comes to asking her out for dinner. It's been on the tip of my lips for two years but it always seems as though I have a mouth full of marbles.

“Well Guinness I think you have decided for me you know, I think sometimes you can read my mind.”

Our cup of tea was delightful as usual; almost Victorian in the politeness was our conversation. I tried to bring the question I had wanted to ask for months. My tummy was like a roller coaster but I eventually blustered my question out.

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“Why don’t we go out to dinner sometime, maybe not if you’re too busy, but in the future or.”

“I would love to go out with you for dinner. Well that’s settled then George”

“Swell, okay. That’s good.” Well I’ll be off now.”

“When, George?”

There was a full term pregnancy pause, as George’s mind processed this mind boggling equation.

“How about not this Saturday but next.”

“George! A lot can happen in 10 days. Were not spring chickens, you know? I would not want to die thinking I missed out on a free dinner.”

“Well, you know the old adage, there’s no such thing as a *free*.”

“Now you don’t go having any of those saucy thoughts, I’m way too long in the tooth to entertain such foolishness.”

I looked at Alice with a cheeky little smile and his eyebrows rose.

“Like you said, Alice, a lot can change in 10 days.”

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Walking home you would have thought I had just conquered Everest. A spring in my step my chest puffed out, it felt great to be younger than what I am.

It was crazy but when I got home I made a To Do list. Iron my best pants and shirt, have my wisps of hair cut, tidy the living room and change the sheets. I was a new man and I liked it.

Guinness kept looking at me, you know, that movement of the head from side to side. The one that says, Who is this stupid bastard?

Well, the days got longer but the date became closer and I was revving up like my Indian motorcycle (well more a pop-pop-chugger trying to fire on all cylinders).

And when the day arrived, it felt like I was going to the graduation dance for those who don't think they are past their "sell by" date.

"Well Guinness, what do you think, do I pass muster? Come on now be truthful. Clarke Gable, Larry Olivier, Trevor Howard. You could at least wag your tail! Thanks for the vote of confidence."

"Darn it, Guinness, don't you dare eat that button."

Too late. So I untied my tie and lowered it to cover my exposed belly button.

"You know, Guinness, I didn't know turning back the hands of time could be so stressful."

Driving to Alice's, my mind was focused, I tell you I was razor sharp, that was until I

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remembered that I had left my wallet on the night stand. Suddenly my Volkswagen Beetle turned into that Ferrari I always wanted.

The *topes* did nothing for my hemorrhoids and prostate, but I made it with seconds to spare. I was flushed and hot, I felt I was experiencing the change.

Alice looked a picture of elegance whereas I look a disheveled mess.

Looking me up and down like drill sergeant on parade, she grimaced

“Didn’t your mother teach you how to dress?”

My belly button was winking at her.

After that wonderful first impression I made, the dinner at Tango’s was splendid; we talked and laughed and reminisced. And we even had a soft shoe shuffle at the *malecon* to a mariachi band until we became the center of attention for a tornado of bobo flies. The chance of an evening kiss had gone, yet I did feel the warmth of a woman as we danced

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if only for a little while.

Walking Alice to her door was my one last chance to steal a kiss but my timidity was getting the better of me. Yet it was Alice who took my hand, as we spooned in companionship till we fell asleep. Knowing there was warmth when I rolled over and not the coolness of the sheet made me feel alive.

And in the morning Alice smiled and said, “A lot can happen in 10 days at our age.”

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