

After he closed the door in her face, Alice felt a flutter of fear, followed by what felt like a lightning bolt of anger. She looked at Mother Jones. “What on earth has suddenly caused him to become such an impulsive and secretive old man?”

The cat blinked slowly. It was possible, Alice thought, that she shared Alice’s opinion of Gerard. More likely she was calculating if she could convince Alice that her breakfast had not yet been served.

Alice collapsed into her desk chair. Gerard’s sudden departure took her breath whooshing right out of her lungs. Why would he suddenly go off without telling her where he was going? Whatever it was, she would have willingly gone with him.

Well, maybe that was not actually true.

She couldn’t have driven him too far, and she wouldn’t have been very open to flying. She generally objected to the burning of excessive fossil fuel necessary to travel by air. She was well known for her commitment to thinking globally but acting locally, especially when it came to the environment. Still, if it was an emergency, she would fly. Or she could have offered her car, and Warp could have driven all three of them to wherever those two were headed right now.

She was puzzled that Gerard hadn’t given her a chance to be part of this sudden plan to vanish for what sounded like the better part of two days. His departure was baffling. So secretive!

Well, well. She had to let this turn of events percolate awhile. She tried to calm herself by stroking Mother Jones who had now commandeered her lap.

It was a fact that her relationship with Gerard certainly kept her life forces flowing, especially lately when he was so fired up and ready to go. But the more she thought about this, the more she was distracted by thinking of times when he was not so enthusiastic.

danger in the house

Gerard could be stubborn when he wanted to avoid certain social activities, potluck meals, for example. He was horrified by the gastronomic disappointments of the ubiquitous pasta salads, potato salads, greasy roast chicken, and unacceptable bakery products from the supermarket. But she could hardly blame him for his discerning French palate.

Aside from these occasional dislikes, lately he glowed with the zest she remembered when they were first reunited. After forty years apart, the reunion had been exhilarating.

Everything bloomed as they enjoyed the return of love, even amidst their hair-raising adventures in the pursuit of the anthrax killer. There were occasional times when she feared that Gerard might leave her when she became so busy stirring up trouble that there wasn't enough time for rest or simple pleasures.

Lately, however, it seemed that he was as charged up as she was by their fast-paced activism.

During their recent battle to stop the new gas pipeline from destroying family farms and precious forests, Gerard had been dramatically rejuvenated. He was very proud of his skirmish with a violent intruder when he physically subdued the thug who was trying to harm Alice. Everyone involved was amazed by Gerard's success in capturing a professional criminal who was easily thirty years his junior.

These days, she wondered if Gerard was craving danger for the sake of the excitement. Evidently testosterone remained forever on alert in the human male, as enduring as the shelf life of a fruitcake.

Despite her best efforts, right at this minute she was feeling more and more upset. Her indignation was rising so fast that it made her heart race. What was he up to? She tried to calm herself, making herself

contemplate the possibility that Gerard might be seeking help from some medical experts.

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*Dusty J. Miller*

Just recently, Alice and Gerard had gotten into a slightly heated disagreement about his rheumatism.

“Alice, my beloved,” he had said, “you have no understanding of my pain. Today, I feel I cannot live with this. *Je ne peux plus marcher!* I cannot walk!”

“For heaven’s sake,” Alice had snapped irritably, “I think that’s a bit of an exaggeration. *Of course* you can walk! I know you are in real pain, Gerard, I understand, but why won’t you at least try one of Felicia’s herbal treatments?”

Pain could certainly undermine anyone’s mental stability, she reminded herself. She thought ruefully that she should have been more sensitive to his distress.

Maybe it was something personal, something male, that he needed to do without her. That would explain Warp driving him somewhere. She tried to accept the idea.

She considered the devotion that always before had kept them from the brink whenever they got too near the flames of disagreement. Neither their passion nor their commitment had ever deserted them. If Gerard had, for some odd reason, chosen to ask Warp to get him to a doctor in some far off city, she could understand. Still, she felt blindsided. Why hadn’t he just told her what he was doing?

She wished that, only minutes ago, before Gerard walked out her door, she had been the one to take him into *her* arms. Had she missed the chance to remind him of her unwavering love?

Alice was reminded of how it was forty years ago when they had to make the decision about the future of their relationship. Oh how they had argued! He had wanted her to go with him to the Congo, but of course she couldn't just fly off to another continent with him. She had three teenagers still living at home with her.

In the end, they went their separate ways, both brokenhearted.

danger in the house

She sighed once more, and then sternly marched herself into the present moment. "Get a grip, Alice!" she scolded. "It's not a disaster. He'll be back tomorrow night."

She called Jasmine to cancel her appointment. She just didn't have the energy for exercise today. After washing a few dishes and feeding the cat a second, completely unnecessary meal, she decided to call Felicia. What she needed most right now was her friend's counsel.

She was waiting for Felicia to pick up when a sudden crashing sound at the back of the house made her jump and end the call.

This was followed by more unnerving sounds. With her hearing loss, she could not be sure of the direction of sounds. Now it seemed as if something large was trying to get into her house.

As the sounds persisted, she realized that someone was right at her back door.