

## And Do You?

It's every old man's fantasy, right?

You're at, say, your daughter's house for Sunday lunch. It's a beautiful sunny day, so she, her husband and their daughter go for an afternoon walk; and you don't go with them because of your 'trouble' (whatever that is). Instead, you decide to have a nap, and they've told you to help yourself to the spare bedroom, so upstairs you go.

The spare bedroom is at the end of the landing. You pass the bedroom belonging to your daughter and son-in-law, and that used by your granddaughter, and the upstairs bathroom, which you don't need to visit. (That fact is important, so remember it for later.)

The spare bedroom is a neat, brightly-decorated room containing a single bed, bedside table, wardrobe, chest of drawers and dressing table with vanity mirror. Perfect for overnight visitors, of which you've never been one because you live close enough not to have to stay.

Oh – and the single window has semi-sheer curtains that, when you close them, dim the light, but not enough to darken the room significantly.

With a grateful sigh you relieve your feet of your shoes and flop onto the bed, and within seconds you're sound asleep.

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You wake, it seems only minutes later (and you glance at either your watch or the clock on the bedside table, and discover that it is, indeed, only ten minutes or so), to the sound of a giggle; and you raise your head to look towards the door, and in the half-light you see –

A young woman.

A young woman around the same age as your granddaughter.

A young woman around the same age as your granddaughter whose hair, though neatly brushed, is obviously damp, and whose face has a sheen to it that further indicates she's probably just stepped out of the bath or shower.

A young woman around the same age as your granddaughter whose hair, though neatly brushed, is obviously damp, and whose face has a sheen to it that further indicates she's probably just stepped out of the bath or shower, and who is wearing nothing but a bath-towel.

She's paused just inside the threshold, and her eyebrows have risen, presumably in surprise.

And you think: Thank God I didn't take my clothes off. Which you would have been quite justified in doing, given that the day is the sultry sort. And if you had taken your clothes off, well, right this instance that would be –

Well – it just would be.

Still hovering, she gives you a smile, and her teeth are that pearly white that only Hollywood actors can achieve, and she says, 'Oh – hello.'

And you suddenly realise that your eyes are popping out of your head, and that your jaw is somewhere down by your lap (you're sitting now, not laying, so it has to be your lap, not your feet, but if you were standing upright it would be down at your feet), and there's a silence which stretches out to the point where it might be described as 'awkward' while you try to reconnect the latter to the rest of your face, but eventually you manage, and you say, 'He – hello' back, and then there's another silence, which does stretch into the damned awkward, and then you manage to add, 'Erm, sorry – I don't...'

And then the young woman (who is around the same age as your daughter, remember, which is just turned twenty, so there's nothing illegal about this scenario, even if it does border on the dodgy given that you're some fifty years older) giggles again, and the giggle sends a sort of – something – up your spine, and then you realise that you're still staring, and maybe it would be better if you were to avert your eyes, and so you do, and stare at the wardrobe instead; which, although a fine body of a piece of furniture, is not half as fine a body as the one you're now not staring at, and you realise as well that if you were to stand up at the moment, you might be severely embarrassed.

'I didn't realise that anybody...' you say to the wardrobe, and the young woman giggles a third time.

'You must be Jimmy,' she says, and you reply (to the wardrobe), 'That's right', and she says, 'I'm Clare, Ellie's friend from work. Ellie's told me a lot about you' and you say (to the wardrobe – but we'll take that as read from now on), 'Hello, Clare – erm, has she really?', and she says, 'Yes', and you can't think of anything but the feeble, 'All good, I hope?', and she replies, 'Oh, yes – very good', and you mumble something back in confusion, and even you can't tell what it is, it's just noises.

And then she says, 'You're probably wondering what I'm doing here', and you say, 'I was, rather', and she says, 'Ellie and I are going out tonight; she said I could shower and change here, and told me to use this bedroom.'

And you say, 'Oh' to that, because nothing else comes into your head.

And then there's another awkward pause, during which time she looks at you in a sort-of expectant way (you know this because you've stopped looking at the fine body of furniture that is the wardrobe, and back at the fine body of non-furniture that is her, since the wardrobe can't offer you any clues as to what you should say or do next, and she can), and you suddenly realise that what she's expecting is for you to get off the bed and bugger off out of the room so she can get on with the second part of what she and Ellie had agreed she'd be able to do.

And all this, by the way, is begging the question of how she got into the house, or whether she was already here when you came upstairs, and if so, how come you didn't hear

the shower running. But it's your fantasy, so you don't need a rational explanation for every single detail, right?

And you say, 'Oh – erm – yes, of course'; and you very gingerly slide off the bed.

Let's face it. You may be seventy years old, but certain elements still function quite normally. It's just that they haven't needed to since that tragic day five years before when your wife passed away. And if a semi-naked twenty-year-old isn't reason enough for your body to start remembering the days when your wife stood before you in similar splendour, then what is?

Ideally, you could by now have adjusted your position to make it less obvious. But with the suddenness of it all – well, you're not going to shove your hand down the front of your trousers to fiddle around with her looking directly at you, are you?

So you perform a sort of crouch-scurry towards the door, and then you hear her giggle yet again.

And you stop, confused, because you'd expected a cry of indignation/disgust, and you glance at her again, and she's not staring at your rapidly-beetrooting face, and she giggles for a fourth time and says something like, 'Hmm – you are pleased to see me.' And there's this – this smile. Playing around her mouth. And her eyes are sort of sparkling.

And damn it, you find yourself thinking: Is this young woman actually *interested*?

And you think: Of course she isn't!

And you think: Well – why the hell shouldn't she be? You're not bad looking for your age, are you?

And you think: Don't be stupid. She's just making fun of you. She wouldn't be interested in an old creep like you!

And you think: Why not? Look at Michael Douglas.

And you think: You're hardly in the same league as Michael Douglas, are you?

And you think: Maybe not. But she is staring, and she isn't recoiling in horror.

And you think: I suppose not.

And you think: Exactly.

And you think: Supposing I took a punt?

And you think: If I did, and I'm reading this wrong, I could be in one hell of a load of trouble.

And you think: She's still not recoiling in horror.

And you think: No – she isn't, is she?

And you think: Should I?

And you think: Shouldn't I?

And do you?