

THE LAST DAYS OF MADALYN MURRAY O'HAIR, IN EXILE

excerpt

MADALYN: Now, young man, if you'll just fetch me the rest of my cushions and my blanket, I'll be quite comfortable here. *[As he goes to get them:]* God, I'm done in! My advice to you is never get old. Time was I could get up before dawn, attend a tribal feast, insult a few Christians, and still be full of beans for the rest of the day. No more. No more.

[HANK starts arranging the cushions behind her. She grabs his arm.]

MADALYN: I got my eye on you.

[He stops but doesn't look at her. Beat. He continues what he was doing.]

HANK: *[coolly]* Do you?

MADALYN: *[stroking his arm]* You're a fine-looking young man. Meaty. Muscular. I like that. If I was ten years younger, I'd take you now—right on the beach. And you'd like it, too. I used to know a trick or two. But now, as I say, I'm old. My body's just about given up on me. So. Now. Maybe you're what Rita needs. Something big and sexy to rub the spark of life back into her. Maybe not. But let me tell you something: One way or another, nothing happens in my house without my O.K.

HANK: Is that so?

MADALYN: Yes, it's "so." I run a tight ship. I've had to. Look at me. I'm almost eighty and I'm still alive. Lotta people didn't want that. I've had death threats. Bombs. Perfect strangers walk up to me in the street and spit in my face—tell me how much they want me to die and what it's gonna feel like when I'm roasting in hell. But I'm still here. Why? Because we're tight. We stick together. And now with Mort gone God knows where, the mush-headed oaf, we gotta be tighter. So maybe you're good for Rita. Maybe you're not. But I've only got one question for you. Are you with us or against us?

HANK: *[cautiously]* It depends what you mean by "with."

MADALYN: There's only one "with" I understand. Totally. One hundred percent. No questions asked.

HANK: Then I must say that I am not with you in that sense. You are the mother of the woman I love. For that I owe you the deepest respect and gratitude. You are the fount of my newfound happiness. On the other hand, you are a very bad woman! You have robbed the people who trusted you. You have taken money for the struggle against oppression and converted it to luxuries for yourself and your family. For this I cannot respect you, and I cannot be with you.

MADALYN: *[laughing]* That's good! That's good! I respect that. Young man, I know just where you're coming from. You're a card-carrying, Marx-reading, Internationale-humming member of the bleeding-heart revolutionary post-graduate army. Good for you. I am, too, in my heart of hearts. Used to be a member of the CPUSA. Lost the card. Kept the spirit. But I tell you there's one thing that trumps a good Marxist dialectic and that's money! And I got it! You want to raise up the downtrodden and bring justice to the oppressed, you need money! I got it! You wanna tell the corporate-cum-Christian-cum-Republican powers-that-be to go fuck themselves, you need money! I got it! You wanna screw over the system that's been screwing over you? You wanna take all their goddam platitudes and their superstitious mumbo-jumbo and shove it up their pasty-white asses? Get yourself some money! And let me tell you, I got it! So all I'm saying is—you wanna defeat the power of capital, you need some capital of your own. Got it?

HANK: Excuse me for saying so, but I understood the problem right now is that you don't "got it."