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Wily Eloise

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— **M**an, fuck this shit.

Wily Eloise

—Cool it, Elo.

Grandma Eloise peeled deep orange burnt sweet potatoes off the bottom of a glass dish. Grandpa was supposed to be in the kitchen controlling just such outbursts but had decided his leather armchair in the living room was a better sentry post. I was surprised he could hear her muttering at the food. Or rather, into the food. Over the past decade her back had snuggled into a question mark, leaving her barely five feet tall, which suited me because I was no longer the shortest one in the family. Five *two*, motherfuckers.

Any attempt to help Grandma with her cooking was doomed from the start. That was her job and she didn't want anyone meddling. So I just stood by the counter, frowning, hand on hip, a comely pose I had learned from my aunts. I watched as an anonymous miniature dachshund wiggled at Grandma's feet. Without looking, she kicked it aside with a crooked slippered foot and it slid across the tiled floor, yipping. She left the foot suspended in the air, leg straight out a few inches above the floor, either because she forgot to put it down or she was pleasantly surprised at her own spryness and wanted to show it off. *Elo, you wily thing.*

The upsides of senility always seemed plenty to me, not being senile myself, and I sometimes wondered if Grandma took advantage of her mystifying condition: a grab bag of mild insanity. She could say whatever she wanted, do whatever she liked, and never have to take shit from *no BODY!* That's just what she said to me when I told her I'd go get some more sweet potatoes from the V-Point, the grocery store my Grandpa opened after World War II. (The name came from the V-shaped lot it was on, although I used to think it was after his own name, V.F. My cousin suggested it was surreptitiously named after the female *hoo-hoo*. She is thirty).

Grandma wasn't going to go and let me pick out some second-rate, two-timing, good for nothing yams. She followed me slowly, sneaky and purposeful like a mad scientist's assistant, all the way out to her Lincoln Towncar. I helped her into the passenger seat and tried to buckle her seatbelt, but she swatted my hand away. *Don't take shit from no-BODY*, she muttered at the

dash, scowling. Obviously, not buckling her seatbelt fell into the category of Grandma's Supreme Autonomous Stuff.

I backed the great chrome tank out of the driveway and thought, this is a great set of wheels for not taking any shit. It hummed right through the suburbs, compressing the pavement under its big wheels. At some point we hummed right over a big fat squirrel that I failed to see until it was too late. Oh *shit*, I said under my breath, wincing into the rear-view mirror.

Grandma craned her white head over her shoulder, something I was not aware she could do. She was smiling. She turned back around, settled into her spot, and nodded. She closed her eyes and muttered something, nodding some more, looking like some kind of deranged medicine woman.

—What's that, Grandma?

—*Goddamn squirrels, that'll teach them to fuck with us. Shit.*

I shook my head. No more bad word lessons for you, I said. When we got back I rubbed them all off the little toy blackboard in the garage.

—*Emily Smith*

Off the Beaten Path

—*Kimberly Wiest*

