am I still alive, yes

by Jerry Ratch

She read her briefs as she sat at the café table in her smart dark blue suit, and she altered the wording on the briefs in front of her, and she would check the watch at her wrist as if there were a pulse there: Am I still alive, yes. Am I still alive, yes.

A woman with pale skin as if it's been powdered, peaked eyebrows, severe haircut, short, dark, cut above the ear on one side, occasional streaks of gray. There was no ring on her finger. She looked like she had not had an orgasm in 15 years.

The woman looked up from her briefs, and her cold blue stare fastened on the man sitting alone at his own table. She trained her attention on him like the steel barrel of a gun, while he arranged everything neatly on the table in front of him. The glass of water, half full. One white paper napkin. The spoon with its white ring of coffee foam.

“You're real anal, aren't you?” she said.

The man flinched when she spoke. “What do you mean?”

“It's all right. I'm anal too. Don't you just hate messy people? With all their mess and stuff?”

He warmed up a little when she said this. “Well, yes,” he admitted. “Yes, I do.”

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