

This Old Man

by Maggie Sokolik

"Have I told you this one before?"

I can't think of one he hasn't told me, but saying so won't stop him. I fire up the FreeCell game, put the phone on speaker, and pour a tumbler of chardonnay.

"Nope, I don't think so." The chardonnay is good, not too oaky. My opening deal looks promising, too.

"Your stepmother..."

"May she rest in peace," I say, before he can say it.

"Yes," he says. "May she rest in peace. I don't know why you couldn't get along better with her. She loved you as much as I do."

Comforting, I think.

"Well, I doubt that," I say, "I mean, Jesus. She took back all the gifts she ever gave me. Even that red dress. Did she ever wear it?"

"You didn't have to give it back."

"I was happy to. She never gave a gift with an ounce of sincerity. Only conditions."

"Okay, well, anyway. I think I've told you this one before..."

I deal again. FreeCell isn't working out. The chardonnay is getting warm. I drink a few ounces and refill the glass, hoping to bring some chill back to it. I think I bought the bottle in Sonoma, at that little shop on the corner of, oh, what was it?

"It was that time, at the beach house, do you remember? You kids loved the beach house."

Right, the chardonnay came from the general store near Schellville. A good price. I really should go back sometime.

