



YESTERDAY, MRS. SELMA RADFORD HAD TO GO TO PROVIDENCE to do some errands; first to the bank, to make a deposit, then to the dentist, to pick up her new teeth. So she tied her celery-green scarf around her hair, slipped on the matching dress, and belted a jacket, the color of the Mediterranean, over that. Then she called a taxi.

Mrs. Radford would rather have driven herself downtown — as she used to do when she had the white Coupe de Ville. But now, at 91, she's not doing any driving anymore. To her chagrin she's been cooped up in her little East Providence cottage, except for the trip to the dentist.

"It's hard to describe this feeling that I have now," she says, leaning on her elbow, "because I have never felt this way before. It's a letdown for me, you know, to be in this physical condition."

The walls of the cottage document a glamorous life: a photo of her, shoulders high, with a mink hat and a handsome man; and there she is with

a short swing coat and a baby daughter; and there's her young granddaughter, primped for the prom ("They say she takes after me").

Mrs. Radford isn't sure where she got her sense of style — maybe it was from her two decades as a saleswoman at Peerless. Or maybe it was from before that, when she lived in New York City.

"When I came to Providence," she says, "everybody used to look at me. They'd say, 'I'd wear a hat, but everybody on the bus would look at me.' And I'd say, 'I don't see nobody on the bus but *me*.'"

Mrs. Radford's self-possession persists — take her teeth, for instance. Her dentist tried to talk her out of the fifteen-hundred-dollar set, but she wouldn't hear of it. "He meant very well," she says, "but I said to myself, 'Why I've got a sister-in-law and she's already turned *a hundred*. How do I know how long I'll live — I might live another five years, I might live another one year. I'm not gonna be waiting around here. What? Wait till I *die* to get my teeth fixed?'"

## Our Times

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