

# Menopause

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Katrien Van Huyck

KAREN IS SITTING at the oak desk in the living room of their suburban house; she is reading a letter. There is a crack in the wall. Beside it a photo of her husband Max, one she took last year in the backyard. It is Max, sitting on a bench, rugged up with a beanie and scarf and looking intensely cross-eyed. You would think that this is what he really looks like. The truth is that Max is a cross-eye expert and he uses his skills as a tool for distracting Karen when she's moody or to make up after a fight. It has proven to be very effective — on bad days not so much, but that is not his fault.

Today was one of those days. After she waved Max goodbye with a pout, overwhelmed by a hot flush, she checked the letterbox and was surprised to find a letter from Mexico City from her youngest daughter Zaya. Still in pyjamas, Karen nestled herself on the couch and started reading slowly but with greed, paragraph by paragraph, some even twice, to make sure she didn't miss a thing. Halfway through the letter Karen burst out in laughter. Then, as if bewitched, she suddenly started crying. Then she laughed and cried simultaneously, her face resembling a baby's grimace at that point of making a decision between screeching or smiling.

That's when she realised it was time to surrender. There is no point in fighting rebellious hormones, she remembered, because no matter what strategy you apply, they always win, cackling away on their broomsticks. Since she had the house to herself, she decided to take advantage of the situation and launch into a session of Extreme Interpretive Dancing.

By the time Max arrived home from work, she was dressed, the carpet was dry, the lounge table put back together and a lasagne was cooking away in the oven.