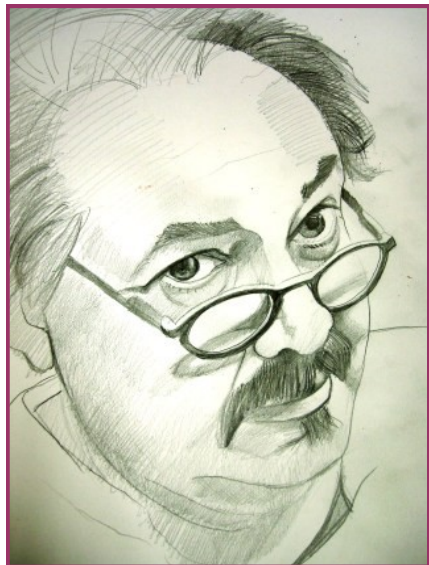


An Old Guy's Love Poems

by John Kotula



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Cover sketch by John Kotula

Origami Poems Project

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Husband in Winter

In the middle of the night
I wake up in my warm bed.
I nudge Deb softly.
Yeah, she is still there.

I get up to pee,
Walk past the coats in the hall,
The door to the basement.
The clock on the stove says 2:10.
My old bladder knows the hour,
If not the minute.
There is moonlight coming in the back door.
I can make out the silhouette of the big
rosemary plant.
I sit.
No sense in trying to steer
When I'm half asleep.

The thermostat is set at 58.

I'm cold
When I slip
Back under the covers.
But, Deb is warm.
I press against her,
Snuggling, spooning.

One day,
One of us
Will be alone
In this bed.
One of us
Will have to wait
While the heat of one body
Warms it up.

Stories

"We had been directing camp in Barnes.
The Dutch families gave us a bunch of bikes to use.

We had been riding bikes all summer.

At the end of camp,

The Dutch families said they would pick them up.

We decided it would be fun

To ride a couple of them to their house.

It was a two or three hour ride.

Lars had Helen in a seat on his bike.

I was pregnant with Jesse.

So we were exhausted.

Lars was leading and he just fell over.

I said, 'Are you alright? Is Helen alright? What happened?'

He said, 'I fell asleep.'

That was about it."

You've told me that story

A hundred times.

I want to know all your stories.

I want to know about when you and Loie

Were "the little girls."

I want to know about you getting stoned with Janet

And running the tollbooths on 95.

I want to know about the time you and Lars

Didn't have thirty-five cents to cross the Mt. Hope Bridge.

I want to know about Helen and Jesse jumping from the hayloft

And crumpling the roofs of the antique cars.

"Deb, tell me about the time

Lars fell asleep riding the bike."

II

And to forgive me.

To be proud of me

I want you to know all my stories,

A hundred times.

I've told you this story

I stayed awake to protect her.

Miranda slept through it.

And lightening toppled a chimney near by.

Of our hotel room

That night, thunder rattled the windows

Halos her head)

That refused comb or brush,

Her hair,

A tiny red and white plaid bathing suit.

(In a snapshot, she wears

And built driftwood sculptures on the beach.

We climbed down the bluffs

That makes it thirty-five years ago.

I think she was three.

With Miranda.

I spent a weekend on Block Island

Deb, long before I knew you

I

III

Deb, last September 2nd, before dawn,

When you were home in Rhode Island,

I pedaled my bike a couple of miles

Out into the Nevada desert

To an art oasis of upholstered couches and chairs

And fake palm tree umbrellas.

Just as the sun was raising

I sat next to a skinny

Sixteen-year-old boy.

In lieu of shaking hands,

He hugged me

Like the prodigal son coming home

To his long lost father.

This boy had two names:

The name given him at birth

Was Alexander, my middle name.

It means, he told me, ruler of many.

But his desert name was Shanghai.

He was too stoned to talk much.

He was sweet and spacey.

I was much too thin.

It had been possible,

I would have taken him out for a cheeseburger.

He would have ordered

The brown rice, tofu, organic shitake, goat cheese burger.

A hundred times.

I want to tell them to each other

I want to remember all our stories.

Deb, remember everything that happened in Honduras?

At U-Mass?

Remember when we dropped Miranda and Helen off

On the beach in Guatemala?

Remember when we got robbed

From our canoe?

Remember when we saw a palliated woodpecker

To watch the sun rise?

Remember when we climbed Cadillac Mountain

From the blind guy in Truth or Consequences?

Remember when we got massages

Remember when...

Remember when...

Deb, remember when...

IV

Telling you the story completes it.

Living the story is half the story.

I want you to know all my stories.

"Only about a hundred times."

"Have I told you this story?"