

My Old Jeep

by Gary Percesepe

I

I still have the old Jeep we used to ride around in when I lived there. Today I spent \$225 putting in a new power steering hose because the old one was leaking steering fluid. I didn't know it was leaking steering fluid because it only leaked when it was moving, not when it was stationary, and it's hard if not impossible to check the fluid on a moving couple. Were we a couple?

II

It's been two years since you were in my Jeep, or two years minus one month if one insists on accuracy. I'm not sure how many miles you logged in my old Jeep because most of our trips were local, to restaurants and bars but sometimes to the mall. Once we drove to the deli. We'd had a sudden craving for meatballs. This was during a March blizzard. They keep the delicatessens' open during blizzards in Buffalo, as it turns out. Your girls were with their dad. Kimberlee called. I hid her phone call from you as I walked around the deli. You didn't know that, did you? Kimberlee wasn't an ex-lover just almost (there was that awkward time in her NYC hotel room, but no), so I hid her from you because who really wants to have *that* conversation? What did we talk about? While you were buying Italian sausage and I was hiding Kimberlee? Nothing much. I had texted her why are we so fearful and insecure in love? Kimberlee called to say the key is to find someone as terrified as you are. She didn't mean *you*, you.

III

Not long after we broke up I met a woman who was a Buddhist. She may have been the first to ride in your spot in the Jeep. (I'd say "ride shotgun," but that is not something she as a Buddhist would consider saying; tonally, it's just off.) Her name was Jean. She suggested we could purge the memory of you in the Jeep by burning sage? Her upspeak voice. I nodded yes, and turned away from her. She asked if I was OK? I nodded. Yes. She looked at me, not unlike the way you might look at a child whose best friend is moving to Bali. That was awkward. I coughed and flicked an imaginary piece of dirt from my jacket. Jean went into the house and returned minutes later with the sage. She lit it. Breathe, she said.

IV

One night you kept playing with the knobs of the radio in my Jeep. The clock was three minutes off, and this bothered you. I figured it was the teacher in you, glancing at the clock every few minutes, waiting for the end of class. You broke the radio, but I didn't care. I hated clocks, too. It was an old radio, after market. I'd only had the Jeep a few months. I bought it because my real car couldn't manage the Buffalo winter. I'd heard of "lake effect snow" but figured that was only Cleveland. I didn't know that Cleveland was on the other side of the lake. Technically, I didn't know Buffalo was on a lake. In seventh grade New York history, I'm sure we must have covered this, but my teacher was from Manhattan. My real car was a convertible with "run flat tires" and no spare. The car had run flat tires because the roof retracted into the trunk and there was no room for a spare, no room for a tire error; run flat tires are designed to carry you fifty miles from your tire disaster, wherever it may be, without the need for a spare, provided you don't go over fifty and provided you don't bend the rim. They also cost \$535 per tire. It was like driving with four snowboards on the wheels. Steering was barely possible; stopping was out of the question. This was not the car to be driving around Buffalo. You never complained the one and only time I drove

my real car (the skidding convertible) to your house, and it got stuck in the snow and I couldn't get it out of your driveway. This was the morning after the first night I had met you. And the first time we had made love. So, to tally things up, it was the first time I drove my convertible to your house, fucked you, walked to my car in the driveway wondering if I'd ever see you again, cleared the snow off the car with a broom and started it, got the car stuck in the driveway, walked back to your front door certain now that I would be seeing you again, asked to borrow a shovel, requested that you get behind the wheel of the convertible while I pushed, and kissed you goodbye when the car reached the street. The Jeep came later.

V

We kissed at traffic lights in the Jeep. I'd put the stick in neutral then lean over to kiss you, foot on brake.

