

Old Age

by Jack Swenson

I see them walking, not every day, but often enough to surmise that they are on their daily constitutional. They are old--as in *old* old. An Asian couple. They must have a home somewhere near. Often I see them as they pass my house; sometimes I pass them as I drive down the road in my truck. When I spot them, I always greet them. I wave and smile, say hi, good morning, or whatever. If I'm in my truck, I toot the horn. They always smile and nod. The old man carries a cane, and he raises the walking stick high over his head in a salute.

Both of them are stick thin--skin and bones. They wear warm clothes, sweaters, scarves, all year long. They wear comfortable shoes. She has on ankle sox, which make her look like a Fifties teenager.

My friends never stop and talk. They nod and say something, but I cannot understand the words. That may be my fault. My hearing isn't good. I enjoy seeing them, though. They lift my spirits. Sometimes they walk hand in hand, and when I see them thus, I carry the image with me for the rest of the day. This is what love is, I think. This is the way it is supposed to be.

What is their life like, I wonder? They walk, they eat, they sleep. What can they do at that age? Are they too old for life's little pleasures? The answer comes as I pass them on the canyon road one morning. I am in my truck headed for a local business park to go for a walk with a friend. I come up behind the old couple and startle them as I pass. I honk the horn and wave. The old man waves back; the woman stops in her tracks, frozen. Her whey face is blank. In her right hand she is holding a cigarette. She holds it like a cup of tea, with thumb and one finger, the other fingers arrayed like a fan.

