

Did I Tell You I Have Stripes On My Socks?

by John Olson

The hothouse is full orchids. It's hard raising orchids. I'm a big man. 452 pounds. People find it odd that a big man likes to raise orchids.

I have stripes on my socks. All my socks have stripes. All my shirts have stripes. I need stripes. They keep me contained. I feel safe in them. You know? Civilized. Compliant.

Kids are fascinated by me. Adults look the other way. Maybe it's my size. Or maybe it's the stories in the newspapers. About those people. Those people they say I killed. But I was acquitted. Because of one striped sock. Not my DNA. No sir.

I like the sound of trickling water. The groaning and coughing of old rusty pipes. Hushed voices. My hands and forearms brushed by fronds.

I worry about things. Barometers, scissors, wasps. The strange allure of the pickax.

I'm not an extravert, no, but I do like the swimming pool, and all those women.

I will tell you this: I don't like getting old. But I do like falling backward into an old arm chair. Where my body is welcomed by creaking springs. I've gone through eight armchairs in the past five years. Eight.

Did I tell you I have stripes on my socks?

I'm terrible at keeping secrets. Never tell me a secret. Someone told me a secret once and I couldn't keep it and people got killed. This is a hard thing to live with.

Here's a secret: I take three types of medication, and sometimes I feel like crying.

My emotions are not my fault. They're like gasoline anything can ignite them. Anything. Creosote. Skateboards. Cameras.

That's why they put me to work in here. A quiet place. A quiet place for delicate things.

Did I tell you I have stripes on my socks?

