

Coffee at the Headlands Café

Pricilla Comen

I sit across from my husband, Richard, at the Headlands Café. We've been married sixty-five years. When people ask how long I say "Too long." The place is buzzing with customers ordering coffee and lunch, couples who consult on what to get, children who run from table to table, and screaming babies in mothers' front packs. I sip my Decaf Cappuccino, and stare at the crossword puzzle in front of me, pen at the ready. It's a hard one because it's Saturday.

"What's a word for a sub weapon?" I ask Richard

"How many letters?"

"You should know this, you were on a battleship in World War II."

"Do you have any of the letters?"

It might end in O"

Do you want more coffee for your left-over foam?"

"Sure."

Richard gets up to re-fill my cup at the counter. It's not easy to weave through the throng of people, but Richard prides himself on his physical ability at age 95. He can mend a fence, climb a ladder to change a light bulb, and mow the lawn in front and back yards, all on the same day.

I watch him and recall the young thirty year old he was when we met at my sorority house at UCLA. He was a surfer and skin-dived for lobsters in front of his Malibu apartment. After we started dating, he let me drive his Jaguar home after an evening of love-making. He taught me many things: how to appreciate and recognize different classical music composers, how to use a complicated camera so I could illustrate my articles for magazines. When I watched him fix teeth on children (he was a pedodontist) with gentleness and jokes, I knew I wanted him to be the father of my kids. He's always been my friend, my teacher, my lover. We do differ, however, on some things: he turns the heat down, I turn it up; I say I love you, he says "Casbah." He believes the atom bomb was justified, I think it was inhuman. But we laugh at everything together, and dislike the stupidities of the same politicians. We traveled to Puerto Vallarta, built a house there, went to Paris again and again, have friends all over the world. No wonder we've been together sixty-five years. I smile at him when he returns to our table.

Sandy Drewberry stops by. She wears a black Tee shirt and black jeans. Her blond hair is neatly combed back from her forehead. She has a little weight, but carries it like a Queen.

"How are you?" I ask

"I have a tumor in my head. I start radiation tomorrow in the city," she says

"Oh no," I mutter.

"It is what it is. Got to get to work." She shrugs and skips out the door like a fresh breeze.

Richard says, “What did Sandy have to say? I couldn’t hear her with all the noise in here.”

“I’ll tell you later. What’s a ten letter word for a pastel color?”

“What happened to the sub’s weapon? Try torpedo.”

“It works,” I say. “Did you know that crossword puzzles were first designed by a man named Arthur Wayne in England in the year 1911? He published a “word cross” puzzle in New York World that was almost the same...”

“Hmmm” he says. He continues to stare at the customers who enter the café. Richard loves people watching and sometimes takes out his camera to quietly snap their photos. Someone once threatened to swipe his film, but my old geezer held him off and explained that he was on public property and it was his right to photograph whomever was there.

“What’s a digression? I ask.

“It’s what you’re doing,” he says.

What’s a pastel color, ten letters?”

“I don’t know.”

“There’s a woman sitting behind you who’s wearing a polka dotted skirt and high heels. She’s pretty.

He turns around in his seat to look at the woman in the skirt. She’s reading a book and eating a bagel. She’s oblivious to us.

“What color are her shoes?” I ask

Richard looks more closely, almost falls out of his chair. He’s a little wobbly without his cane. He turns back to me and says, “Powder blue.”

“That’s it,” I say. “Powder blue. “POWDERBLUE Ten letters. Thank you sweetheart.”

“I’m ready to go now,” I say. “Are you?” We finish our coffees and exit into the street, following the woman in the powder blue shoes. The sun shines on us and we hold hands like young lovers.