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Woman Posing

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"An Elderly Couple," about 1520, oil on parchment laid down on canvas, by Jan Gossaert (Jean Gossart), licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 from [The National Gallery](#).

after Jan Gossaert's Portrait of an Old Couple (ca. 1525-1530)

So here we are,
a few years short
of wizened, fit
to sit dressed up
for a double portrait
of a marriage
that's lasted.

My husband
has his preoccupations
and I've acquired my own —
our oldest son still learning
to inherit the concern,
the surviving daughters
nursing their children
as I nursed mine
until my well-used womb

turned useless, the stillborn,
the four small losses
to chilling fevers,
most living sons at distances
I'll never travel

and, yes, my husband's hands,
which the painter studies
with a discerning skill
I wish I had, their grip,
steady and purposeful,
making my husband
the man I love.

No, *love*
is a silly word,
as the painter somehow knows.
He knows to keep tenderness
from softening our faces,
knows that, if our marriage started
with a giddy coupling
of yearning and youthful fancy,
it was simply a risky bargain.
He wants — and we've agreed —
the portrait to show
that we have earned
through years of cares,
shared and unshared,
our durable content.

Jack Kristiansen's poems have appeared in such places as FIELD, The Literary Review, Stone's Throw Magazine, Main Street Rag and The Ekphrastic Review.