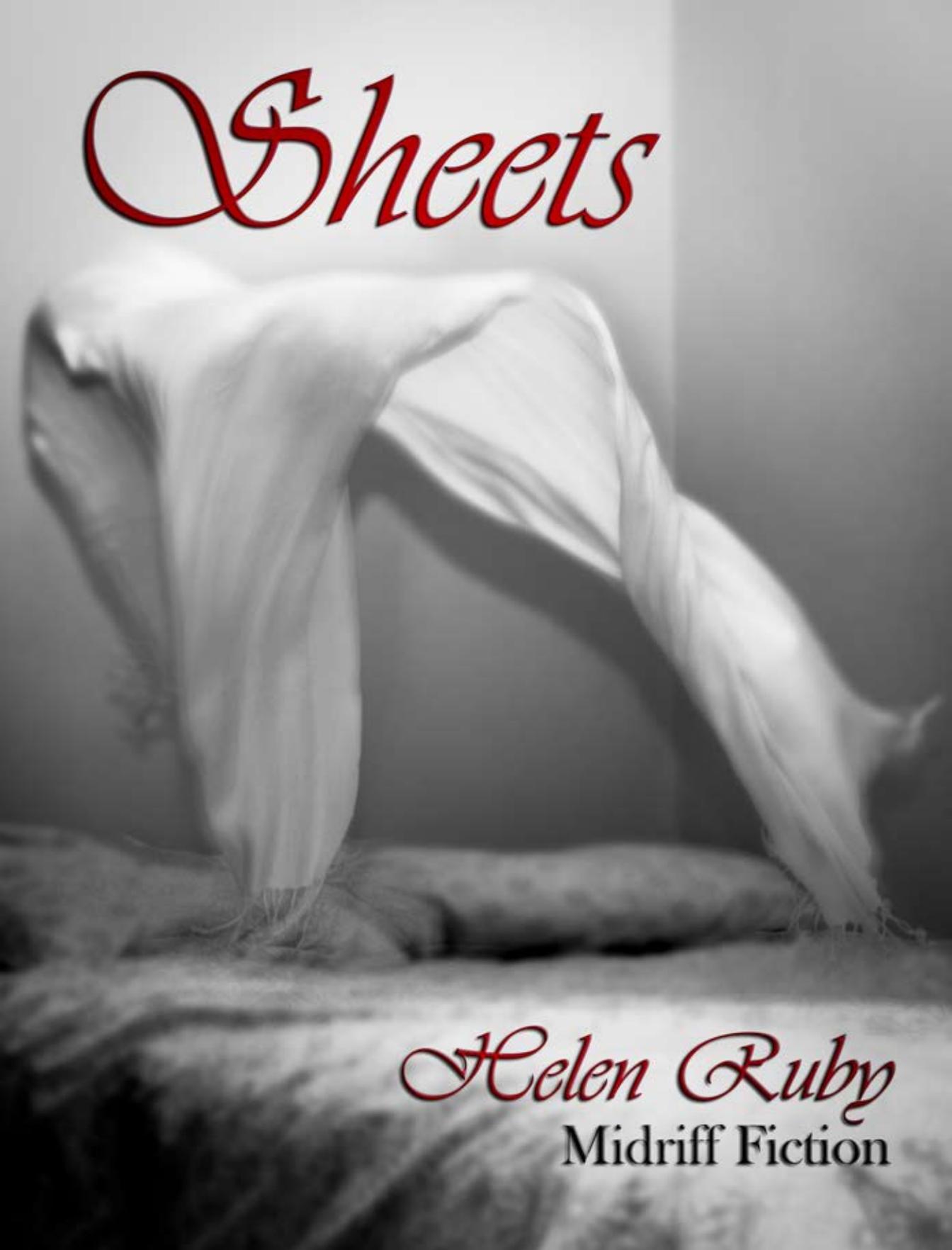


Sheets



Helen Ruby
Midriff Fiction

Sheets

by

Helen Ruby



Midriff Fiction

(Short Stories that Go for the Gut)

Sheets

© 2013 Helen Ruby. All rights reserved.

www.helenruby.com

Cover images are copyright of the author and designer, and are reproduced here in the spirit of publicity, as is the story itself. Except for inclusion in a review, no part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means— electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopying, or recording—without permission in writing from author or publisher.

Published and printed in the USA by *thewordverve inc.*

eBook ISBN: 978-0-9889264-2-4

Sheets

Midriff Fiction with Verve



www.thewordverve.com

Cover photography and design

By Pam Kennedy

<http://fineartamerica.com/profiles/pam-kennedy.html>

*To loves lost and sweet memories retained,
May you find a meeting place,
In the futures of your souls.*

After a mildly frantic search for paint supplies in his garage—supplies he knew he had, so he hadn't bought them anew, and now he wondered if possibly his memory had failed him, as it so often did lately—he pulled the bucket from the high shelf.

Paint brush. Stirrer. Handles. Rollers. Tape. And at the bottom of the bucket, a bundled-up sheet and some rags. *Perfect.*

He bounded up the garage stairs two at a time, ready to begin the chore he assigned himself this rainy weekend: a new coat of paint in the living room. It'd been, what, ten years since he'd repainted? And now with his new puppy having eaten a hole in the drywall . . . it was due. Along with some crate training.

As he unloaded the tools of the trade, he finally pulled out the sheet. Gave it a shake. It floated gently in the air before landing atop the items strewn beneath. Light blue. *Very, very* light blue now. He must have had that sheet thirty years, thirty-five years? He could almost see through it, so soft, so . . .

Memories flashed through his mind, when this sheet had been on a bed in his college apartment in Central Florida. Where he had lain, tired and sweaty, after a hard game of baseball. Where he had lain, frustrated and bored, after hours-long study sessions. Where he had lain, heartbroken and morose, after a particularly tough breakup, burying his face in her smell that was still on the sheets. He lifted an edge and held it to his nose now. Could it possibly be?

They had dated for just two years, but the memories were as close to him as this sheet was now. The sheet where she had lain tangled in a mess of her long locks, and long legs, and love. Asleep, but awake with the essence that was her, always her.

It had always been her, and for a long time, especially right now, he remembered how true that still was.

It hit him hard. He surprised himself by choking back a sudden wave of emotion. *Whoa, if this sheet could talk . . .*

Too old for this, too tired for this, he shook his head and began taping the baseboards to protect them from the paint. He looked at the sheet.

Man, sometimes he was just over the top with sentiment. Even his friends teased him about that . . . oh, if they could see him now.

He laughed out loud and continued taping.



The scent caught him first—caught him before the sight of all sights that he could have ever imagined in the entirety of his life, midlife crisis or not, rose before him.

The sheet. She was here.

“So you wanna talk?”

Before him, the soft sheet rose from the floor and twisted upward, into a tight twist that eventually untwisted in a subtle fall of material, only to twist again. Like a gentle tornado.

A giggle.

“So much fun, I remember. How much do you remember, luvah boy?”

“Pretty much everything,” he said aloud then looked around the room to make sure he was alone, which he knew he was. Still, pretty weird, talking to a sheet. He scratched his chin, coarse with a few days of growth. He remembered she liked when his beard was rough like that, and she would often rub her cheeks against his, like a cat. She might have even purred. Knowing her, it was likely.

“Yes, I purred.”

He smiled. *Well, there you have it.*

The sheet untwisted again and fell to the ground, a cotton-blend pile of . . . nothing but a sheet.

NO!

He reached for the sheet, touched it barely at first, then grabbed it in both hands and pulled it to his face, inhaled. He didn't cry, but he was close. He didn't freak out, but he was close.

Another giggle.

And the sheet then parted his hands and bade him to let go, as each end wrapped seductively around his neck. The bottom of the sheet wound from left to right around his waist. He was completely enveloped in the most loving touch he'd ever known. Covered in peace and complete joy.

But it hadn't always been that way with her. She'd been a stormy part of his life too, especially the part when she'd said goodbye forever.

"Oh stop thinking so hard. These . . . these are the best of times, here in me now."

And with that he understood.

He remembered the first time he had brought her to the apartment, laid her on the bed, kissed her face, and kissed her face, and kissed her face, until she'd asked him to stop kissing her face and kiss something else. And he did. And she did. And the excitement of that first time was woven in the very fabric that now stood before him, a fully formed woman.

It was almost funny—cut some holes in the sheet and you have a ghost costume, right? But this was no costume. This was no ghost. This was real.

It was her. A living, tangible memory?

She was as beautiful as he ever remembered, and his desire grew as he stared, unmoving except for one body part.

"Not possible, my love."

He caught himself, mildly embarrassed. "Yeah, I figured."

“Is it possible that you are more handsome than thirty years ago?” she smiled at him, an eyebrow lifted in admiration.

And he recalled “. . . that time when we sat on my bed and talked about the club we would open.”

“You recorded it so we wouldn’t forget all the details: where the speakers would go, what kind of effects, the design, the lights. We certainly shared a love for the music.”

“And dancing.”

“Yes, and dancing,” she reached for his hand. The sheet swirled around in a billowing, grand dance.

He bowed dramatically. “You know, more got recorded on that tape than our plans for our club.”

“Ah, well . . . she lowered her eyes in a feigned shyness. He knew better. She had been anything but shy.

“Where are you now? What are you doing with your, er, life?” He had so many questions, he didn’t know where to begin. “How is this happening?”

“Those are answers that do not even matter, luvah boy. My gosh, where is your sense of wonder?”

And with that, he let it all go . . . the memories overlapped and fell over one another in a rush to reach his words first. The excitement of it all filled him to the very edges of his being, like . . . “Like when I taught you how to shotgun because you didn’t want to smoke it yourself.”

“Ah ha, yes. Tell me again, how did it go?”

“I would take a deep inhale. And then you would put your lips—so damn soft, it was ridiculous—against mine—”

She interrupted. “Uh, it was actually your lips that were so soft.”

“Then you would inhale as I exhaled. And then we would just keep kissing and kissing and I would be all over you and you would be all over me. And the feeling . . . I remember feeling just like I do now. Like the love was all over me,

covering me, like a warm blanket,” he said, shaking his head at the power of the memory. “Wow. I miss that so much.”

“I have been with you always because you never let me go.”

And with that, she tumbled into a tousled mess to the ground—so like her, the flair for the dramatic.

“Oh, and don’t get paint on me.”

Then silence. Stillness. He willed the sheet to move, speak, emit something, anything. But there was nothing more.



When he had finished his painting project, he stepped back to admire his work for a moment, his mind full of thoughts, his body tired in that healthy way that tired can be. He washed the brushes, closed up the leftover paint in the can, washed his hands. He placed all the tools in the bucket, along with the rags to use another day for another project.

He folded the sheet, carefully end to end, then again and again, until it was a neat square. He walked it to his dresser and carefully laid it in the top drawer, next to some old photos of family and friends, the leash from his first dog, the baseball from his first college homerun, the cassette recorder with the tape still inside it. And he closed the drawer.

Acknowledgements

To the support team at *thewordverve* :

Pam for her amazing concept with the cover art. We needed a hot sheet shot and she gave us one!

And editors **Billie** and **Deborah** for their encouragement and editorial expertise.

To the **college friend** who allowed me to use his idea to create this story.

To my **ancestors** who unwittingly passed along the creative spark that runs like a firecracker through my veins.



Author: www.helenruby.com

Publisher: www.thewordverve.com