



old  
women,  
talking

Wilderness  
Sarchild

## Dear Old Women, Future Old Women, and All Who Love Old Women,

In our culture, old age often indicates invisibility, but the old women I know are far from invisible. We have honed wisdom over the years, developed resilience, learned to accept what is, and are not worried about what others think of us.

Old age is also difficult. We don't have long to live, we often suffer physically and emotionally, we get lonely as our loved ones pass on.

I hope these poems will encourage you to embrace and honor your aging process, whatever that might look like. May your rage burn bright as the mid-day sun. May your grief swim deep as the salt-filled sea. May your joy fly on the wings of time.

In Gracious Aging,

*Wilderness Sarchild*

## My Mother's Truth

On the day my mother yelled at my father  
for having an affair with his secretary,  
she ran outside and held on tight  
to a telephone pole, all the while screaming  
accusations at him. He was embarrassed  
and tried to get her to come into the house  
but she wasn't having it. The police  
were called. They pulled her away  
from her pole and into their squad car.  
She never came home again.

It was true that my father  
had an affair with his secretary,  
but that was forty years before.  
She held her tongue back then,  
tiptoed through my father's rages  
at mismatched socks  
and the wrong brand of whiskey.  
Smoke smoldered  
inside the blistering oven  
of her gut and bided its time  
until dementia ate her fears  
and set the wildfires burning.

All five feet and one hundred pounds  
became the Amazon's arrow  
meant to annihilate.  
Though it took three attendants  
to hold her down and change her diapers  
she was never so fierce.

Do not think it was no more  
than a crazy woman's obsession  
that she refused to eat anything  
unless every bite was mixed  
with soft serve vanilla ice cream.

Do not think she was not in charge.

Do not think he did not pay.

## Hags and Crones III

*I call on all the ages inside me to awake  
maiden, mother and crone for goodness sake  
come out, come out please do not forsake  
all that is female is what is at stake  
we must gather our power, we must make the earth quake  
and use it for justice, no room for hate  
my bones may carry years of heartache  
but I will not break  
I tell you, this old gal's  
AWAKE! AWAKE!*

## Just Say Yes!

Do you think it's possible that every poem you write  
is really the same poem, even when you think  
you're writing about something else?  
When I look at what I've written,  
hundreds of poems, I see death lurking:

*washing and singing prayers over my friend's still body*

*cutting my mother's yellowed concrete toenails when she  
no longer knew who I was*

*the water snake eating a bullfrog butt first*

*chanting names of the deceased at Auschwitz*

*young black men and women killed by those assigned  
to keep the peace*

*my own wrinkles, crepe paper skin, and fear of dementia*

Do you, too, love this life so much that you want  
to learn to love that part also? That mysterious  
passing from everything you know into all you do not know?

Do you, too, pretend death won't happen, tell your friend how sure you are that she's going to get well even though she has stage four metastatic breast cancer?

What do you propose we do about this thing that will claim us all? Can we learn to say

*Yes*

and mean

*Yes?*

I don't mean right now though it may be now,

*Yes.*

And I don't want it to hurt but,

*Yes,*

it might hurt. Or to be unjust but

it might be unjust,

*Yes.*

If you were promised that a

*Yes*

wouldn't open a door to make it come sooner

than it would have otherwise, would you say

*Yes?*

No pressure, but think about it.

I'm really trying to say

*Yes.*

Goddamnit

*Yes!*

**Wilderness Sarchild** is a poet and playwright. She is the co-author of *Wrinkles, the Musical*, a play about women and aging that premiered in 2017 and will continue to be performed on stages around the country. Wilderness is an expressive arts psychotherapist, grandmother of six, and lay worship associate at a Unitarian Meetinghouse. She is a social justice activist and consultant in conflict resolution, consensus decision making, and mediation.



Photograph by Chuck Madansky

Wilderness lives in a cottage in the woods on Cape Cod, MA, with her husband, poet Chuck Madansky. They are surrounded by wild neighbors that include turkeys, coyote, fox, deer, squirrels, and giant snapping turtles.



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In *Old Women Talking*, Wilderness Sarchild confronts head on the specter of aging that terrifies so many of us. She wrestles honestly with wrinkles, fear of dementia, the loss of friends and loved ones, and demands of herself that she say yes to aging and yes to the fact of her own eventual death. This is a necessary collection and strong medicine for all of us.

MARGE PIERCY

This book offers exactly the kinds of old women's voices our world needs to hear: strong, sexy, and loving. *Wilderness Sarchild* is a beacon of passion and wisdom. These compelling, honest poems will change lives.

ANNIE FINCH