

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-lled 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 wild fires 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? at 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!