

Forever Young

As I walked across the yard, the sun shined brightly onto my face. It was such a beautiful day. “So, why do I have to be *here*?” I thought to myself. I reluctantly walked up the front steps of the house. “I *really* do not want to go in,” I repeated to myself.

I know this is going to sound heartless, but I am going to be perfectly honest with you. I hate old people. They are miserable, irritable souls who feel that you owe them something because they have lived so long. They walk around with scowls on their faces as they murmur and complain about the music youngsters listen to these days. What is even worse is the fact that one day I will inevitably become one of them. I fear the day I look at myself in the mirror and gaze upon thinning, gray hair and sagging, wrinkled skin.

Now you can better understand why I was less than thrilled to find myself on a sunny, Saturday afternoon about to be surrounded by the decrepit. A longtime friend of the family was celebrating his eighty-seventh birthday. I had to attend as a family obligation.

Unwillingly, my finger pressed down on the doorbell. *Ding-dong. Ding-dong.*

“Hello, there!” an older woman greeted me as she swung open the door.

I introduced myself as I handed her the birthday present to place among the accumulated pile of gifts lined up near the door.

“My name is Margie. Nice to meet you! I’m glad you could make it! We need some fresh, young blood at this party!” she exclaimed with more enthusiasm than necessary.

She ushered me into a large, crowded room with oversized windows. The hot sun shining through strikingly conflicted with the cold, stale room. In the center, was an oversized table which overflowed with a variety of unappetizing casseroles made with liver, tuna, and some other unidentified food group. The meal would not be complete without dessert –green Jell-O. I watched as a herd of old people hobbled around. Plates in hand, they heaped piles of food with the mission of maximizing the plate’s full potential. My ears were graced with the melody of

cracking bones, coughing, and the harmony of multiple walkers hitting the tile floor simultaneously. As I took a deep breath, my nose was overwhelmed with the odor of must and mold, best described as “the old person smell”.

“I better see you eat something!” Margie said as she shoved a plate in my hand, and pushed me toward the table.

I began my path around the table, carefully inspecting the food. I ultimately decided on what I thought was macaroni and cheese casserole. As I tried to pick up the slimy macaroni with my plastic fork, something caught my attention.

“It’s not going to last,” someone hissed.

I glanced up to see who or what was talking to me. An elderly woman, hunched over, peered down at me through her oversized, magnified glasses. “It’s not going to last. Enjoy it while you can,” she repeated with her eyebrows raised high and her eyes bulging out of their sockets.

“Oh, yeah, I noticed there’s not much left. It must be really good!” I replied, assuming that she was referring to the casserole.

“What?” the old woman said, “No, I’m not talking about the food. I’m talking about your youth. Let me tell you honey, it doesn’t last.”

“Oh!” I awkwardly replied and then followed with an even more awkward laugh.

“You remind me of myself when I was young. I used to have long brown hair just like you. But now, as you can see, it’s all mostly fallen out,” she sighed as she ran her fingers through the few strands of gray, straggly hair left on her head.

I instinctively grabbed my hair just to make sure it was still there.

“Take a look. This is what you have to look forward to,” she said as her hands outlined her face and body. “That’s why I’m telling you to enjoy your life now. It’ll be gone before you even know it. Then, it just goes downhill quite literally.”

To drive the point home, the old woman thought it was appropriate to give me a surprisingly detailed account of her medical history. The highlight was when she showed me a peculiar growth that was developing on her back. Though, I must say when she insisted on me touching it, I was quite shocked at how squishy it was compared to its rough, hard appearance.

Unfortunately, the conversation was cut short, when the woman had to leave to take her anxiety pills. After washing my hands in bleach, I headed back to the party. The first person that caught my attention was a loud, boisterous woman. She was laughing hysterically making quite a spectacle of herself. She annoyed me as she kept flipping her freshly highlighted hair so it would purposefully fall into her face. However, that is not what initially caught my attention. I noticed she was wearing the exact same bright pink top I was. Apart from being a major fashion faux pas, I was disturbed that an obviously older woman would be wearing the same clothes that I would.

“I’ve got to say, I look better! But only because I’m younger!” the obnoxious woman screamed across the room before she broke out into a cackle. She proceeded to walk towards me. Unable to escape, I knew my fate. I would have to talk to this crazed woman.

“I can’t believe we’re wearing the same thing! How funny! Actually, it’s no surprise to me. I have always had an eye for fashion. All my friends tell me I dress better than my daughter. Whenever we go out, all the men can’t help but gawk at me....”

I stood there with a stoic face. The woman was oblivious. She was just happy talking. While standing there, I took it upon myself to figure out what was so peculiar about her face. Something was not right.

She continued to blabber on, “Believe it or not, I am sixty-eight years old. You’re shocked, right? Because most people think I am like twenty years younger. Whenever I go out with my daughter, we always get confused for sisters...”

Ah ha! I figured it out. Her face did not move. She could only bulge her eyes out, and thrust out her silicone-injected lips. The rest of her face was shiny, immovable plastic. Under the right lighting, I could have sworn I caught my reflection on her right cheek.

“...I work-out everyday. I stay active. I’ve got yoga to thank for my body. That’s my secret for staying sexy....By chance, do you have the time? I have a date tonight. My friend set me up with this man. I told her that I refuse to go out with anybody my age. Only younger men will do. Younger is the way to go...”

As the delusional woman went off to primp for her blind date, I was left to contemplate her sad existence. She was attempting to hold on to youth, yet it could not be farther from her. She ended up looking sad and desperate.

It was now six o’clock, which is considered late in the elderly time zone. The party was ending. As people began to leave, I headed over to say goodbye to the host of the party.

“I hope you weren’t bored,” James smiled at me and said.

“Honestly, I can’t say I was,” I replied, “I hope you enjoyed your party.”

“Ugh, I hate these things,” he leaned in to whisper to me, “They get old fast. And let me tell you, at my age, I’ve had my share of them.”

I laughed.

“Looking at you has brought back so many memories of when I was your age.” He said.

“Aw, good memories, right?” I said cheerfully.

“Most of them are. But, I can think of one thing that I regret not doing,” he replied.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“One of my biggest dreams was to travel and see the world. I worked hard, and saved up some money. Actually, I ended up saving up a lot. But, I never went anywhere.” He reflected.

“Why?” I questioned.

“I don’t know. I always put it off, waiting for the perfect time. Unfortunately, that right time never came.” He stated, “I got married, had kids. I was responsible for my family. I couldn’t just take off and go somewhere.”

“What about now? Can’t you travel now?” I asked with the optimism that I solved his dilemma.

“I would, but my health forbids me to set foot on a plane,” he sadly confessed. “Anyway, enough about my sad story. You better get going,” he said as he walked me out the front door.

I found a morsel of wisdom in my experience that night. Do not get me wrong. I still think old people are cranky and miserable. However, they taught me something important –I need to start living my life in the present tense. Because I am young, it is difficult for me to fully appreciate the fact that life is so short. I see my whole life ahead of me. However, as I was surrounded by the aged, they illustrated how fast time goes by and how easy it is to just let it.

I need to find what I want out of life, and then go after it passionately. I have to take hold of my present opportunities realizing that I may not get another chance. I want to be ready for the day that I look into the mirror and see gray hair and sagging skin. I hope to look in the mirror with confidence that I have lived my life without regret. Then my age will not be a sad indication that my life is over, but on the contrary will be evidence that I have lived a fulfilling life.