

The Innocence of Age

by Joey Delgado

"I want to show you something pretty."

She looked at me, chin on her chest, watery brown eyes looking up. Skin tags on her eyelids made it difficult for her to look as coquettish as she wanted. She tried to flutter what was left of her eyelashes, but syrupy tears caught her lids and made blinking a laborious affair. She altered her voice, cinching the back of her throat to raise the pitch. She wanted to sound like a little girl, like the little girls in black and white movies with ribbons in their hair and saddle shoes on their feet. She sounded like Shirley Temple with laryngitis.

"I want to show you something pretty," said Shirley Temple with laryngitis.

"Show me, Miss Rita," I said.

"Under the blanket," she said.

I pulled down her bedding. She grabbed her nightgown and pulled it up, all the way up to her chin. She moved her shoulders side to side like bossa nova music was playing in her head.

"Alright, Miss Rita, pull it down," I said.

"Look at this body. Can you imagine?" She was no longer Shirley Temple with laryngitis, but a seventy-eight year old smoker with emphysema. It was the kind of transformation I only saw in seniors when the end was near. They time-traveled in and out of decades with great ease, sometimes bringing little holdovers from each year making a kind of lifeline mashup.

"It's beautiful, Miss Rita, but we need to get you dressed," I said.

"Oh, you're no fun." I helped her pull down her gown and pull up the covers. I smoothed out the rumples and gave her hand a little squeeze when I finished.

"There," I said. "Better."

I saw her change again. Her eyes narrowed and something in her look made me think she was sizing me up, trying to figure out what she could say, what I could handle.

“There is nothing shameful about the human body. It's beautiful. Everything about it is beautiful. But the most beautiful part of the body, young man, is the vagina. It's beautiful and it's special because only fifty percent of the world has one. Only fifty percent of the world has the most beautiful and perfectly constructed part of the body. It's the wellspring from where all life begins. That's power.”

Her voice was deep, commanding. Coughs punctuated her speech as much as periods and commas, but her delivery seemed smooth and confident. She spoke like one of the great orators from the activism days of the sixties and seventies.

“Vaginas are beautiful,” she said again.

She lowered her head and rested her chin on her chest. She looked up at me and batted her eyes.

“Do you wanna see it?,” said Shirley Temple with laryngitis.

