

EDWARD FIELD

Instead of a Letter: Sins of My Old Age

The most obvious thing about moving into my 70s was [that] I had ceased to be a sexual being. —Diana Athill

In terms of the meat rack,
where you want to be wanted,
and sex is more about
someone else's pleasure than your own,
I'm in the same boat.
It was sometimes fun, but ultimately
a loss of self—that game isn't about us.
But beyond that,
the sexes are quite different.

It's quite all right for you, dear friend—
but if women, having reached a certain age,
can easily put away their sexuality,
once and for all,
it's not like that for us,
who have that external and pesky reminder,
no matter how old and droopy, to the end,

and no matter that the world thinks
it's disgusting for us
with our leaky old bodies, hobbling about,
to even think of sex,
and certainly inconceivable
for dear old gran and granddad.

I know how foolish we look—
our peculiar, dangling genitals ...
the husband with a family of six to support,
worrying he can't get it up ... and the man
who said a day without sex was wasted—

“Get a job, you bum” said an old lady in the room—
whereas I sort of agreed with him.
We can't give up on it, in one sense,
because it doesn't give up on us—
and dignity be damned.
It's not just that it feels healthy,
it's an experience that connects you
to your basic self,
and you don't need anybody else
to get there.

So it doesn't matter anymore that nobody
wants to do it with you.
Basically, a man's greatest love affair
is with his dick anyway,
and perhaps that's why women
never forgive us for it.
In sex, a man is pretty much alone,
so you and your imagination
will do just as well, especially when
nobody cares but you,
just another old fart who can hardly
get it up anymore,

and by this time, you yourself know
more about your outdated technology
to launch the rocket to the stars, so to speak,
than anyone else possibly could.

Maybe women, their beings linked to the moon,
in their last years have no need, as we do,
for this reassurance, rehearsing
not just the oblivion that we're heading to
but the victory of return.
It's a marvelous mystery of a universe
this foolish old guy leaps off into
as often as he can, and, so far,
keeps coming back.

Edward Field is working on a book of poems for his ninetieth birthday. Recent publications include the novel *The Villagers* (third revised edition), by Bruce Elliot (pseudonym for fiction with his partner, Neil Derrick); and *Kabuli Days: Travels in Old Afghanistan*.

IVAN DE MONBRISON

Two Characters with Gilded Faces, 2012
Mixed Media, 16 x 12 in



courtesy: the artist