

THE DATING BOOTH STORY

I had just turned sixty, even though I knew I didn't look it, when I wandered into a street fair in the upscale southern California neighborhood of Brentwood. As I strolled through the array of kiosks and booths a woman frantically began waving her arms in my direction.

"You! Come here!" she shouted.

Curious, I strolled towards her.

"Are you married?" she asked excitedly. I shook my head and she shoved a piece of paper under my nose. "I have got *so many* men," she cooed, "that would die to go out with you!" Now I realized she was running a booth for a dating service. "You're absolutely gorgeous! I'll have you married by the end of the year, I promise."

I was so pumped by her pitch that I was already planning what designer would do my wedding gown.

"Let's get going," she squealed, pressing a pencil into my hand. "Wait 'til you see how many wealthy bachelors I have for you!" I was mentally choosing my bridesmaids when she said, "By the way, how old are you?"

Batting my baby blues, I said, "Sixty."

The enthusiasm drained from her face and she snatched the paper from my hand as if taking matches from a toddler.

"I can't help you," she said icily, taking her pencil as well. "You're too old."

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My self-esteem deflated like a leaky balloon. Dazed, I wandered through the crowd with her words echoing in my head so loudly I was sure everyone else could hear them too – “You’re too old, you’re too told, too told, old, old, old...”

By the time I reached my car I was fighting back tears. I felt obsolete and invisible, as if I didn’t deserve love or even happiness. Too old, old, old...

Then I got mad. Wait a minute, I thought, I haven’t even peaked yet! And how many other women have been made to feel this way – even by members of their own sex? I knew then that I would make certain that this second part of my life would be just as fabulous – if not more so – as the first. I’d show that witch at the dating booth and everyone like her. Better yet, I’d find a way to share my wisdom and experience with other single women who have fallen victim to age discrimination in the most personal and devastating ways.