

*In a geriatric ward, Kate couldn't speak but was occasionally seen to be writing. After her death, her locker was emptied and this poem was found.--Gladys Elder, THE ALIENATED: GROWING OLD TODAY (London: Writers & Readers Pub.Coop./77).*

What do you see nurses  
What do you see?  
Are you thinking  
When you are looking at me  
A crabbit old woman  
not very wise,  
Uncertain of habit  
with far-away eyes,  
Who dribbles her food  
and makes no reply  
When you say in loud voice  
"I do wish you'd try"  
Who seems not to notice  
the things that you do,  
And forever is losing  
a stocking or shoe,  
Who unresisting or not  
lets you do as you will  
With bathing and feeding  
the long day to fill.  
Is that what you're thinking  
is that what you see?  
Then open your eyes nurse,  
You're not looking at me.  
I'll tell you who I am  
as I sit here so still,  
As I use at your bidding,  
as I eat at your will.  
I'm a small child of ten  
with a father and mother,  
Brothers and sisters  
who love one another.  
A young girl of sixteen  
with wings on her feet,  
Dreaming that soon now  
a lover she'll meet;  
A bride soon at twenty,  
my heart gives a leap,  
Remembering the vows  
that I promised to keep;  
At twenty-five now  
I have young of my own  
Who need me to build  
a secure happy home.  
A young woman of thirty,  
my young now grow fast,  
Bound to each other  
with ties that should last;  
At forty my young ones  
now grown will soon be gone,  
But my man stays beside me  
to see I don't mourn;

At fifty once more  
babies play round me knee,  
Again we know children,  
my loved one and me.  
Dark days are upon me,  
my husband is dead,  
I look to the future,  
I shudder with dread  
For my young are all busy  
rearing young of their own  
And I think of the years  
and the love I have known.  
I'm an old woman now  
and nature is cruel,  
'Tis her jest to make  
old age look like a fool.  
The body it crumbles,  
grace and vigour depart,  
There now is a stone  
where once I had a heart;  
But inside this old carcass  
a young girl still dwells,  
And now and again  
my battered heart swells,  
I remember the joys,  
I remember the pain,  
And I'm loving and living  
life over again.  
I think of the years  
all too few--gone too fast,  
And accept the stark fact  
that nothing can last.  
So open your eyes nurses,  
Open and see  
Not a crabbit old woman,  
look closer--see ME.

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