WE ARE NOT JAM

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Somewhere between sixty and death, the English language loses its nerve.

You are no longer old. You are seasoned. Distinguished. Well preserved. A silver fox navigating your golden years with grace and wisdom and an impressive collection of supplements.

Nobody calls you old anymore. Old, apparently, is an unspeakable word. **Instead, we invented Botox.**

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The Euphemism Industrial Complex

It starts, as these things often do, with a better word.

The result was seasoned. Distinguished. Mature. Well preserved. A whole glossy wardrobe of words designed to dress up the unspeakable thing and walk it down the runway looking respectable.

For the men, there was *"silver fox"*. Two words. A gift. Aging, apparently, only improves them.

For the women, there was an entire motivational speech nobody requested. *"Sixty is the new forty. Age is just a number. We're just getting started. Years young."*

The men got a noun. The women got a pep talk.

Here is the problem with euphemisms: they work until they don't. The moment a softened word gets too close to the thing it was softening, it curdles. It absorbs the very connotation it was invented to escape.

"Elderly" went first. Too frail. Too honest, perhaps, about what it was actually describing. So we got *"senior"*. Dignified. Respectable. And at least, finally, a discount. Paired so relentlessly with living facility and discounted dinners that it subtly began to mean exactly what elderly had meant.

Senior gave way to *"older adult"*. Clinical. Neutral. Inoffensive to the point of saying almost nothing at all. The linguistic equivalent of beige.

Older adult is currently exhausted.

The wellness industry (never one to miss an opportunity) contributed *"vibrant, vital, and active older adult"* — terms carrying the faint implication that the alternative is lying very still in a darkened room.

And then, from a Florida tourism brochure, in what can only be described as a moment of magnificent institutional delusion, came the pinnacle of the entire genre: *"Dynamically mature."*

No one left the room with their dignity intact.

The cycle, of course, continues. Somewhere right now, in a conference room with excellent lighting and a whiteboard full of adjectives, someone is workshopping the next replacement. Something crisp. Something aspirational. That is how it works.

Wrinkle Panic As A Business Model

Wrinkles, in this framework, are not a natural development. They are a flaw. A sign that something has gone wrong in the preservation process.

The message arrives subtly at first. A cream. A serum. A helpful article explaining that your skin is no longer producing collagen at the rate it once did. A reminder that time has continued moving.

Soon the solutions multiply.

Retinol. Hyaluronic acid. Peptides. Collagen powders. NAD+ boosters. Resveratrol. Adaptogens. Red light therapy. Cryotherapy. Stem cell facials.

There is collagen to drink, collagen to inject, and collagen to apply topically, because one delivery method is apparently not enough. There are injectables, procedures, devices, and, should you require it, salmon DNA. And beneath all of it sits the unspoken assumption:

You are a jar of jam approaching its sell-by date.

All of these products exist to solve the same problem. That you are, in your current condition, defective.

The Performance of Aging Well

At some point, someone decided that slowing down was a problem requiring a solution. Not an illness. Not an emergency. Just a pace that inconveniences the people around it.

The cashier has places to be. The customer service representative has a queue. The family member knows exactly where your sentence is going and sees no reason to wait for you to get there yourself. Speed, it turns out, is not just a preference. It's a moral position.

And so the slow person becomes something to be managed. Not unlike the aging jar. Something to be assisted, and, if possible, accelerated. The performance required in response is considerable.

You are not permitted to be annoyed. You are not permitted to be weary. You are expected to be wise. Serene. Inspiring. The kind of elder who dispenses gentle life lessons rather than pointing out that you just finished their sentence for the third time this week.

Aging well, it turns out, is a full-time job. And the compensation is terrible.

Just Old

Here is a proposition. Not a supplement. Not a rebranding. Not a seventeen-step solution or a biological age assessment or an emergency consultation about your telomeres.

Just a proposition.

That *"old"* is not a problem. That a person moving through the world at their own pace is not something to be managed.

That a face that has lived in it for seventy years is not a defect requiring correction. That the accumulation of time is not a crisis requiring an industry.

That seasoned and distinguished and dynamically mature and all their exhausted successors were never neutral. They were apologies.

We are not jam. We are not in need of preservation.

We are simply here. Still thinking. Still speaking. Still arriving at the end of sentences in our own time. Still doing what the English language lost its nerve to name.

Aging.

There. We said it.

***About The Mindlight Pen**: Where the sell-by date is rejected, the euphemisms are retired, and old is no longer unspeakable. Here, we dispense with the supplements, ignore the conference room adjectives, and call the thing by its name. No preservation required.*

No jars were harmed in the making of this essay, though several euphemisms were escorted firmly off the premises. ✒️

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