

On Two Old People
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“Youth” is an English language, Italian-produced 2015 film directed by Paolo Sorrentino that received a good deal of favorable notice at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival. It’s gotten mixed reviews from the American critics I’ve read, but I found it to be in the top rank and recommend it to those who have a serious interest in film. Film buffs will know what I mean when I note that “Youth” has a Fellini-esque quality to it.

Contrary to what might be assumed from its title, the film primarily deals not with being young but rather with the reality of being very old. The setting is a lavish grand hotel in the Swiss Alps. In a scene toward the end of the film, Mick Boyle (Harvey Keitel), a film director in his late seventies who is writing the screenplay for his new film, is surprised by the appearance of its lead actress, Brenda Morel (Jane Fonda), who is around Mick’s age:

Brenda: Hi Mick.

Mick: You look fabulous, Brenda. The very picture of radiance and sex appeal.

Brenda: You’re getting mixed up with the last millennium, Mick.

Mick: What, you couldn’t wait any longer? We just finished the latest version, you know. We had trouble with the last scene, but then yesterday, Eurika! it came to us. So now that you are here in the flesh, we can hand it to you. But didn’t you tell me you were going to be in Los Angeles. What are you doing in Europe?

Brenda: How many years have we known each other, Mick?

Mick: Jesus, you're putting me on the spot! Let me count.

Brenda: Fifty-three years. How many films have we done together?

Mick: Nine, ten!

Brenda: Eleven. So after 53 years of friendship and 11 films together you don't think I'm going to bullshit you now, do you?

Mick: No, I don't. I wouldn't deserve that.

Brenda: That's right, you don't deserve it. You deserve me to call a spade a spade. Which is why I dragged my ass here from L.A. To talk to you in person.

Mick: Look, Brenda, if it's about scene 21, where you are described as "ugly, feeble, a pale shadow of your former beauty," please realize that's just poetic license. I want you to be extraordinary. You still preserve intact. You still have that mystery, that allure that you had when you first became a diva.

Brenda: Stop licking on my ass, Mick. It just breaks my balls even more, especially given what I've come to tell you.

Mick: Why? What did you come to tell me?

Brenda: I'm not gonna be in the movie, Mick.

Mick: What?

Brenda: They've offered me a TV series in New Mexico with a three-year contract. An alcoholic grandmother who's suffered a serious stroke. Character's got real balls. With the money, I can pay for Jack's drug rehab, I can pay all the debts of my idiotic future ex-husband, and still have enough money to buy a house in Miami, which is something I've wanted to do for 14 years. That's why I've come to tell you this.

Mick: But this is cinema, Brenda! That's just television. Television is shit.

Brenda: No, television is the future, Mick. To tell you the truth, it's also the present. Look, let's be frank, Mick, because nobody speaks frankly in this fucking film world. You're going on 80, and like most of your colleagues you're getting worse with age. You know, the last three films you made were shit, Mick. I'm telling you, according to me and according to everybody, they were real shit.

Mick: How dare you! How dare you! So you want to be frank? Do you? Fifty-three years ago, if it weren't for me, you would still be crouching under some producer's desk. I pulled you out from under those big fat producers' underpants and made you an actress.

Brenda: You little shit! I was just fine in those producers' underpants. You know why? Because I wanted to be there. I don't owe anybody anything. I did it myself. I paid my dues. I got into Actors Studio, nobody pulled any strings for me. I supported myself washing toilets all over Brooklyn. My mother went into debt for me. And in Hollywood, oh, when I walked through that door, I was all by my fucking self! Marilyn, Rita, Grace, they shit in

their pants when they saw me coming. It's all written in my autobiography, don't tell me you haven't read it?

Mick: Unfortunately, I have. Except you didn't write it. And it is a piece of shit.

Brenda: The real shit is your film, Mick. I understand cinema, you know I do. You're the one who doesn't understand it anymore because you are old, you're tired, you don't know how to see the world anymore, Mick. All you know how to see is your own death, which is waiting right around the corner for you. You're career's over. I'm telling you flat out because I love you. Nobody's interested in this testament of yours, is that what you call it, a testament? And you risk nullifying all the beautiful films you've ever done. Which is unforgivable, Mick! It's only because of me that they are letting you do this movie. So if I pull out, I'm saving your face. And your dignity.

Mick: You're an ingrate. An ingrate and an idiot. Which is why you got ahead.

Brenda: You're right, Mick. You're absolutely right.

Mick: Okay. I'm going to make this movie without you.

Brenda: Oh, come on, Mick. Life goes on. Even without all that cinema bullshit.

Soon afterward, Mick jumped off a hotel balcony, ending his life.