“The Pretty Helmet Seller”

By François Villon

Translated by David Georgi
Consider the poor little women, who are old and left with nothing, when they see those little hussies going at it with all their might, they turn to God and ask what right He had, to let them be born so soon!

Our Lord doesn’t make a peep, for even He would lose that fight.

It seems to me that I can hear the belle who was a helmet seller rail and wish that she were young and speak aloud with words like this: “Old Age, you vicious traitor, why have you cut me down so soon? What keeps me, what, from lashing out, and killing myself right now?

You’ve robbed me of the thrilling power which Beauty granted me, to rule over scholars, priests, and merchants – for once there wasn’t a man alive who wouldn’t give me everything, however much he’d later grieve, if only I would let him have this body street-worn beggars scorn.

So many men I turned away (which was not so wise on my part) for the love of a shifty boy, to whom I gave it lavishly. Whomever else I strung along, by my soul, I loved that lad. He showed me nothing but contempt and took me for all he could get.

He used to knock me sprawling, used to walk all over me; yet I loved him. He could have dragged me on my back, and, turning, told me to kiss him, and I’d forget he’d ever hurt me. That devil, rotten to the core, would hold me and – Well, I was a fool.

What did he leave me? Sin and shame.
Well, he is dead, some thirty years now, 
and I’m still here, old and haggard. 
When I think back on the good times, 
what I once was, what I’ve become, 
or when I see my body naked, 
and see myself completely changed, 
dried up, paltry, thin and scrawny, 
I’m nearly driven mad with rage.”