

## Keep Buying Shoes

I've grown weary of chronicling the relentless tide of spam that clogs my inbox. Mundane as it may seem, one has to wonder what kind of soulless beings prey on the elderly's fragile trust? The question is rhetorical, of course – the answer, sadly, lies within the query itself.

As I ponder this somber thought, an ad for Life Insurance flickers mockingly at the periphery of my computer screen. It taunts with a sinister cheerfulness, "Over 50? Still breathing? Congratulations! You're eligible to give us your money!"

There's an attempt to cloak the gravity of death with humour, but all I envision are the futile struggles of loved ones trying to claim what was rightfully promised.

"Grandpa, you left us with a gift – the Life Insurance – but now that you're gone, the company has decided you're not worth it. Your voice is sorely needed to set things right."

Imagine the audacity: "You're over 50, you've secured our insurance for that elusive peace of mind. But when the reaper calls, why bother about claims? Surely your grieving family's pursuit of owed benefits is a sign of their greed, not their love."

Is it just me, or does this scene give anyone else the creeps? Here, the living are attempting to communicate with the dead, all in a bizarre effort to acquire money.

But let's escape these dismal thoughts.

**W**e're currently entranced by the Netflix series, "On The Verge" – a delightful distraction. It centers on women, all on the crest of forty, threading their way through life's mazes. One poses a query to Siri, "Siri, career changes for women over 40?"

The digital oracle has spoken, offering a singular path: "Office administrator, office administrator, or office administrator."

Siri's limited vision is nothing if not consistent.

Curious, I challenge Google with a similar question. “What career paths beckon men in their sixties?”

The answer is a lukewarm, “Seek out who hires the time-worn, and approach with a confidence as unwavering as your youth.”

I’m not making this up. Certainly, the undercurrent of the message might as well have been a stark and unsympathetic command, “FORFEND THE ADVANCE OF TIME” or, in a more offhand and mocking tone, a breezy “FARE THEE WELL IN YOUR TWILIGHT YEARS, ANCIENT ONE.”

I just received a PING (notification) I am the first person ever to use the word ‘forfened.’

We’ve been served cold, hard advice – it seems after the festive glow of fifty fades, around fifty, or the moment you first reach for support with intimacy (at 23 for Stanley), society deems us ready for the final curtain. This, I refuse to delve deeper into, fearing the archaic roots of the terms ‘retirement’ and ‘dysfunction.’

From the advice I’ve received, it seems there’s this expectation that when we reach a certain age – around 50 or so – we’re supposed to not just retire but fade away into obsolescence, almost as if we’re meant to die.

It brings to mind the drastic ritual in the movie “Midsommar,” though I’m not interested in tracing the origin of this morbid concept. For some, like Stanley, this perceived expiration date arrives absurdly early.

However, there appears to be one peculiar exception to this rule: if you’re a frequent buyer of shoes, your social relevance seems to get a reprieve. Your worth becomes as up-to-date as your latest shoe acquisition.

Bizarrely enough, in our society, this counts as a fact.

So, you want to live a golden life, keep buying shoes.

We are only as relevant as our most recent shoe purchase.



## STOP!"

I implore you to halt, and I do so with urgency—a plea underscored by the intensity of the word 'implore' itself.

On the edges of my computer screen, the newscasters deliver their reports with an air of detached professionalism.

They begin with the traffic update: “The accident on Knight Street Bridge has been cleared, so commuters can expect smooth sailing ahead. There is no need for concern about the individuals involved in the wreckage—they didn’t survive the incident. A dead flower memorial will be set down at the accident site later in the day. Soon to be covered in soot.”

The newscasters then pivot to the core issue at hand, one of demographic shifts and governmental headaches:

“In the not-so-distant future, everyone in British Columbia will be over the age of 65. And by ‘everyone,’ all those who are over 65, which if the ones on the cusp, like me (the newscaster didn’t say ‘me’) make it, there will be a whack of us methane producing geezers for the government to deal with. This aging population will undoubtedly present a myriad of challenges for governments to tackle.”

4

## MONEY!

Dr. Kevorkian.

The translation, boiled down to its essence, is simple: OLD PEOPLE ARE EXPENSIVE.

Perhaps, there is an ‘easy’ solution—seniors should pay the full price for their coffees at fast-food joints.

It’s an idea that strikes me as cruel.

Yet, in the grand scheme of things, who would really take notice?

Seniors aren’t fast runners.

That doesn’t make sense.

Your face.

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J and I are on a quest; publishers who send me books often include duplicate copies for me to share as gifts. Just yesterday, we distributed three.

The second one we offered up within the bustling confines of a popular coffee chain. It was J who chose who would receive it – a shop worker whose age couldn't have been less than seventy, bent over before me, faintly resembling a wisp of a ghost as he swept the floor. I couldn't be certain J had even noticed him. I also wasn't entirely sure if he was still breathing.

Upon laying eyes on the man, two conflicting emotions arose in me: admiration for the chain's decision to employ (a likely created position) this elderly, barely animate figure, and repulsion at the thought of them forcing someone so frail to labour.

A third thought wedged itself in – grimly pragmatic, wondering if I might be a suitable candidate to fill his shoes, should a position open up.

Could I envision my final days spent pushing a broom across the floor of a coffee shop for eight solid hours?

Was this an act of compassion or an act of cruelty – akin to banishing an old person to a work camp?

Hold back your judgments – those that might suggest he relishes the customer interactions. **HE. DOES. NOT.**

And it's all too likely that his manager, be it a Tiffany or a Chad, would reprimand him with a trite "If you lean, you clean. No chatting with the customers."

As I pondered this, I found myself hoping that Lloyd – the sweeper – had his life insurance in order.

I'll go back tomorrow with my resume, I'll have to amend it to stress my love of sweeping, because they sure as hell won't let me near the coffee makers.

When I was a bartender, I used to get, something rhyming with 'paid,' starting with an 'I' a lot.

I wonder if it's the same for Lloyd, the old guy, I named him Lloyd.

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6

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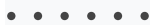
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7