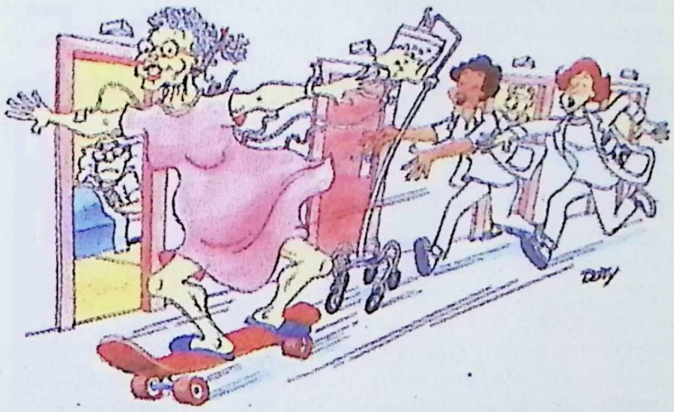
The Beauty of Aging

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They say you are as old as you feel but most often than not you are as old as you look. Most individuals who are past the prime of their life spend an inordinate amount of time doing one of two things: agonising about how old they have become or spending huge amounts of time and money on trying to reverse this cruel, unfair, natural process. For the first category of people there is hardly any remedy save half-hearted attempts to cheer them up: "Isn't it wonderful that now you don't have to worry about getting anonymous calls or how you look when you go to the mall?" For the second category it is so much easier to make them smile (not too widely though since it might give them wrinkles). The cosmetic industry is having a ball selling all sorts of anti-aging creams and lotions that ensure that the aging are 'worth it' while nutritionists and quacks come up with all sorts of concoctions that guarantee the reduction of at least ten years of a person's real age.

But no matter how sprightly you make your step, no matter how many facials and ozone treatments you spend on or how much spirulina you consume, there are spies everywhere and soon they will be on to you, rather on to your age. There are many ways to know that you have aged, or that people know you are 'no longer a spring chicken'. Just look for the signs and get real.

When beggars start calling you 'khalamma' or chacha or worse 'dadu'. You may want to smack them in the face or refuse them their measly two-taka toll but this is where you must exercise extreme self-control. After all you are too old to have tantrums.

When people in their twenties avoid eye-contact with you and ignore you completely, rushing past you as fast as they can, probably in fear that they may catch the 'aging virus'.

When you start holding in your stomach when in the presence of attractive members of the opposite sex who could be as young as your oldest offspring.

When your favourite childhood sweets start tasting way too sugary and fast-food too darn salty.

When sleep is a lot more seductive than going for ice-cream to the best icecream parlour in town. It's just too much trouble dragging oneself all the way and besides, you can't wear your nightsuit to the place since it's socially unacceptable.

When the hair on your head goes for a permanent sabbatical appearing instead, in the most unlikely and unwanted places like under the chin (for women) and out of the nostrils (for men thank God).

When you get all dreamy listening to The Eagles or Boney M or worse, Engelbert Humperdinck (now you're really an old timer).

When you start getting paranoid of all electronic devices and they reciprocate the feeling. You are scared of turning on the computer because the last time you tried that some diabolical force kept saying 'your computer has been attacked by a virus and will shut down in 50 seconds'. The ATM booths are a terror because you are sure there are vicious people behind them sometimes choosing to refrain from giving you your advice slip with the measly balance or even eating up your card!

When you meet your high school heartthrob and he has turned into an obese primate with a bulging belly, three bratty teenagers and an obnoxious tendency to talk about how well-connected his in-laws are.

When young men wearing ear-studs make you shudder and the sight of young couples in the park make you cringe with embarassment (In your days men and women were not so brazen. They sent chaste letters or at best, gave coy glances at their object of affection).

When you hear the word 'hottie' all you can think of is a steaming cup of tea.

As a woman you are pleasantly surprised that no one is ogling at you on the streets, that security guards stand up and give you smart salaams and shopkeepers no longer look you up from head to toe but instead offer you a chair to sit on. Welcome to the elders club!

This is just the tip of the iceberg of how to know you are getting on. It is not a pleasant experience but the best way to tackle it is to just accept the reality with grace and dignity. Just don't forget to say 'cool' or 'josh' when your young acquaintance offers to take you on the roller coaster in Fantasy Kingdom this weekend. It will be a thrilling yet thankfully, quick end. ■