

Getting Physical

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I started aging rapidly last week. Until then, I had been aging steadily at the rate of about one year per year, with a few exceptions, such as during the party where I drank bourbon from John Cooper's shoe while standing in the shower. When I woke up on the lawn the next morning, I discovered that I had aged nearly a decade.

But after that I felt pretty good until last week, when I went in for my annual physical examination. I get an annual physical exam about once every six years. I'm reluctant to do it more often because of the part where the doctor does A Horrible Thing.

You middle-age guys know what I mean. You're in the examining room, and the doctor has been behaving in a nonthreatening manner, thumping on your chest, frowning into your ears, etc., and the two of you are having a normal guy conversation about how George Steinbrenner should get, at minimum, the electric chair, and you're almost *enjoying* your physical examination, when, without warning, the doctor reaches into a drawer and pulls out: The Glove.

Suddenly you notice that the doctor looks vaguely like Vincent Price, and the room lights are flashing, and the music system, which had been playing *Wonderful World*, is now playing the theme from *Jaws*. And now the doctor is holding up his hand, which has grown to the size of a mature eggplant and has sprouted eight or nine extra digits, and he's struggling to pull on The Glove, which has developed a life of its own, snarling and writhing

like some kind of evil mutant albino squid. And now the doctor is turning to you, his eyes glowing like beer signs, and he's saying "Turn around hahaha-HAHAHAHA" and you're thinking OH NO PLEASE NOOOOOOOO

Once I was getting examined, and when it came time for The Glove the doctor brought in, for training purposes, *another* doctor, who happened to be a member of the extreme opposite sex, and the two of them were back there chatting away about various Points of Interest like a pair of guides on a glass-bottom-boat tour. When it was over, all I wanted was a grocery bag to wear over my head until I could get a new identity through the federal Witness Protection Program.

But last week I got through The Glove OK. In fact I got through almost everything; the only problem the doctor found—this was NOT during the glove exam—was excessive earwax, which in many cultures is considered a sign of virility. So I was feeling good, ready to schedule my next appointment for late 1996 and sprint for the exit, when the doctor looked at my cardiogram and made that "hmmmm" noise that doctors are taught in medical school so they won't come right out and say "UH-oh!"

"You have an abnormal cardiogram," he said.

He said a lot of stuff after that, but I missed most of it because I was looking around the room for a good place to faint. I do remember the doctor gesturing at an explicit diagram of the human heart and talking about a condition called a "branch bundle blockage" (or maybe he said "bundle branch blockade"), which is caused by the heart valves being connected improv-

erly to the distributor wires. Or something like that. I wasn't really following him. I felt the way I do when the guys at my service station, Sal and Bill, are attempting to explain what's wrong with my car.

"Look at this!" Sal will say, picking up a filth-encrusted object that for all I know is a fragment of Mayan pottery. "Your postulation valve has no comportment!"

"No comportment at all!" affirms Bill, genuinely disgusted that such a thing could happen in 20th-Century America.

"And look at this here!" says Sal, thrusting the thing toward me.

"Your branch bundle is blocked!" says Bill.

"You have two weeks to live!" says the doctor.

No, the doctor didn't really say that. He said that an abnormal cardiogram is perfectly normal, and it's probably nothing to worry about, but just in case, he wanted to schedule a test where I run on a treadmill and then they inject atomic radiation into my body and frown at the results.

"Fine!" I said, trying to appear composed, which was difficult because by that point I was sitting on the floor.

So, now I'm waiting to take my test, and I'm feeling *old*. I'm experiencing every one of the 147 Major Warning Signs of Heart Trouble, including Chest Pains, Shortness of Breath, Tendency To Not Notice That The Traffic Light Has Changed and Fear Of Ordering French Fries. Also my heart has taken to beating very loud, especially late at night. Perhaps you have heard it. "STOP BEATING YOUR HEART SO LOUD!" is what I am sure the neighbors are yelling. Fortunately I cannot hear them, on account of my earwax condition.

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