

THE ART OF SELF-DELUSION

A MAN CAN DREAM, CAN'T HE?

A BLINDING WHITE LIGHT BECKONS ME CLOSER. Intense heat sines my brow. I smell the sickly sweet odor of decaying flesh. No, my mistake. It's just the icing on my birthday cake.

Gasping for breath, I vainly attempt to blow out forty-eight loathsome candles. This is it baby. I am old. The idea that we are as young as we feel has its limitations. The closest I'll get to twenty-one again is at the tables in Vegas, and that's a long shot.

Well, I for one am not going to line up and march to Century City while I watch my body decompose through failing eyes. Time to turn things around. The first stop is to a barbershop to tame this graying, thinning mop.

I'm seated in the barber chair, face to face with the big mirror. It's not a pretty picture. The shrubbery over my eyes has grown with such profusion it rivals Scorsese, nevermind the thickets sprouting from my ears and nose. Good Lord, why doesn't he just start up the gas powered hedge trimmers!

But when did I get so self obsessed? It could drive one to drink (though hitting the bottle may not be such a bad idea these days — besides helping blur the reality of decay, studies show the sauce offers myriad benefits.)

Back to my hair. Still gray and thin.

Depressed at the image before me, I close my eyes as the barber starts to buzz, and conjure a far more appealing vision. A younger, thinner version of me with flowing locks. On a long tropical vacation doing my best rendition of George Hamilton. Sipping a caipirinha on Ipanema Beach. A sexy Brazilian über-model saunters by and purrs exotically about my luxurious hair. (Hey, it's my fantasy!) Drifting slowly deeper into reverie, I close out the buzz of the trimmer and my aging reality.

Long afternoon trysts with

voluptuous Giselle, zipping around Rio in my new cherry red Porsche convertible. It's true, there's no fuel like a beautiful woman and a sports car to send one's testosterone into overdrive. Who needs Cialis?

But like one too many Margaritas in paradise, things begin to sour.

Keeping up with Giselle requires so much stamina I have to hit the gym. But all that exercise (and Giselle) leave me constantly fatigued. Sleep has become a rarity and it shows: the dark bags under my eyes are frightening the locals. My nerves are shot and I fear this sleep deprivation will cause me to drive my Porsche off the road. Giselle won't like that. Except that she doesn't ride with me much anymore. While I've been going to the gym, she's discovered cheesecake.

Things really heat up under the summer skies when my spouse spies me cavorting with my sultry Samba partner. She has a new partner too — her lawyer. And suddenly the only thing I'm courting is divorce.

The final summation is that you can change the packaging, but the ingredients remain the same. The eternal struggle of mind over body manifests itself in the pitiful realization that

I'm fooling no one but myself in this vain attempt to drink from the fountain of youth. Maybe it's best to grow old gracefully and leave this youth trip to the young. After all, they have nothing much better to think about.

At least that's what I explained to my analyst that my ex-wife said to me after I scratched what is now *her* little cherry red Porsche while backing out of the detox center in my 'pre-owned' Geo Prism because I was unable to turn my sprained neck, which, incidentally, I acquired from the gym, while Giselle, who recently exploded to 200 pounds, sat by my side admiring my hair.

"You're all set," chirps the barber, awakening me from a vision of what could be — an old drunk in a Geo with a fat foreign girl.

Note to self: Stay away from Brazil and invest instead in a hand-made Italian suit.



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