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not taped
but first printed in

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Now and Then and Then Again

~~Keep
can edit~~ I am a slave to popular culture and advertising; I am a victim of my own vanity. I think about my grandmother, and am envious of her simple health and beauty routine. Yet, I wonder how she lived to be eighty years old without Today's remedies for aging and death.

I wake up each morning worrying about the twenty pounds I've gained. I start my day with two glasses of water and eight vitamins guaranteed to make me live forever and a vow to count fat grams in even my salads and bran cereal. I shower, I shave my legs and under my arms. I shampoo, condition, blowdry. I tincture my toe nails with fungicide. Sometimes I wear contact lenses if I'm going out. I cannot read or write with them, so I have to switch to one of the four pairs of glasses I carry in my pregnant tan leather shoulder tote, which also contains a tan baby bag with the backup cassette of my computer files and a contact case.

Every third day, I scrub my face with table salt and Ivory soap-- got this tip from some movie star--; just as every third day, I exercise on my Fitness Flyer. Used to, I walked fast--aerobic exercise for twenty years, thirty minute a day. But now I have a pulled tendon and a hammer toe on my left foot from wearing pointy-toed high heels. I wear special orthotics in my Nike Air walking

shoes. I have shoes I'll never wear again because of my ruined feet. I have wardrobes ranging from Barbie to circus fat-lady size. I have a Gucci bag that went out of style the day I bought it. My husband shakes his head and laughs because I have hidden all of my jewelry in places I can't remember because I keep forgetting to take my vitamin E and I'm afraid some street punk might cut off my finger to get my diamond ring. On Valentine's Day, he now gives me gift certificates from my beauty salon, rather than jewelry.

Every six weeks, I go to this salon to have my roots dyed brown to cover the gray, and every three months, I have the ends highlighted, which involves having a thick, snug, flexible, perforated rubber hat pulled down over my hair and strands snatched through the holes with a crochet needle. I want a simile to describe how I look, but can't find one. I've had three babies and birthing comes close to describing how I feel. Last time I went to the salon, my hairdresser suggested that she dye my eyebrows. I said okay as long as she could do it while my hair was coloring. Otherwise I wouldn't have time, because of all this other stuff I have to keep up.

What would Gransallie have said if she'd known that I brush my teeth three times a day because I wasn't paying attention when I went for my last cleaning and the dentist suggested grinding down my front teeth and bonding them, so now I'm afraid my too-perfect, white teeth will stain? I floss them at night while other people go to parties, then I put Retina on my face--all except for the area between my nose and top lip where I put a strip of Scotch cellophane tape to prevent those puckered gathers that will send me to the cosmetic surgeon. They now have laser for that, I've been told. Just last month, I

learned about Alpha Hydroxides. According to the directions on the jar of cream, you should put it on your face, neck and chest. I couldn't put it on my face because of my Retina, so I put it all over my body, even the tops of my hands. Which are beginning to look...well, like Gransallie's.

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"Dressed up," for Gransallie, meant slipping on a pink or white Belks cardigan over one of the cotton print dresses she bought new at Easter and Christmas. Maybe pinning a broach at the throat, or clipping on a pair of faux pearl earbobs if she was feeling fancy. And those shoes--those square-toed shoes with the block heels had to be the appropriate color for the season: black in winter, white in spring, bone in autumn. Same with her hard triangular pocketbooks. Gransallie would as soon have blasphemed as walk into church with a white pocketbook after Labor Day.

She owned one box of Tussy face powder her whole life; she wore the same shade of pink lipstick for fifty years. She kept an emery board by her sagging upholstered chair in the living room, that and her blue bottle of Nivea body lotion, which I later learned was the source of that grandmotherly smell. She went to the beauty parlor every couple of months for a trim and a perm and to get that starch-water bluing applied to her gray hair.

She was short, fat, clumsy and looked old as far back as I can remember. She was fixated on food--eating from the five basic food groups mostly, but never denying herself a slice of coconut cake or that last fried chicken back on the platter. Exercise was walking up the lane to the mailbox and back.

Gransallie's teeth soaked overnight in a small squat glass. When I was a child and went with her to Florida, and we would stay overnight in one of those green court-style motels, she would come out of the bathroom looking like a ghoul without her teeth. She was probably no older than I am now--let's round it off at fifty--which prompts me to consider how my granddaughters will remember me.

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Five-year-old Laney is spending the night. Midnight, and I hear her getting up in the room next to mine. Then I see the light from the hall fanning across my bedroom as she opens the door. Her light brown hair is humped up in back, and she is sucking her thumb. Her gray eyes are stretched and seeking, as she stops at the foot of my four poster bed.

I sit up.

She stands there watching me for a while, then comes around to my side of the bed and climbs up. She slips under the cover, facing me close. Still sucking her thumb and studying the tape above my top lip with her drowsy-cat eyes.

can cut
 Is she seeing me the way I saw my grandmother; or worse, an old woman trying to look young? Is she dreading the night when she too will begin sleeping with tape above her top lip? Will her days be spent exercising and dieting and buying? Plus some? Less some? Maybe her generation will figure out that they have to grow old and die, regardless, and come full circle back to Gransallie's time.