MS. FIX-IT The author at home in Manhattan

EYES WIDE OPEN

When her eyes started acting their age, actress and writer **Ali Wentworth** headed for the operating room—and actually told people about it! Little did she know, other women in her life had been nipping and tucking for years

I am not a vain person. In fact, I should care more. I don't work out. I bite my nails till they bleed and wait until my dark roots are so grown out that I look like one of those women who hold their Big Gulp in their cleavage and mail their panties to convicts. I'm in awe of my girlfriends who have resplendent bodies perfectly toned from Pilates, skin that has been thermo- or phyto- or something-dermed, and hair made silky with exotic oils drawn from rare coconut husks. If I shower, shave my pits, and moisturize, I consider it a full day of pampering.

So the idea of plastic surgery seemed inane and way too time-consuming. Who would elect to have someone cut his or her face? What woman could suffer through a face-lift? Steep her stitched and tattered flesh in a bucket of ice for weeks in a dark, undisclosed hotel room? Surely, I thought in my ignorance, only Joan Rivers and a handful of the women who elbow me out of the way at the Bergdorf's sale had "work" done. Little did I know, a significant portion of my friends were nipping and tucking and slicing and dicing on a regular basis.

My friend Beezie is ravishing. Her eyes are perfectly symmetric, her skin creamy and seemingly untouched by the sun (although I once saw a freckle on her ear), her legs toned from years of tennis. Even as a middle-aged mother of four, she can still wear tiny jean shorts and look like Cheryl Ladd circa 1976. Beezie is a professional photographer, and when she's staring at me midconversation, I can't help but feel she's deciding how to "fix me in post."

Recently, Beezie was in New York City for a few days. We met at the downtown eatery Lucky Strike for french fries and the hope of recapturing our youth. My costume for this performance included skinny jeans and high-top sneakers, not that I was fooling anyone. I could have been our waiter's great-grandmother. I remember once being at a bar in Beverly Hills and seeing a gaggle of girls in microskirts and stilettoed, bejeweled cowboy boots sipping pomegranate martinis, laughing and barking like baby seals while whipping their bleached hair from side to side. When they finally got up to leave and turned around, to my horror I saw that none of them was a day younger than 67. Since then I've been pushing myself to dress age appropriately. And I don't judge a woman's age by her behind, even if she's in diapers.

Beezie looked especially becoming this spring day. Like she had just emerged from six months in a hyperbaric chamber.

"I got my eyes done!" she declared, batting her lids.

"I don't know what that means," I replied, shoving a bunch of ketchup-drenched fries down my gullet.

"I got all that hanging skin on my upper lids cut off," she said.

Instantly I was aware of the fact that the skin under my eyes was starting to resemble a curled-up duvet that would soon unfold and cover my lower face.

It's important to note at this point (as I have been frequently reminded by haters on the comment sections of the Internet) that I had quite large bags under my eyes. And it's not because I was up all night doing speedballs or studying for the bar exam. It's a hereditary condition passed down from generation to generation, like chipped china or a propensity to drink. Since my early twenties, my baggy eyes had been a source of utter frustration not only for me, but also for makeup artists (who whispered sotto voce about them on set) and cinematographers (who spent hours desperately trying to relight my face). If I had too much salt or soy sauce? I awoke the next morning as Mickey Rourke. I tried concealer, Preparation H, even Scotch tape, but there my baggage hung, under my translucent skin, like pizza dough thrown against the wall.

I wanted Beezie's bright and awake eyes. I wanted her body, too, but...baby steps. One would involve being drugged into a twilight state; the other, thousands of SoulCycle spin classes.

I consulted every professional ravisher I knew, including four beauty editors and a bevy of gay men. I was referred to three doctors. I chose a female plastic surgeon based solely on the assumption that she'd be nicer when I yanked off my shower cap and went screaming into plate glass en route to the operating room. (Ever since I saw the film *Coma*, I've had tremendous fear of anesthesia.) And I hoped she'd throw in a free Pap smear.

At the consultation, the office of Haideh Hirmand, MD, was so immaculate and speckless they could have performed open-heart surgery on me on the bathroom floor. And Dr. Hirmand herself was statuesque and flawless. I pointed to her face and drooled like a toddler: "I want that! I want that!"

She inspected my face the way a gemologist might scrutinize a blood diamond.

"You have heavy bags. It's very advanced for a woman your age. I highly recommend you get this procedure as soon as you

Photographed by Hans Neumann (styled by Anna Levak; hair by Owen Gould at the Wall Group for Sachajuan; makeup by Linda Gradin at the Wall Group; manicure by Tatyana at Artists by Timothy Priano; stylist assistant: Alicia Corpening)

can. You also have sagging around your neck and—"

I cut her off. I didn't want her distracted by lopsided breasts and ears in desperate need of pinning. I took her first available surgical opening.

As I confided in friends and family about the upcoming procedure—lower blepharoplasty, with a tiny bit of upper for balance—I was stunned to learn that my weary-looking eyes had been the bane of other people's existences as well. The news was met with a unanimous response: "You must be so excited! Finally! We've been collecting donations for this for years! There's enough for boobs, too!"

The more I opened up about my plans, the more people confessed to having gone under the knife themselves. Not that they were shouting it from the rooftops. The word *blepharoplasty* was whispered the way *abortion* was in the 1950s. More than half of the women I spoke to admitted to having had their eyes tweaked. And it didn't stop there. Everything from the forehead to the vagina—vaginoplasty deserves its own essay—down to the knees. Lord Byron coined the phrase "the fatal gift of beauty." Now, if you weren't given it at birth, you can buy it! Or buy it back, later.

On the big day, I arrived at the crack of dawn with my gay male friend Joe (who took video of my nervous presurgery babble on his iPhone) at Hirmand's Parisian-looking Upper East Side townhouse. There was a discreet side entrance for people like Madonna, some kind of Underground Railroad for the immortal celebrity, but I marched in the front door practically wearing a name tag and blaring a bullhorn. I was in complete denial about the fact that I was voluntarily (at a hefty cost of more than $7,000) having my face slashed. I'm slightly embarrassed to reveal the price of such a self-indulgent act, but I do give a large portion of my income to charity. And many people keep telling me it was money well spent. I guess like when you redo the roof? Or replace the boiler?

The anesthesiologist was a strapping man in his thirties with perfect teeth and a sun-kissed look that suggested a second home. He was so charming that I felt entirely comfortable allowing him to pierce my wrist with an IV as he regaled me with stories about his new Mercedes-Benz SL550. He explained he was going to administer a cocktail that would make me very relaxed, as if I'd had a couple glasses of wine. The syringe went into my IV line, and I fell into the deepest level of sleep. A couple glasses of wine? More like a couple gallons of chloroform.

Afterward, I remember being held up like a drunken sorority girl as a (far too attractive) nurse and my husband pulled me across the marble floor of our lobby. I'm told my first question when I awoke after surgery was "Did they shave my pubic hair?" Apparently anesthesia makes me feisty—I also tried to yank off my husband's trousers in the elevator.

In the days that followed, I lay in my bed with blurry vision and ice packs on my eyes and listened to reruns of *Friends* on TV. (The show still stands up, even without visuals. And in Spanish.) Every few hours the nurse handed me fistfuls of pills, including Vicodin. A lightweight like me taking one Vicodin is a bit like a puppy chewing a sheet of acid. It alleviated the pain but rendered my limbs numb, and for a few hours I believed I was Eva Longoria. Then there were prescription eye drops, arnica gel for bruising, Tylenol, bags of frozen peas, antibiotics, and lots of gauze. My bedroom looked as if it were being readied for my last rites.

The recovery seemed endless. For the first two weeks, I was basically secluded in our apartment, not because of vanity but because my eyesight was blurry and I was physically weak. My husband was suddenly married to an 80-year-old woman in Yoko Ono sunglasses. The bruising and swelling were, in retrospect, more horrifying for my mother than they were for me. Even three months later, my eyes still felt as though they were adjusting and settling. I now believe, as with a contractor, you have to triple a surgeon's estimated time to completion.

I decided openness was the best route to take with my kids. I explained that I'd looked sleep deprived for the last 20 years and was tired of looking tired. It was my Moby Dick. Whether or not they fully grasped what I was saying, I felt good about being honest. Even though they were confused that I chose to fix my eyes when, to them, my stomach was clearly the glaring problem.

My mother thinks plastic surgery is "for the birds." Maybe, if their beaks have deviated septums. But in her early fifties she too had upper blepharoplasty. I called her a few days before my appointment and told her I was going under the knife in my quest to shave (or cut) years off my face. Her voice had that disparaging yet concerned tone only she can manage: "Well, I hope you have a good doctor."

I decided to pull the gauze off the conversation. "Well, Mom, don't forget that *you* had this surgery!"

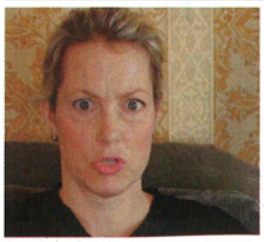
There was a long pause, long enough to allow a Manhattan bus to power by.

"Well." If such a thing is possible, her tone had grown even firmer. "That's because I lost my peripheral vision."

Right. So, from now on, let's say I was legally blind. And now I see!

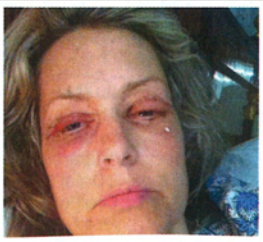
I won't be doing a Million Mom March to advocate plastic surgery anytime soon, but I do look better. In photos, I think I look as though I've been digitally refreshed—just as Beezie might have done. My face hasn't changed a bit; it's just that my eyes look like they've been at Canyon Ranch for six months. My fishmonger couldn't put his finger on it, but he kept telling me how young I looked. Little does he know I was gutted much the way the grouper in his hand was about to be. But we live in a world of never enough. When I e-mailed a photo of myself to one of my beauty-magazine pals, he screeched with excitement, "Amazing! Don't you love them? Now, just a little Restylane around the mouth, some Botox, and a neck-lift, and you're good to go!"

SIGHT FOR SORE EYES

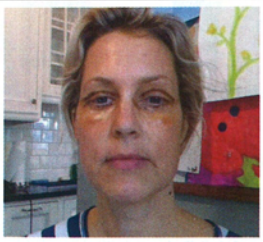


BEFORE SURGERY *Notice the bags—and my unhappiness with them.*

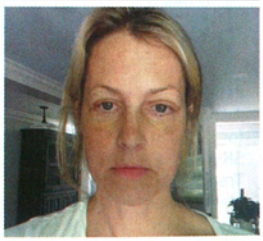
FOUR HOURS POST-OP *Feeling no pain in my Vicodin cloud. I'm told I kept singing "Happy Birthday, Mr. President."*



DAY TWO *It looks like I was in* Fight Club, *but in cute PJs. My lids feel tight, like someone Scotch-taped them to my face.*



DAY FOUR *I can finally see—and can stop listening to Telemundo.*



DAY SEVEN *People think I hit the dashboard. My lower-lid stitches have dissolved, but I still haven't had the uppers removed.*

Wentworth; Courtesy of the author