

Beauty or Bags by Jackie Papandrew

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My sixth-grade teacher was a strong believer in what they used to call "women's lib." She was also in charge of teaching the girls in our class what they used to call "sex ed." (I think now they call it "prime-time television"; but that's another topic for another day.)

I can remember this teacher assuring us - as we sat there befuddled by the incomprehensible egg-fertilization diagram - that by the time we were her age, women would no longer be constrained by outdated, sexist notions of beauty. And I believed her.

Now, I'd like to find this woman - if she's still alive - and ask her if she's ever watched any of the "Real Housewives" series on TV.

Let's face it. Women today are no more free from stereotypical notions about beauty than the men of today are free from the primal male belief that if your neighbor has a bigger television than you do, life just isn't worth living. We women would like to say we no longer care as much about our appearance as about being independent, fulfilled individuals. But who are we kidding?

That's why I found myself in the bathroom the other day, staring at my face in the mirror and holding a tube of a certain substance normally used on the opposite end of the body. I'm not at liberty to name this substance, except to say that it starts with the word "preparation" and ends with a letter that usually comes after G and before I in the alphabet.

See, being a victim of outdated, sexist notions about beauty, I'd become unhappy with the bags under my eyes. And being both cheap and a chicken, I wanted to reduce these bags without spending much money or undergoing any medical procedures that involve shots or surgery. I'd read about a nifty, bag-banishing trick in a magazine - one of those lofty "women's" publications which promote the value of being independent, fulfilled individuals with articles such as "Five Ways to Bag a Boyfriend." This magazine suggested shrinking unattractive under-eye areas with the aforementioned substance.

Now, if we lived in a world where women were valued for their minds and souls and were not subjected to chauvinistic sentiments about beauty, I would never have considered trying this. And I would never have been standing there patting this substance under my eyes when my husband walked into the bathroom and did a double take.

"Did you just put that stuff on your face?" he asked. "Isn't that supposed to be for hemorrhoids?"

I hurriedly put the tube in a drawer and scowled at him.

"It was a brand-new tube," I pointed out defensively. "It's supposed to get rid of the bags under your eyes."

Then, when he started laughing, I lambasted him on behalf of all the members of my gender.

"This is all your fault!" I said, wagging my finger at him. "You and all the other men out there with your outdated, sexist views about women."

He kept on laughing, so I tried a diversionary tactic.

“Hey,” I said, “did you hear our neighbor got a new, gigantic TV?
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