

COSMETICO

ANDREA NEIDLE

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4 PAGES

I had my first Botox tidy up on my eighteenth birthday. I know what you're thinking, eighteen is so old to start. But I didn't want to be the same as everyone else. I felt that something as wonderful as a tidy up was worth waiting for. Just like people in earlier centuries used to preserve their virginity until they were married.

Professor Darius Longchamp's research in 2030 finally proved what people had been saying for years - that sun exposure increases wrinkles and lines. All those who had been sun worshippers before literally stopped overnight and there was an increased demand for fake tans.

Then ten years later new research showed that living in a sealed environment increased one's life expectancy by up to fifteen years. People started shutting themselves off in their homes. My parents said it reminded them of the Covid pandemic in 2020 when everyone had to remain indoors.

Mum and dad were among the few who refused to shut themselves away, preferring to enjoy the fresh air and sunshine. But I was still only a kid and easily persuaded. I didn't want to look old and wrinkled or die young. It saddened me that my parents wouldn't change their minds and join me in Tidy Land. They insisted on remaining wrinkled and lined. Mum had always said that she was around at the start of all this Botox and cosmetic surgery lark and that she and dad were happy with their lives as they were – wrinkles and all.

My parents regarded the Tidies as a cult which came out of the narcissistic 2020s when people became over obsessed with their appearance. They told me that all the photographs of people in the public eye were doctored to make them appear better looking than they actually were. It wasn't then such a big step to actually physically doctor people in real life. Cosmetic surgery had already been around for years. But then the Cosmeticos and Tidy Land came into being.

In Tidy Land I didn't see the sun at all. Everyone lived in a totally sealed environment. No fresh air or sunshine that would harm the skin. No animals or insects. No flowers or trees. Only artificial flowers. An artificial world. It was

what I was used to and I didn't know any better. Our leaders, the Cosmeticos called it, "tidying up the human race." Their mission, they said, was to remove all the imperfections in the world. It started with beauty treatments and developed into getting rid of anything that didn't fit into their ideals of beauty. If someone didn't agree, then they were forced to move from Tidy Land to go and live with the Wrinklies.

In Tidy Land everyone was beautiful. There were no unattractive people. No one with ugly teeth, bad eyesight, poor hearing – you get the picture. Losing your hair? No wigs or hair pieces. Instead, it was off to Wrinkle Land for you. But if you had something that could be fixed easily, then that was no problem. Moles, freckles, skin tags, laughter lines, thin lips, body hair, crepey skin – a quick visit to the Cosmetico would put those right.

Women didn't give birth in Tidy Land. Why put up with all that trauma, pain and bodily scarring? Instead babies were taken from the Wrinklies and made perfect. In fact, Perfection was one of the top baby names last year.

I saw an old TV programme the other day. It was a documentary on the perfect body and they showed a beauty contest from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The thing is, the women weren't beautiful at all – at least not according to the Tidy Land ethos. And yet, there was something about them that made them more attractive. I think it may have been that they were all individuals. You could tell one from another just by looking at their faces.

One good thing people used to say about Tidy Land was that there was no crime. But that was only because anyone found doing anything beyond perfection ended up being removed and having to live with the Wrinklies. And who would have wanted that?

My parents seemed happy enough with their lives in Wrinkle Land. Mum enjoyed her garden. Dad belonged to a bird watching club. They played sports and did exercises. That's when you have to move your body around and use up a lot of energy to stay slim. But who needed that when in Tidy Land you could slim the easy way by just popping a few pills now and then?

I had my last tidy up a few months ago. Some lines at the side of my mouth needed adjusting. I'd been many times before so knew what to expect. The

Tidy man was a real hunk. He wouldn't say how old he was but he looked incredibly young. It made me wonder how old I might be?

Everything was going well in my life. My partner, Gemini and I, were being vetted for parenting, hoping for a Wrinkly baby. Mum and dad – I was still able to see them on the screen but not visit them – were very excited at the prospect of becoming grandparents. I was an only one, you see, so they'd been waiting for some time.

Mum said she was so relieved that she had me before they came up with the idea of removing babies to Tidy Land. I'm quite used to babies because I worked as a nursery nurse in the Tidy Lab. I helped the Cosmeticos settle the babies before they were tidied up. They still cried, unfortunately. No one's worked out yet what to do about that. An old fashioned cuddle sometimes used to work but you had to make sure you were not seen as that was against the rules.

Mum says that in the old days they used to take me for a ride in the car – even if it was in the middle of the night. The rhythm stopped me crying, she said. Mum thought it reminded me of being in the womb. But no one in Tidy Land ever saw a car. There wasn't much point in having them when you couldn't go outside. Mum and dad still have a car. They say that there's far less traffic now than there was years ago because so many people have been tidied away.

It's been good to see my parents again after all these years though I'm sad that Gemini couldn't be here with me. Her parents were already living in Tidy Land and she didn't want to leave them behind. You're probably thinking what happened to me? Why am I here in the fresh air with the birds, flowers, trees and cars? Why am I living in my old home among the Wrinklies? What made me come back, you ask?

Remember how I told you that my partner Gemini and I were waiting for a Wrinkly baby? I was becoming very impatient. The Cosmeticos had said that the new intake weren't yet perfect and that no one wanted a bald baby with imperfect skin. Then I had what I now know to be a crazy idea. There was this one particular Wrinkly baby I'd become quite attached to. It had blue eyes for

one thing and a blue eyed baby is a rarity so I understand. It seemed to like me and would stop crying when I gave it a secret cuddle.

I decided that one time when no one was looking and when all the screens had been turned off for the day, I would just pick up little blue eyes and cart it away. I didn't tell Gemini as I knew she wouldn't approve. So that's what I did. I waited till closing time, picked the baby up in my arms – which of course was already against the rules – and made for the door. But the second I touched the door all the alarms started sounding. The Cosmeticos came running from all directions and that was an end to it.

The baby was put back in its cot (I never did find out its gender) and I was told to gather up my belongings and leave. At first I thought they meant just leave the building but to my horror they meant I was to leave Tidy Land. I begged them to let me stay but it was no good.

They walked me to the wall that sealed us from the outside world, unlocked the door and pushed me out. The feel of the fresh air made me gasp. I thought I was going to die. But the thing that made me gasp even more was seeing the skin on my hands and arms. They had gone all wrinkled, veiny and freckled. My legs had these very ugly veins running through them. As for my face, without a mirror it's a mystery, thank goodness. There are no mirrors in Wrinkle land so I'm unable to see what I look like any more. Dad said that there's an old saying, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

Mum, who of course was overwhelmed with happiness at seeing me again, told me I looked as adorable as ever. But she would, wouldn't she? She's a mother after all. And as far as she's concerned I'm still the beautiful baby girl she was forced to give up all those years ago.