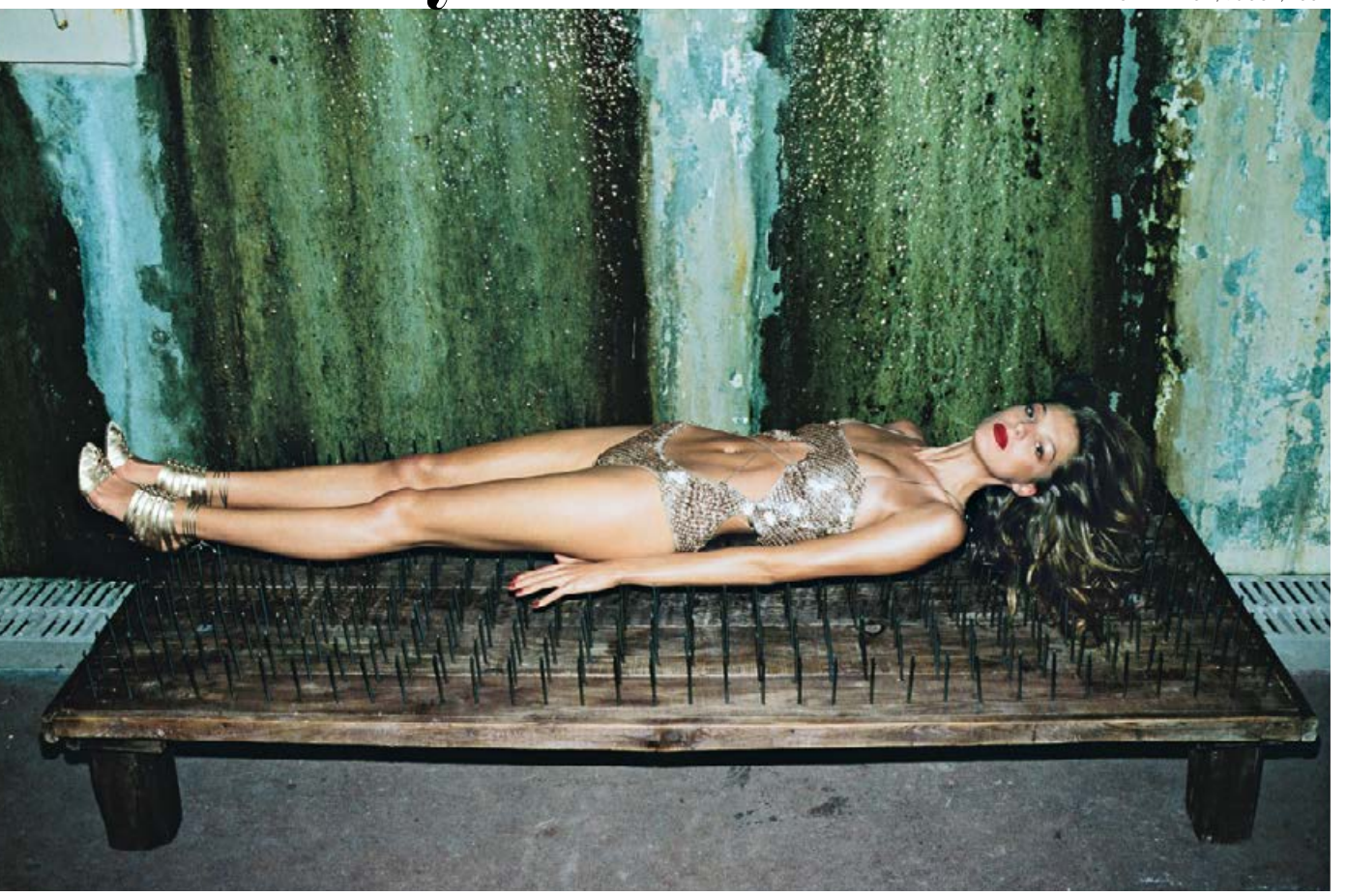


NO PAIN, NO GAIN
DARIA WERBOWY, PHOTOGRAPHED BY HELMUT NEWTON, *VOGUE*, 2004.

Pretty HURTS

FROM SKIN-TIGHTENING SHOCKWAVES TO MORE INJECTIONS THAN SHE CAN COUNT, NANCY HASS REFLECTS ON BEAUTY'S PAIN AND, ULTIMATELY, PLEASURE.

Tribeca is as damp as a warm sponge that summer night in the mid-1980s when the doorman at the nightclub Area waves me in past the crowd. I'm 24; beneath the black tuxedo jacket draped over my shoulders I wear a Dita-tight white eyelet corset dress from Fiorucci.

Once inside, I can barely breathe because the damn thing is laced to strangulation. I run my scarlet nails over the boning, wondering how long I can last.

When I look up, he is standing inches away: Bryan Ferry. I'd spied the louche rock star across the room, with his midnight-blue sharkskin suit and his entourage of models, but now he is close enough for me to smell the clove cigarettes on his breath as he witnesses my misery with amusement. "Totally worth it," he says.

Pain, we learn as we go through life, is often the price of beauty. Through our 20s and 30s, it's mostly of the temporary variety, the sort of thing you can strip off once you get back home: the aching arch of a stiletto, the pinch of a push-up bra, a bandage dress that takes your breath away, literally. When you're young, that kind of suffering is part of the equation, marking you as a beauty warrior—someone who goes to the trouble of polishing her assets even if it means a little discomfort.

But as we age, the calculus of beauty changes. When you're in your 50s, as I am, many of those simple fixes lose their charm. Five-inch heels and a bustier aren't for me anymore.

What do women want at this stage? To resemble the selves we love a bit longer. Lately, when I catch my reflection, I see that my exotic features have lost some of the softness that once leavened them. My jawline is no longer as smooth, and my hands, once so perfect that I worked as a hand model after college, no longer elicit a reaction from the manicurist. I'm BEAUTY>696

not ashamed to acknowledge it: I'd like to hold on to those calling cards for a while. I've gone from glorying in artifice to hankering for the natural, which, ironically, means I will need a little help from the professionals.

"I'm a bruiser," I warn dermatologist Elizabeth Hale, M.D., as she surveys the landscape of my face. Despite my bravado when I made the appointment, I'm feeling a little queasy about being appraised without my makeup (a sure sign it's time for a tune-up), not to mention that I blanch at a paper cut. Tall, blonde, and athletic with a wide, easy smile, Hale pretends not to notice that I'm clutching hard at the exam table.

Hale, who practices in a chic suite of offices on East Sixty-fourth Street, is well known for her artistry with injectables. She has plans for me. First she'll restore some oomph to the hollows in my cheeks with Voluma, a hyaluronic acid–based filler. It turns out that this loss of volume is what's causing the deepening nasolabial folds that have been casting new shadows. For good measure, she'll Botox between my eyes and inject a touch of Juvéderm (another hyaluronic acid, better suited to filling smaller areas) in my upper lip to correct the slight droop of the left side of my mouth that has gotten worse over the years.

While pressing a trio of ice packs against my cheeks in anticipation of the needles, I flash to a favorite photo of myself, taken in the Costa Rican rain forest on my fortieth birthday. My hair is up in a messy bun, and the sun glints off my cheeks. That's the burnished joy I want to glimpse again when I look in the mirror. Just to feel at ease with my hair up once more. To walk to the corner store barefaced.

Even with the numbing cream, the dozens of injections make my head spin. And we're not done yet. Hale's pièce de résistance involves Sculptra, an injectable made from the same material as dissolvable surgical stitches. Developed in the 1990s for HIV patients—anti-retrovirals of the era ravaged facial tissue—it stimulates the growth of new collagen, unlike most other fillers, which only plump the face temporarily. (When it was introduced, in 2004, Sculptra got a bad rap because on occasion it caused hard bumps to form under the skin; now physicians dilute it more to avoid that.) The effects of Sculptra aren't dramatic or immediate, explains Hale—it takes a month or two to see results—but I am entranced by the thought of my own body doing the work. Who would hesitate to avail herself of a treatment that boosts her own powers of regeneration?

Like all cosmetic injectables, Sculptra is not without its costs: A vial (the usual dose, parsed into more than a dozen small injections) can be $1,300—and Hale recommends coming back for a second treatment a few months later. And then there is the kneading, Sculptra's special agony. Hale demonstrates how I should massage my face with all my strength—five minutes, five times a day, for five days—to make sure no bumps form. It's brutal, like getting a facial from a sadist. *You've worn six-inch Jimmy Choos to a three-hour cocktail party,* I remind myself as she presses her thumbs into my swollen cheekbones, *surely you can make it through this.*

AND THEN THERE IS THE KNEADING, SCULPTRA'S SPECIAL AGONY. IT'S LIKE GETTING A FACIAL FROM A SADIST

"How are you doing?" she asks. "Fantastic," I squeak through gritted teeth.

My hands are next in my master plan. Signing in at the elegant townhouse office of Luis Navarro, M.D., I look down at them with reproach. They were once my secret weapon, elegant and unblemished. Just looking at them used to raise my spirits. Now the veins are visible beneath the skin, like an illustration from an anatomy book. The situation hasn't been helped by my low body-fat ratio and a longtime free-weights habit. There's a reason Madonna wears fingerless gloves.

A gentle Catalan with elegant old-world manners, Navarro, founder of Manhattan's Vein Treatment Center, is the man who erases the spider veins and varicose veins of women (and men) from Manhattan's chicest ZIP Codes. About 15 percent of his practice is hands these days. Sclerotherapy, the injection of a few drops of a mild chemical solution into the walls of a superficial capillary, weakens and collapses the vein, which is then absorbed into the body. Blood is rerouted to a healthy vein nearby, avoiding any circulation issues. (While the treated veins are permanently gone, after a year or so, new veins can eventually rise to the surface and protrude in some patients, requiring another round of treatment.) The price: $1,000.

On his Web site, Navarro calls sclerotherapy "painless," but I have my doubts. The hands, with their elaborate systems of nerves, are among our most sensitive body parts, so I steel myself for some serious hurt anyway. He tells me he has a secret weapon to numb the area and reduce inflammation: a startlingly low-tech machine that directs a narrow stream of frigid air through something that looks like a vacuum-cleaner hose. The mind, it turns out, is easily tricked out of its sensation of pain by the competing stimulus of the cold. He tries a couple of injections without the cryotherapy, and I nearly jump off the table. Once the machine is blowing freezing air on my hands, I barely notice that he is stabbing them with a syringe.

The bad news comes later, after he has pulled mummy-like compression mitts over my hands, which I will have to wear for 24 hours: Patches of coagulated blood appear in 90 percent of his patients, and those will have to be squeezed out later. Will it hurt? "Well, truthfully, that part," he says, patting me on the back, "is not so pleasant."

Our threshold for pain (the point at which we feel it) and our tolerance (how much we can take) is highly individual. Mostly it's genetic. But as we age, some scientists say, we tend to deal better with extreme hot or cold, and worse with pressure on the skin. It has to do with how our nerve endings change, and the way skin thins in some places and thickens in others. Lasers may hurt less, injections more. My friend Grace, a stunning 57-year-old who has had multiple cosmetic procedures, none of which I would know about if she hadn't told me, says she's become far more able to manage pain as she's BEAUTY>701

gotten older. It's all about the breath, she insists: If you can relax and envision the result, the pain will barely graze you.

I have heard that I will need all my Zen calm to endure Ulthera, the new treatment that tightens (and thereby lifts) lax skin via high-intensity focused ultrasound, sending sound waves down to skin's deep-tissue level, the same one that is pulled in a facelift. It's been FDA-approved for use above the brows, on the neck, beneath the chin, and along the jawline and décolletage.

Jennifer MacGregor, M.D., assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Columbia University Medical Center, practices from Union Square Laser Dermatology, a sprawling loft overlooking the park. She is a leading authority on Ultherapy, having published many papers on the subject. When she walks into the exam room, her smooth brunette hair bouncing, the first thing she wants to talk about is my new and improved hands, which I'd told her about on the phone. She's been looking at her own with disappointment lately, she says. By now I have mostly forgotten that I couldn't wear my rings for a week. I'm just so happy that I can hold them up with pride again. "Oh, I am so getting mine done," she says, writing down Navarro's address.

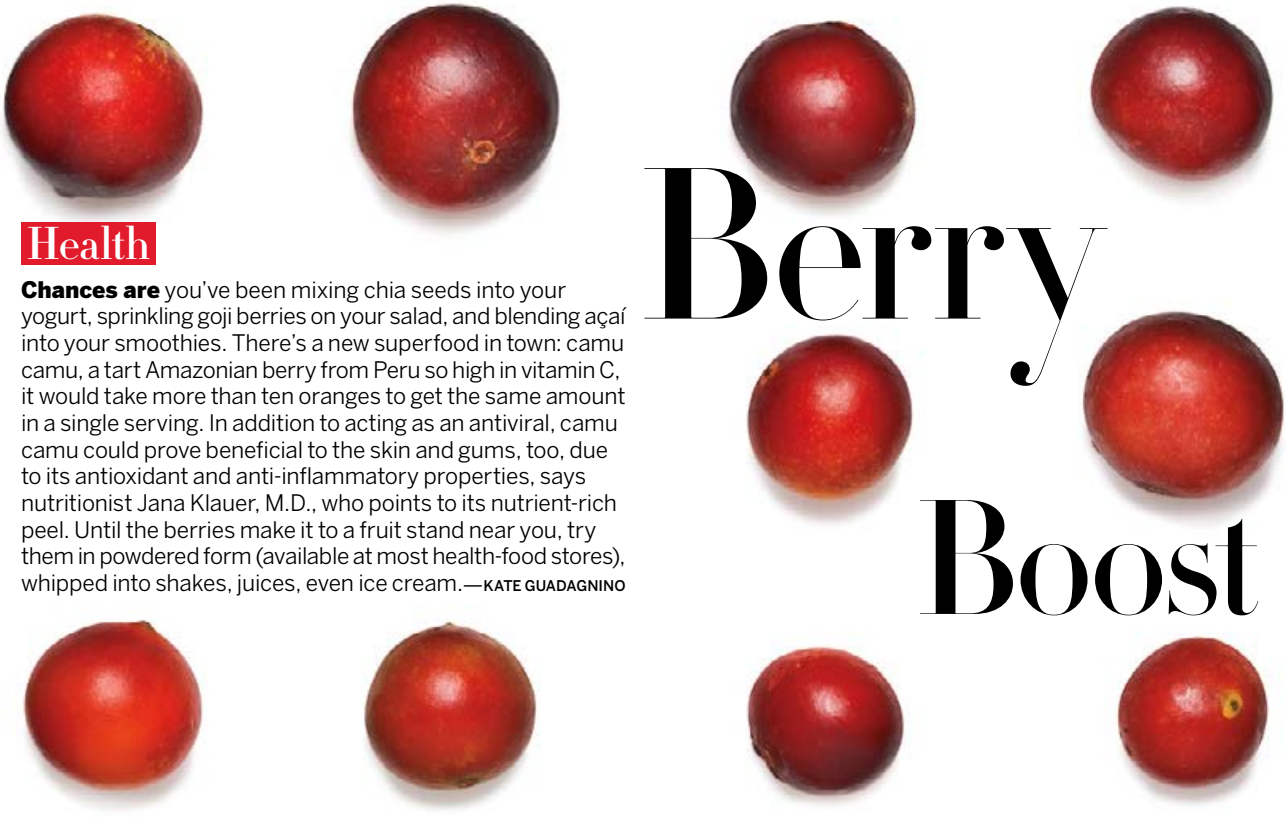
MacGregor feels Ulthera will complement the new collagen that Sculptra is supposed to be jump-starting; she also recommends it beneath my jaw and along my brow line to open my eyes a bit more. "This is definitely going to hurt," she says, cheerfully. "Don't worry, we'll give you some Valium and a bit of Demerol." Still, if I no longer have to use my hair to camouflage the long neck I once loved, I can get through this.

IF YOU CAN RELAX AND ENVISION THE RESULT, INSISTS A FRIEND, THE PAIN WILL BARELY GRAZE YOU

While the Ulthera machine is only the size of a footstool, it delivers what feels like electroshocks that jump, alarmingly, from my jaw to the top of my head as she zaps me in a grid pattern from below my cheekbone to halfway down my neck, and again above my eyes. The drugs help, but it's still an hour of extreme discomfort—and at $3,000 a session, it's a pricey leap of faith. As with Sculptra, the changes are cumulative and gradual; I won't see the tightening effects for three or four months. But the tightening should continue for years, further counteracting the aging process. "It doesn't take the place of surgery if you have serious jowls," MacGregor says, "but for someone like you, with just a little slackness, you'll see, it's pretty amazing."

On the walk home, a little woozy and high with expectation, I look at the women on the street, especially the ones in their 60s, swinging bags from Barneys or headed to one of the many yoga classes nearby. They are full of feline grace and still lovely. They seem to have figured out that the pain we sometimes endure for beauty is ultimately a gift to ourselves. My husband smiles fondly when I ask if I look better after my bout of treatments. "This is for you," he says, ruffling my hair. He laughs aloud when I wince—my scalp is still tender from the ultrasound.

Some weeks later, I think I'm starting to see the effects of the Sculptra and the Ulthera, but I wonder if I'm just imagining things. Actually, I like the suspense. The Voluma has already done its job—the nasolabial lines are gone. I pull my hair off my face and into a ponytail for a trip to the gym, something I haven't done in years. □



Berry Boost

Health

Chances are you've been mixing chia seeds into your yogurt, sprinkling goji berries on your salad, and blending açaí into your smoothies. There's a new superfood in town: camu camu, a tart Amazonian berry from Peru so high in vitamin C, it would take more than ten oranges to get the same amount in a single serving. In addition to acting as an antiviral, camu camu could prove beneficial to the skin and gums, too, due to its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, says nutritionist Jana Klauer, M.D., who points to its nutrient-rich peel. Until the berries make it to a fruit stand near you, try them in powdered form (available at most health-food stores), whipped into shakes, juices, even ice cream.—KATE GUADAGNINO