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The Silver Age

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Grandma's hair was long, glistening with silver, and undulating in soft waves. She never colored it. True to her Southern Baptist upbringing, she clung to the belief that a woman's tresses were her sacred *glory*, while for a man, they were his *shame*. I am not sure what part of the Bible she drew this from.

When she washed her hair, she let it air dry and put it in a secure bun on the back of her head that touched the nape of her neck with a pile of unpretentious bobby pins. While her hair was her splendor, it was never entirely down except when air drying after a rigorous washing, which Grandma did the way she did all things—with unparalleled enthusiasm and vigor. She secured her hair in place, as the thought of trying to work with it flowing freely probably wasn't practical.

At night, she would brush her hair like she was trying to remove thatch from a lawn, but ironically, with a delicate gold filigree brush that rested next to a matching comb that always lay together on a matching filigree mirror. I sneaked and used the comb sometimes. After the brushing, or dethatching as it were, she would quickly and deftly weave a single lengthy braid down the middle of her back to make it easier to sleep in at night or, sometimes, if she decided to take a midday nap.

Once, when I was four years old, a curious impulse overcame me one lazy summer afternoon while Grandma was napping on the divan. Yes, that's what she called a couch. In a moment of youthful fascination, I tip-toed over to cut my grandmother's opulent silver braid while she was sleeping.

What mysterious muse had possessed me to commit such an act, I cannot fathom, save for the mesmerizing allure of her shimmering hair. It was soft and flowing and sumptuous even though it was older, graying hair. My mom caught me just as the scissors were about to slice across the braid at the nape of Grandma's neck.

I never saw Grandma's hair turn completely white, although I think she never got old enough for that. It remained an undulating silver river to behold until the day she passed away at the age of 84.

I also have wavy hair, which is exceptionally thick thanks to my Italian heritage, but silver strands now gracefully intermingle with the darker remnants of my youth. Some days, when I don't have time for makeup or to dress nicely, I feel like my hair and smile are all I have left as I creep into old age. I wonder if I will ever see my hair turn wholly white.

Kenyan Rose, Black and White Photograph _Angel Nance