

Trimming
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Polly takes showers so hot that no one has ever been able to tolerate showering with her. Her practice of bathing in a scalding stream began when she was twelve and started shaving her legs. She soon discovered that the hotter the water, the softer her skin, and the closer the shave. If the water is somewhat cool, or even lukewarm, her calves and thighs bubble up in gooseflesh, and the shave becomes dappled and dull.

Despite all of her preemptive effort, she does not use shaving cream, as she likes the spicy prickle of the blade running raw over her skin. Occasionally she uses stolen hotel soaps, little bricks of waxy surfactant that slick her legs with lye, shea butter, and droplets of botanical oil. The best shaving is done with superfatted soap, usually from hotels that her parents (but not she) can afford. The trace emollients in the superfatted soap lick deeper into her pores and hair shafts, rendering flesh that appears buttered.

Polly's shaving tool is a red men's Gillette Mach3 Turbo Champion razor, also stolen, not from a hotel but from last year's boyfriend. She does not think of him when she uses the razor, but she does remember the moment when she first used it, how it glided over her hardest spots—her ankles—without so much as a scratch, and left them so perfectly smooth that the boyfriend developed a foot fetish.

Now she always begins shaving at her ankles, the knotty ridge of her spine exposed to the searing showerhead and her breasts falling down towards her chin. She admires her ruby toenails, just manicured last Saturday, as the razor strokes her synovial joint in dorsiflexion. Even though her ligaments flex beneath her skin, the razor does not snag or gash. It moves effortlessly.

As she pulls the razor up the swell of her shin bone, the water pressure drowns the whisper of the stainless steel cutting through the tiny brown hairs. In softer regions, such as the billowy flesh protecting her saphenous vein, the marshmallow fluff of her relaxed calf muscle, or the delicate hollow behind her knee, the sound of slicing follicles is impossible for the human ear. If she was in the silence of a bubble bath and shaving along her shin, the noise would stir through the suds: a choral by three blades, a monkish hum of slitting fiber: *thk thk thk thk thk thk thk*.

Even though she has perfected the process of shaving, she still misses spots: a dime-sized patch on the outside of her left knee, a sliver of forestry on the back thigh cellulite. Because she's been shaving for fourteen years, the stubble grows like moss: softly, slowly, lowly. She shaves every morning without thinking about the infertility she is enforcing upon her legs, about the feathery down permitted to men but inexcusable for her. She is not a bra-burning Amazonian feminist who refuses to shave her legs, indeed, that is the only kind of woman who will. Polly appreciates sexual dimorphism in the human species, she wants her legs to be smooth and her men to wear Eternity by Calvin Klein.

The razor licks like a cat's tongue, and the drain gurgles the shorn particles. At her supposedly youthful age of twenty-six, she has shaved enough hair from her legs to coat the Golden Gate Bridge in an inch-high layer of fuzz. Every snatch of hair on her body receives attention, shaving, waxing, plucking, shampooing, or trimming, but the legs demand the most time: fifteen minutes every morning. At her age, this results in approximately fifty-three days spent shaving her legs.

When she is finished, she places the Gillette Mach3 Turbo Champion on its little plastic shelf beside the razors that are never used, due to their poor performance: a pastel pink Schick

disposable and a rusty Quattro for Women. She tilts her face towards the shower nozzle until her body runs dry with plain water.

As she towels off, she rubs her calf muscles against each other, appreciating their fresh smoothness, the downy fur of her legs having been stripped away to reveal the tendons and fat that operate below her dimpled thighs and scarred knees. With her legs still nuzzling each other, she reaches for a lotion bottle, and that's when she feels it. The missed spots. Stubble. She must wear stockings under her skirt today to avoid the exposure of a sloppy shaving job.