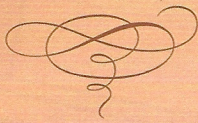


by
Sloane
Crosley

**ALL ROADS
LEAD TO
BRAZIL**



Which way is the promised land? Ask a woman who's about to get waxed

I became conscious that sweat was running down my neck. Whole blooms of it sprang up across my back like fireworks so that when I moved, the paper I was lying on moved with me. I cursed. I smacked my hand over my mouth. I spoke in tongues, some of them aboriginal in origin. This was my first Brazilian bikini wax. Though I couldn't bring myself to see how much more fleecing needed to be done, I guessed that slightly less than half my pubic hair was no longer with me. It had gone to a better place: the trash can. Suddenly the pain stopped. I remembered to breathe. I squinted one eye open. "What shape you want?" the waxer asked, thwapping my knee with a tongue depressor about to be quadruple-dipped in a vat of hot wax. Shape? "Sf," she said, "shape." On a woman who has just had a Brazilian, a thin area of hair remains. Yes, it has a shape. Not all airplanes land on the same strip. I recognized the question. The handful of times in my relatively unpolished life I've gotten my nails done, the manicurists have asked me the same thing. "What shape?" they say, pausing the file in midair. "Um, nail-shaped?" The question is always somewhat humiliating, like ordering a martini straight up without knowing what you'll get, or smoking a joint for the first time and attempting not to publicize your drug virginity. Preference indicates experience. And my preference was to shut my legs and get out of the situation entirely.

I have performed some combination of shaving and waxing at home for years, often with one leg up on the bathroom sink like a sadomasochistic ballerina. I plucked my bikini line once, a foray into the world of OCD that ended as poorly for the tweezers (which I threw out the win-

dow) as it did for me. I wish I could remember when my hair first started growing in. I distinctly remember wishing for boobs, nay, praying for them. I come from a long line of late-blooming large-breasted women. Our breasts are like the friend who comes late for drinks and gets hammered playing catch-up. But you don't wish for pubic hair as a child. I never took a Sharpie to Barbie's plastic crotch, though perhaps I should have. It may have prepared me for how fuzzi-centric the adult world is. The idea of removing genital hair always seemed arbitrary to me. Why not collectively decide it's sexy to pluck eyelashes out? What makes waxing worth it?

I was curious. Once I decided to have it done professionally, I knew I wanted the depilation of champions: the Brazilian. I also knew it came with risks. "We see it less with laser hair removal," says dermatologist Dr. Steven Victor, "but we still have about 100 patients a year who come in with problems resulting from waxing. Women with boils in their groin, painful cysts that have to be lanced and drained." It was the most disgusting sentence I had heard all day. Boils? People still get boils? I thought they went down the garbage chute of history with leeches and diphtheria. I also thought waxing was supposed to be a beauty treatment. The good news is that boil-resistant laser hair removal is all the rage. The bad news is that perma-zapping of any kind is risky and expensive, so there's still plenty of molten agony to go around. "I can take pain, and that shit is painful," says Leylah, 25, a stripper at Scores West in Manhattan. "When I started dancing, I used to wax completely because of the small thongs. But guys actually prefer a little hair on a woman's (continued on page 136)

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pussy, as long as it's not Amazon." I never thought I'd say this, but sadly, not everyone can have a stripper's mentality. "Women realize hair's not in and it's never going to be in," says Cindy Barshop, who owns the Completely Bare Spa on Manhattan's Upper East Side. True to its name, the spa stands by its conviction that sometimes Brazil isn't quite south enough. Barshop encourages women to go straight to the barren Antarctic. "Hair at all is not acceptable," she says. "Any hair."

I, for one, had held to the hopeful theory that men are like the wax itself: In order to perform, they need a little something to hold on to. What sober man wants to fuck a plucked chicken? Apparently lots of them. Two women were in the waiting room of the J. Sisters Salon on the day of my nonstop flight to Brazil, both tallish blondes, both with their heads buried in oversize magazines. They were the kind of women who look perfect naked except for their stiletto-mangled toes. The kind of women who spent more on undershirts last year than most people did on car payments. Above one was a framed picture of Gwyneth Paltrow smiling naked in a pool and cupping her breasts. "Thank you, J. Sisters!" it said, the salon's name scrawled in marker. "You changed my life!" I figured "by scarring me for the rest of it" had been cropped out.

The blondes were calm. Clearly this was not their first journey to the Southern Hemisphere. I sat on a pink chaise and mentally prepared my pelvic region for war. A smiling, legitimately Brazilian woman pulled me into a curtained room with a doctor's examination table in it. "Pull down your pants, and keep your shirt on," she commanded. Then she walked out of the room in an oddly respectful gesture, considering how naked she was about to see me. Men I had talked with before I went seemed concerned that

waxing would place me in an awkward situation. "It's so exposed, having a random head down there that's not attached to a dick," as one eloquently put it. This is perhaps indicative of a general male thought process concerning the vagina: Men see a vagina, they think sex. Doesn't matter what the context is. After having a Brazilian, I can assure you there's nothing sexual about hot wax being poured over your genitalia and removed at close range. Or if there is, it's not to be found on the Upper East Side. The only time I had a remotely sexual inkling was when the Popsicle stick came so close to the orifice in question that I thought, *Where is that thing going?*

No one tells you how hard waxing is on the knees. Having it done made me envious of paraplegics. You lie on a table with your legs spread apart, which normally wouldn't be a problem if you didn't have to touch your feet together and have a middle-aged South American woman lean on your thighs. It's a torture diamond. My Brazilian lady worked from the outside in, covering the wax with thin cloth and swiftly pulling backward. I soon realized you're not made to lie down for easy access; you do it so you're already horizontal in case you pass out. "Breathe," she tried to comfort me. "It does not hurt. It's the anticipation." I conceded this as accurate. As with men who snore, the snoring itself doesn't keep us up; waiting for the next snort does. I exhaled. She ripped. I screamed. It was most definitely not the anticipation.

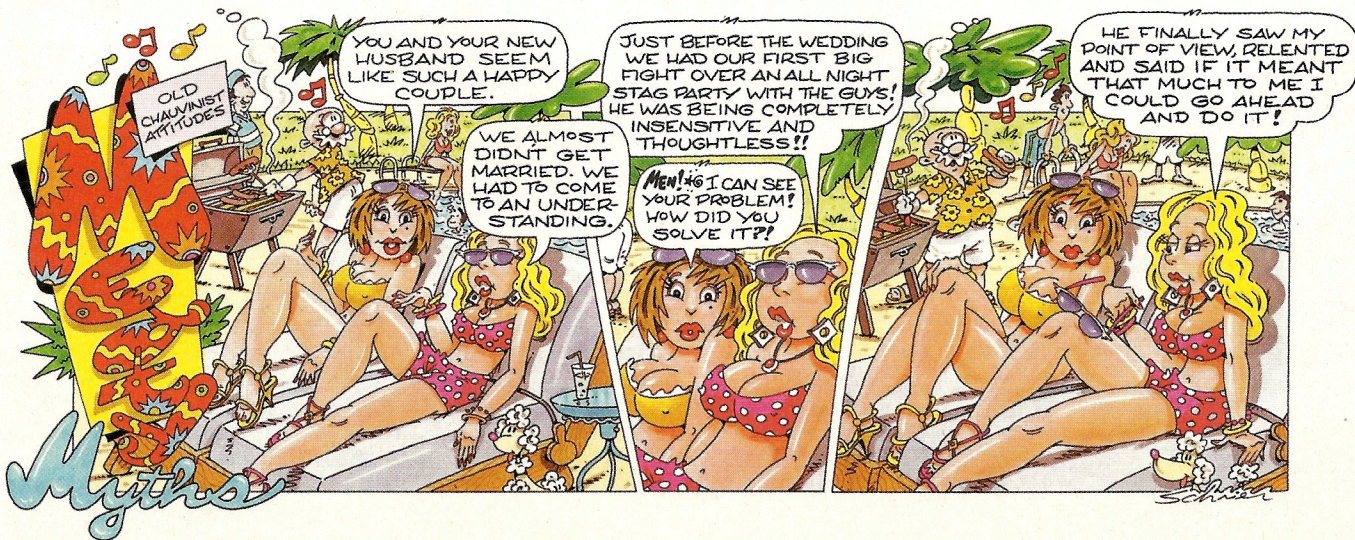
As she scraped wax on hair I didn't know I had, I wondered if it was kosher to ask her to stop. Certain activities sour and become almost intolerable if done after a certain age. Downhill skiing. Watching *St. Elmo's Fire*. I can now add bikini waxing to my personal list. Apparently it becomes easier over time. I have a newfound respect for women who choose to do it enough that it truly doesn't hurt. Other people's pain thresholds are curious things. Kristen, 28, a teacher and

frequent waxer, describes waxing as "a necessary microsecond of pain." Alison, 28, a painter and one-time-only waxer, curses the process as "like being stuck in a mousetrap." "A Xanax an hour before helps," says Jacki, 30, a magazine publicist who waxes every few months. "I've never tried drinking, but I'll bet that works wonders."

Just when I thought our relationship had seen its worst, my Brazilian bully handed me one of my legs and said, "Take this." In no position to argue, I held my ankle to my ear as she wrapped my other leg around her neck.

Great, I thought, for her next trick she's going to rip me in half. She proceeded to pour baby powder on my bottom, which caused me some confusion. This combined (a) something mothers do to baby girls, (b) the infamous male desire for the prepubescent look and (c) the fact that this traditionally comforting act of powdering is followed immediately by pain. She pulled. "See?" she exclaimed. "Look how cute!" Fantastic. I was cute, and we were done.

As she walked me to the door, my legs still shaking, I asked what compelled her to get into this bikini line of work. "It's something women need," she said. Why? "Because they do," she shrugged. It got me thinking. When did we come to need it? Women are quick to equate waxing with modern-day corset wearing, as a practice the world will look back on in 100 years and marvel that we did this to ourselves. It gives you boils, for Christ's sake. Boils. But waxing isn't perfectly analogous to that earlier constraint. With the corset, women still had their hips. This logic would in fact make waxing much worse than its historical predecessor were it not for one important detail: Not everyone sees you naked. This is the core of what makes waxing sexy—the private mystery of it. "There are different categories of women," Leylah says. "Low-key women who do things simply, women who do things to be trendy and



BY ROCKY RAKOVIC

AN INTREPID EDITOR AT A HOUSE OF WAX

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY MEN HAVE A TOPIARY IN THEIR PANTS. THIS BRAVE MAN PUT DOWN THE CLIPPERS AND GOT A BRAZILIAN, OR AS IT'S APTLY KNOWN, A PLAYBOY

I'm lying on my back, and an attractive middle-aged woman is about to smear hot wax on my balls. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Before the main event, a few words of explanation.

While men as young as their 30s may not want to hear it, trimmed male pubic hair is the norm these days. Nearly every guy I know prunes the shrubs. Women groom for us and expect us to return the favor. The few who refuse to let society have them by the short and curlies defend themselves with some version of "By the time she sees you naked, it's pretty much a done deal." Yeah, but the details of the deal have yet to be closed. You don't want to lie facedown in a shag carpet; she doesn't want to thrust her head into a prickle bush.

The ability to grow pubic hair is a rite of passage for boys, along with taking the first swig of beer and copping the first under-the-shirt feel. At the moment men begin to grow fur, they are connected to their animal forefathers. By the time in high school when I actually started doing something with my puberty—while learning how the other half looks without clothes—I also found myself in the middle of the evolution of man. I bought designer jeans and body wash, stopped using a disposable razor and began shaving more than my face. It's not that females want pussified men, but the grooming curve has finally caught up to the male. Our fathers don't have more testosterone than we do because they let the forest grow; our generation just finally evolved and began to landscape it. And it feels wonderful—like skinny-dipping in your jeans.

"If you're such a fan of bald balls, why don't you get waxed?" said my boss with a sadistic smile. "I may even let you write about it." Apparently that challenge was the office sword-in-the-stone myth, originating as a potential stunt five years ago and undertaken by many whose interest flagged after one salton or another abruptly hung up. Well, times have changed, and the hairless trend has taken root. I had no problem scheduling an appointment at Shobha, on New York's Madison Avenue, which has recently made ball waxing a dedicated service.

Before fully processing what I was getting myself into, I had an appointment for later in the week. Soon I began to realize I had agreed—nay, had requested—to have a stranger apply hot wax to my pride and rip out its mane. The anticipation was overwhelming; I felt as if I had registered my boys for some sick Japanese game show. I couldn't sleep the night before. What if the heat from the wax impairs my ability to produce offspring? What if the beautician rips off more than just hair?

I washed thoroughly that morning. My waxer would scrutinize my package more meticulously than any female I'd ever dated had. At the suggestion of a friend, I trimmed, then spritzed some cologne on my boxers, found the

loosest-fitting jeans possible and made my way out the door. Before long I was a wreck. I ducked into a bar for a painkiller. While sucking down a beer, I considered going home or at least ordering a stronger drink. Then I thought, If women are doing this, what kind of man am I to feel this fear? Although you can never trust a clock in a bar, I knew it was time.

A sweet lady at the salon led me to what looked like a homey doctor's examination room. She ordered me to remove my clothes and lie down. I've never visited a whorehouse, but I imagine this is how a session begins there as well. Forgetting about physical pain for a second, I was suddenly concerned about the embarrassment I'd feel if I sprouted oak. Then came the bad news: "You shouldn't have trimmed. It's going to be more painful." Ouch. Contrary to my friend's advice (thanks, jerk), the waxer is supposed to trim to the appropriate length.

She bent my legs into an unfathomable position and sprinkled my bits and pieces with baby powder. I have never felt so vulnerable. I tried to go Zen, but all I could think about was Steve Carell in *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*. My hands clenched down on the sides of the table. I bit my tongue. Then she applied hot wax to my not-so-happy trail. I could feel the wax draw my hairs to attention. She pressed a cloth on the area as if trying to sop up a spill. My breath grew short, and every muscle in my body flexed. I heard a rip, and that was it. I barely felt a thing.

I wanted to share my joy with someone, and since she was the only other person in the room, I did. "I'll tell you when it's going to hurt," she replied. She continued to work, touching me with gloved hands, hot wax and a cloth in places nobody had touched before, myself possibly included. Some areas seemed more tender than others. I let out a gasp and felt a twinge at certain times but nothing more. As it turns out, the hotter the wax, the quicker you want it off. The anticipation of pain never dissipated, but the blood-curdling moment I'd dreaded never came.

Strips of cloth carrying my DNA piled up in the wastebasket, and then we were done. She basted my plucked chicken with rosewater and applied cortisone cream. I was then able to examine the work in a mirror. There it was, the phallus pristine.

Gliding down the avenue as cocksure as ever, I felt a weight had been lifted from me—even if it was just an ounce or so. I knew I'd be taking another trip to Brazil in six weeks. Women have been frequent fliers for years and kept the destination to themselves. Though I wouldn't hesitate to rave about the experience to any open ear, it was clear at the time from the look on my face that I was walking around with the world's greatest secret.

Later, amid shirtless antics at a house party, pants became irrelevant and the secret was out. A woman voraciously propositioned me on the spot, but I had to decline—she wasn't waxed.

women like me." But they have one common thread. "You wax for yourself with the idea of being prepared for that someone special—a man or a girlfriend. But you wax for yourself."

After my Brazilian I went home, took off my clothes and stood naked in front of someone special: a full-length mirror. Something was missing. Not quite *Silence of the Lambs* missing, but missing just the same. Within a few days, however, I got used to it. I found bikini waxing inspires general hairlessness. I have never been so meticulous about shaving my legs as I was in the weeks following my pubic mugging. My eyebrows darted perfectly above my eyes. I was inexplicably inspired to purchase a loofah. I started walking differently, moving differently, even talking differently. I developed the kind of potty mouth attractive only on French whores and starlets. "Sorry," I said, "it's the motherfucking Brazilian talking."

Waxing also has its intangible advantages. Women can do few things for themselves immediately. Losing weight takes time. Tanning takes time. Perfect skin takes time. Waxing can in theory be done on your lunch hour. I have to say it made me feel less womanly, but it also made me feel more feminine. Femininity appears to be what occupies the space between prepubescent and womanly, and I think that's where waxing falls for the average woman. Doing it isn't about being a porn star, the same way growing pubic hair isn't about subscribing to *Ms.*

So what makes waxing worth it? Depends on who you ask. It's all about for whom the wax melts. "I feel as though the only person I get waxed for—besides myself—is my waxer," says Sophie, 35, a lawyer. "No one else pays remotely as much attention to my bits for a sustained period of time." At Agent Provocateur, a famously sexy and expensive lingerie store in SoHo, the *raison d'être* is to make women look and feel like sex on a stick. A silk thong is the only souvenir women are permitted from a trip to Brazil, which is why store manager Maria Ayala sees a lot of naked ladies who are in the market to become more naked as frequently as possible. "Most women who come into the store get waxed because you never know. It's like your grandmother always told you: Wear clean underwear in case you get hit by a bus." She had a point. Of course, that would mean I had waxed not so much for myself as for the bus driver, the paramedics and, if I'm unlucky, the mortician. It would mean the politically incorrect point of waxing is to make yourself fuckable to strangers—a slutbag reason if ever there was one. But who am I to argue? Here lies me, unconscious in the middle of the street with my dress up to my chest and my thong all askew. At least I am well-groomed.

