

Whisker Meditations

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1.

When I told my fiancé's mother about my persistent, recurring whisker—lower right, underside of my chin—she smiled sideways, said, "Be glad it's only one."

2.

I was parked in the lot outside Bed, Bath & Beyond with my then-husband. I was applying lipstick in the mirror the first time I spotted it—my whisker enjoying a stretch of unchecked growth.

It was hot in the car. We were laughing. My husband tried to pull it out with his fingertips. When that failed, he offered to tweeze it with his teeth. What an act of extreme devotion. It makes me wonder why I ever let him go.

3.

It begins, a smooth bump on the skin that you must worry for days with your fingertips. Then, a small nub, slight friction in the follicle, nothing visible. Hours pass, days. You forget. Then one day you catch it in silhouette or sunlight—a tendril like a pliable scrap of piano wire sprung from your chin.

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4.

My friend Jenny tells me about one night after she and Colin made love. Lying there, sweaty, happy, Colin spotted a long brown hair on Jenny's chest—his hair, he thought. When he tried to pick it off, the skin lifted, the follicle resisted. It was connected. "Get it off me," Jenny screamed. "Get it off."

5.

This sliver of iron ore spun from the lava core of the earth, one thin chin wire rising through Cambrian, Devonian, up through continental shelves, bedrock, shale, topsoil. This tendril—manganese, copper, platinum—must have pierced my heel, threaded my first step, wound around tendons, up shin, thigh, groin, traveled through heart, breast, throat to arrive here on my chin in my fortieth year.

6.

Sometimes in meetings at work, I catch myself stroking my sad whisker when contemplating problems. I better understand now the gestures of my bearded colleagues who, over the years, have cradled their chins, stroked with the grain, against the grain, or, when really perplexed, vigorously scratched a stubbled cheek.

7.

In the bathroom of a four-star hotel—marble shower, terrazzo floors—I turn on the lighted magnifying mirror hanging near the vanity. Never mind crow's feet, enlarged pores, the natural exigencies of age.

But, oh, in the magnifying glass, under that terrifying light—constellations of age spots, catastrophe of eyebrows, oh, whisker. All the while my fiancé is knocking on the frosted glass door. *What are you doing in there?*

8.

And now my whisker has attracted an evil twin, albino white, emerging from the doorway of the neighboring pore. How long, how long, will it be before the rest of the family arrives—the older brother, the in-laws and parents, not to mention the car full of California cousins.

9.

To pluck it, you must stand by the window, blinds open in full light with a tweezers and a hand mirror. Try to tuck yourself behind the billow of the curtain. No need for you to star in a YouTube video entitled, “My Crazy Old Neighbor Lady Plucks Her Whisker Again.”

10.

You’ll never get it on the first try or the second. You have to poke around. Then one day, the tweezer’s edge will land, small suction as the follicle releases. When it happens to me, I hold the whisker up in the light, say, *Got it! You bastard!* A small moment of satisfaction followed by vacuous air, silence, contemplating the many hours and days, the many weeks it will take for this grave act to be undone.