

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 prickly 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 salon 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.

