



**Things I wish
they had told me**

(when they said
I'd get hairier with age)

M. Amelia Eikli

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To the girl who fell in love with me completely

Things I wish they had told me (when they said I'd get hairier with age)

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1.

When you are 16, the slimmest girl in class will say she saw a werewolf in the showers, and you will taste your heart at the tip of your tongue.

“The hairs were this long, all over her body!” she’ll say, and everyone will look at anything but you.

You will cling to the fact that the hairs aren’t that long, and they’re not all over your body. Your back isn’t too bad... yet. Besides, you could have *sworn* you got them all this morning, so maybe she’s simply imagining things.

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2.

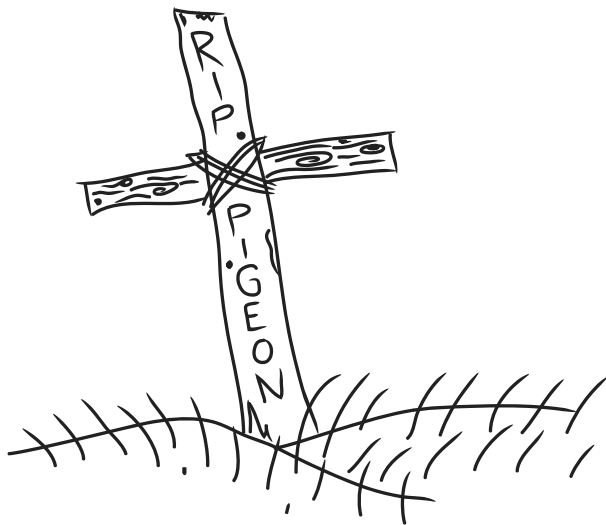
When you are 8, you'll cry over a dead pigeon in the garden. You'll make it a coffin from an old shoebox, and line the coffin with velvet from your Christmas dress. You'll secretly decorate the lid with pink glitter glue and your brother's guitar picks. Your mum will pretend not to notice.

You will make her come to the funeral. She'll stand next to you and put a hand on your shoulder while you play 'Three Blind Mice' on the recorder. It won't sound too bad.

Your mum will study your shoulder, pinch a hair between her fingernails and pull it out. It hurts enough to make you mess up the 'carving knife' bit. She'll straighten up.

"Sorry," she'll say, "we'll get the rest of them later."

The bird will not rise on the third day.



3.

It is perfectly possible to remove every single hair on your legs with tweezers and still have stubble when you're done. Somehow, hairs grow faster than you can possibly pluck them. They lie in wait, right beneath the skin, and push forward as soon as you look the other way. If you watch them, they stay hidden. When you turn, they invade.

You will think they have learned this from you, from all the times you played the green light game, or Freeze Witch, or tried to sneak up on your dad in the kitchen.

The hairs do not care that you've never won.

4.

Eventually, you'll have to tweeze, wax and shave your toes. It hurts to tweeze them. It hurts like fire, and breakups, and that time you accidentally punched your hand through a window and shards of glass pushed their way back out of your skin for years.

If you pluck your toes often enough, you stop thinking about it completely. But you never stop wondering why the two thickest hairs come out clear and brittle like glass.



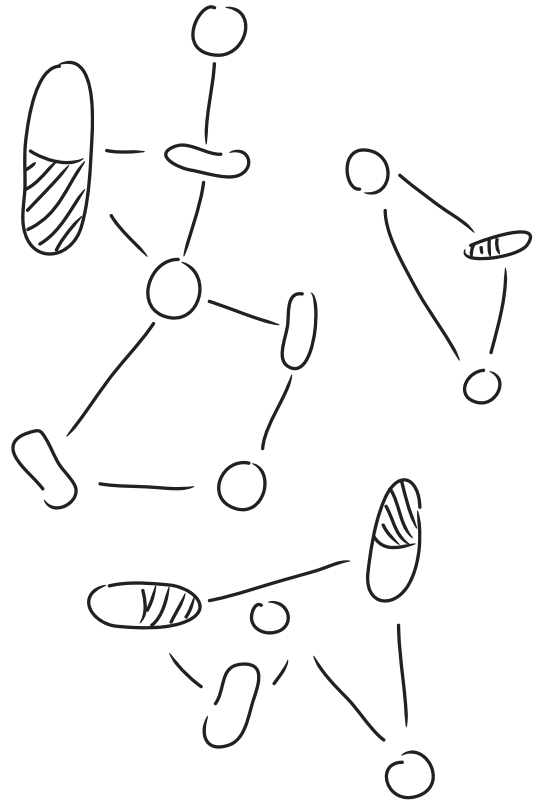
5.

Your brother will yell at your mum, a lot. He'll shout about your beard and that "everyone knows". This is a lie. Do not believe him. No one knows.

No one knows what it's like to carry a razor in your school bag and hide away in the loo to dry-shave your chin, or what it's like to shave while you pee to mask the sound.

No one knows what it feels like to tweeze for an hour each day, or to swallow the big green tablets from your mum's herbalist.

No one knows what it feels like that your mum doesn't tell you the tablets are meant to help old men with prostate problems, or what it feels like to lie prostrate on the floor at Christian summer camp and pray that God will make your body smooth like Suzie's.



6.

When you grow up, every now and then, men who don't know better, and some who do, will come at you with their penises at half-mast and say, "You may not believe this, but I actually like women like you." They will mean women who are chubby, or hairy, or sometimes both. Women they consider sure things, because – without the kindness and generosity of men like themselves – they can't get laid on their own.

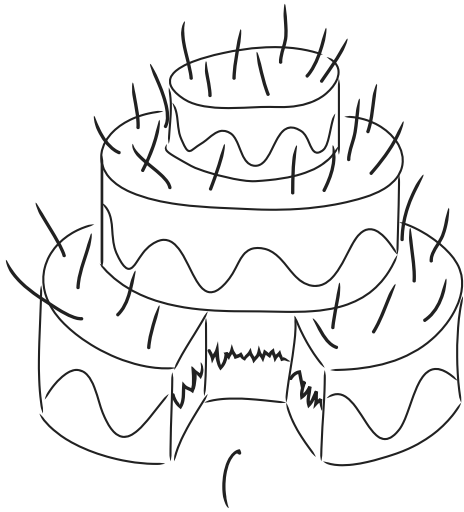
These men will touch your chin without asking, and say, "I really don't mind the stubble," and make you want to scream that you do. You will wonder what their penises are grieving. And you will tell yourself, because you secretly think yourself better than them, that their penises grieve the fact that you'll never let them near you on purpose.

7.

Later, if you realise you don't really care for men at all, you'll meet women who act much the same. They feel all brave and majestic, and will pronounce, out loud, "I love women who are natural, *I* hardly notice hairs at all." Others will whisper like a close confidant: "I see you're a bit hairy. Don't worry, I don't care about that stuff..."

They'll lean in and smile reassuringly, as if you should be grateful, as if you should feel saved. But you lost your faith in saviours back when that bird didn't rise.

"I don't care what you care about," you will say. (You'll run out of clever comebacks long before this.) These women will find you incredibly rude. You'll turn to your friends, who will roll their eyes with you, because they don't really get it either.



8.

When you are young, you will think that hairs are the very worst thing you could have been given. That God has given you the ultimate test; a challenge to show your devotion. You will cling to this feeling for years, and only realise the stupidity of it when you meet people with cancer, or when your friend loses her legs in that accident.

Then they will tell you you're barren. That you can't get pregnant, even if you wanted to. Even if you lived a different life. Even if you cared.

The hairs will be nothing, then. Just the icing that makes the cake look worse. And who cares about icing, anyway?

Besides, it turns out, God and you aren't that close.

9.

You may, once or twice, ask your mum for help to wax your back before a party. You'll scream, and she'll laugh. It's always very funny, a bonding exercise, so to speak. Whenever she looks like she wants to gag, you will look at something else. The ugly pink flowers in the wallpaper or the hidden faces in the marble tiles. Whenever she touches the hairs with her fingers, her nose will curl into her face. She will look as if you're covered in slugs, but you will always pretend not to notice.

She may never know how much it hurts you, but she'll never really get to know you, either. So it evens out.



10.

When you meet a girl who falls in love with you completely, she won't even mention your hairs until you bring them up yourself. She'll shrug and say she's never really thought about it, and to your enormous surprise, you'll believe her. Years later, she will make jokes about keeping your fur shiny, or scratch you behind your ear like a dog, and because it is her, these jokes don't hurt.

You'll joke about having "Will you marry me?" shaved onto your back and letting the proposal happen "organically", as it were. You'll both laugh at this as if it were a real joke, and there will be no awkward silence in its wake.

On your wedding night, when you're all smooth and waxed from head to toe, you'll be able to tell she finds it strange. You will appreciate this more than anything she said in her vows.

11.

One of your greatest fears when you are 18 will be going bonkers when you get old. You fear you will let it all grow, and no one will even care.

For a short while, at 30, you'll take a turn for the dramatic. No one warned you about how rapidly your eyesight would go or how quickly people would start wearing portable CD players as retro accessories, even though you still sometimes use yours – non-ironically – on long train journeys. You will experiment with letting it all grow out. A teenager at the store will spit at you and call you a freak show, out loud, and that will be the end of that.

But if you were old, you'll gather, as you stand in the bathroom and shave off your beard (with no more than five or six tears in your eyes), that little twerp wouldn't have fucking dared. If you were old, you would be just like his nan, and she's a bit bonkers too.

12.

Every month, you will smile to yourself a little, and promise – cross your heart and hope to die – that you'll never tell anyone (never ever ever) that the hairs really do grow thicker under the full moon. It doesn't bother you, not any longer, but you're still not ready to let them hear you howl.



Acknowledgements

You know if you deserve thanks,

I will have told you so.

If I haven't (or you don't)

give me a call,

and we can catch up over coffee.



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