

Brazilian Beauty

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WRITER'S COMMENT: I knew UWP 101 would be unforgettable when during the first class I learned that a decapitated human head could fit into a chicken roaster pan—quite perfectly. I want to thank Pamela Demory for not only giving continual guidance and encouragement to her students, but for opening my eyes to new interests and for making learning enjoyable (I had previously assumed this gargantuan task was more elusive than finding Big Foot). With the freedom to pick any topic regarding an event or experience for our first essay, I was inspired to write about one of the most personal beauty decisions a woman can make. Plus, it gave me an excuse to frivolously spend on cosmetic enhancements all in the name of research. I figured my Davis counterparts would relate to the practice, and the more seasoned generations can have a hearty laugh at what counts as sexy nowadays. So, to all the sensual explorers out there, the next time you are cozied up next to a silky smooth runway of lady goodness—try to remember the lengths (and pain) your woman went through just so her pearl would shine bright. And if any of you out there are curious and considering taking the plunge—try it! The blessing (and curse) about our luscious locks is . . . they will always grow back.

INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENT: Jennifer wrote this essay in response to an assignment in my Advanced Composition course that asked students to write an essay based on observation—focused on either “an interesting local place” or “a public event.” And so when she proposed writing an essay about “the event” of getting a Brazilian wax, I was initially a bit skeptical (how “public” could this be?). But she made a good case for the significance of the topic and for her intention to provide an “objective” reporting of her experience. And I have to admit that the result is an extremely enjoyable—and educational!—essay. I learned not only exactly what happens with the procedure, but also a little of its social meaning among members of Jennifer’s generation. What makes the piece work, I think, is that the tone is just right: she establishes an engaging, empathetic persona; she provides enough details for the reader to know exactly what’s going on, judiciously employing figurative language to

help us grasp the feeling of the experience without having to be too specific; and she invests the entire experience with wit and humor.

—Pamela Demory, University Writing Program

Bang! The car door slams behind me. The extra force might be the brisk wind in the air or the adrenaline coursing through my body. I am all too aware of what approaches with each step I take toward the brick building. I pass a bustling beauty salon. Two women blow dry, cut, and curl; they are intensely determined to give their clients a boost of confidence. The sound of downtown Davis buzzes in my ears, but my mind is too preoccupied on what lies 20 feet ahead. As I turn the corner to my destination, I focus on the hum of car engines as they stop at a red light, patiently waiting for their turn to go. I stop at the glass door and take in a deep breath. Normally, the crispness in the April air would bother me, but today the cold rush into my lungs calms me. As I exhale, a shiver shoots down my spine. Eyes wide, I force myself to go inside. A ray of sunlight hits the golden letters of *European Wax Center* so perfectly that it causes them to glisten and shimmer with the misguided allure of a mirage.

Sitting to my left are two girls, I would guess around early twenties or so. Relaxed, they chat lightheartedly about their upcoming weekend plans. Neither exudes the overwhelming anxiety that I feel creeping up. The receptionist is pretty, petite, and above all perky. Instantly she greets me. I step closer, with my back to the two girls waiting; I do not want them to see my cheeks flush bright rosy pink when I speak in a borderline whisper. “I have an appointment... for a Brazilian.” Fear shoots through me when she doesn’t immediately reply, and I worry I will have to say it louder. Distracted by her computer screen, she looks back up slowly.

She smiles and flashes a set of perfectly straight and gleaming white teeth, “Sure, let me get you checked in and then you’ll be good to go.” *Me? Good to go? No, I don’t think so, not with this much tension pulsing through every muscle in my body. She must have misspoken . . . the hair is good to go, not me.*

Once checked in, I take over the two giddy girls’ spot. I missed them being called back for their own waxing during my little panic attack at the reception counter. The receptionist is back to focusing on her computer, so I am left alone to ponder before getting called back myself. I briefly wonder if the stylish girls before me were also getting Brazilian

waxes done. They seem to perfectly fit the demographic of those who would want the hair on their private parts waxed off. I, for one, wouldn't be here if it weren't for my fashion-forward European friend who had suggested the idea to me. "It's so smooth and free, you will never have felt sexier... trust me, a Brazilian is the way to go!" she exclaimed while putting a heavy emphasis on the word Brazilian in her thick Romanian accent.

Brazilian. Brazilian. The word is unassuming enough, almost lightly seductive in a way. I imagine repeating it and rolling my *Rrrrs* with my tongue. When one thinks of Brazil, many things may come to mind: their world renowned soccer players, the acai berry, the festival of Carnival . . . but who thinks of Brazil and automatically associates that with a *hairless vagina*? I contemplate that now there will forever be at least one: me. However, I suspect I am not alone; many people are familiar with this association because it is a growing trend among my generation. I am curious to know whether this practice of completely removing one's pubic hair began in Brazil or its inventor attached Brazil's name to it to add the element of being exotic and socially acceptable to say aloud. I mean, who in their right mind is going to waltz in here and asked for a complete *vagina and asshole wax*?! Just as my thought begins to trail off, a woman dressed in tan surgical scrubs walks out and calls my name. It's time.

Before the young woman even gets out—"How are you doing today?" I immediately blurt out, "I've never done this before," with an obvious sign of concern plastered on my face. Her lips curl up into a half smirk half smile. She must have seen this look on others countless times before because she goes into explaining the process in a calm and confident manner, which soothes me a bit. During our walk, she introduces herself and tells me her name, Megan? Melanie? I remember it starts with an M, but as soon as she says it, it goes right through me. I am too focused; I must keep my breathing steady.

Before I realize it, we are in a white-walled room. It has a simple elegance to it, not like most salons, which are bursting with color and knickknacks that are supposed to give them an air of sophistication (which to me just comes off as stuffy and tacky). The simplicity of this room gives off a feeling of serenity, which I suspect is no coincidence. As I'm taking in the scene, my eyes land back on Molly (or is it Marissa?), and she looks at me expectantly. I blurt out, "Oh! . . . I guess I take my clothes off?"

"Yes, everything waist down. Then come lie on your back here," she replies, pointing to the thin rectangular white cloth-covered table. It looks quite uncomfortable, although I am not sure why that surprises me. Nothing about this experience is comfortable, I realize, as I strip off my pants and underwear.

"Can I keep my socks on?" I ask sheepishly.

She gives a quick chuckle and says, "Yes, that's fine . . . unless the hair is so long it's growing down to your feet?" raising one eyebrow. Her joke relaxes me enough that I position myself onto the table while she prepares the hot wax she is about to smear all over my most intimate of areas. Over the next minute, she gives me a quick explanation of exactly how the waxing will go. She reassures me not to worry; this is their *most popular* service.

Even though I cannot see the action down below, I close my eyes tightly, as if it will help with the upcoming pain. I brace myself, and the first thing I feel is a cooling sensation. She wipes me down with a special serum; it is especially developed to clean the delicate skin as well as stimulate the hair follicles to open so that they easily (and less painfully) slide out of the hair pores. The coolness and slickness of the gel sends a shiver through me. The hair on the rest of my body stands straight up; my arms flash with goose bumps.

The first strip of wax. She begins spreading the warm thick texture in the soft crease between my thigh and the hidden area beneath a bikini line. This is a new type of wax that hardens and acts as its own strip. This new technique is less painful and better for your skin, so she explains that I should not be alarmed. Waiting for the first strip to harden, she applies the second onto the other thigh crease, working in a symmetrical fashion.

Even with her reassuring statements that it will hurt *less*, she instructs me to take a deep breath. Only countless practice must have her prepared for this precise timing; at the exact moment I begin to exhale, *Rip!* Not even a full second has gone by and part of me is bald! The first feeling that I can register is relief. That wasn't *that* bad. I didn't scream or cry out or even jerk away. It reminds me of getting my blood drawn: there is only an instant when that painful prick hits your senses and your whole body feels the stinging rush, but before you can adjust and take in what has happened, the pain is gone. Quick as a blink. The other thigh goes as fast as the first, and I am nearly laughing at myself for being anxious over such a trivial pain.

Perhaps I really would have laughed aloud if that's where the appointment ended. But the appointment is far from over. She spreads onto my bare skin another layer of dark chocolate-colored wax. This time it's full frontal. My senses tell me this one will not be as forgiving as the previous two. It is like trimming the rose bushes in the front of my house, neatly making sure the edges look orderly and straight. Sure, you'd have to cut off a few branches, but this strip of wax is planning on taking off a lot more. This strip would be like using a chainsaw to cut down the entire bush! The sharpness of the tearing sound is duller but a thousand times more excruciating. My toes, still placed in my white and blue polka-dotted socks, curl with the intensity of the pain shooting through me. The after burn is almost as bad as the initial sting. I have only been stung once by a bee, but I imagine this sensation is like being stung by one hundred bees (bees with a serious attitude problem). I must have an awful grimace stuck to my face, so she applies more of the cooling gel to soothe me. "You're doing great," she says; "that is definitely one of the worst ones." *Worst ones?! There are more like that??!*

Yes. Many more. Each one more intense than the last. I try to distract myself by making idle chit chat. My first defense in any uncomfortable situation is humor, so I try to make a joke, asking, "Sooooo, I have a date tomorrow night. Am I going to be good to go by then?" Once the words leave my mouth, I realize that could be taken as a serious concern and she has probably been asked that before, with no laughing intended. After all, women go through this assault on their bodies to make themselves look better, not worse. But the one time I allow myself a glance at the work in progress I can't fathom anyone finding the red, swollen, and blotchy mess I used to recognize as my vagina attractive.

As I had guessed, she answers in a serious tone, "Oh, yes. The swelling and redness should be gone by tomorrow."

Coincidentally, I actually do have a date tomorrow night. It's a first date, so I have not even entertained the idea that I would be showcasing my new look to anyone. For me, this experience was borne out of sheer curiosity. But as I become increasingly barer and barer, I am starting to feel the seductive power and allure a Brazilian has. It could be due to the exotic stigma a Brazilian carries, but I can feel my inhibitions melting away. I notice a chill in the air and from the cold draft I feel in between my legs, I know the job is almost complete.

By now, I have acclimated to the pain. It still hurts intensely, but my

anxiety has turned to excitement to see the finished product. Now for the final act. She instructs me to lift my knees to my chest while still lying on my back; this way *every* crevice is exposed. I want to make a joke about how she should have at least bought me dinner first, but I have to use all of my focus and will to stay still while she spreads the last two strips of wax. I tighten. *RIP!* And then it's over. I survived.

There is a full length mirror on the far wall of the room. It just now occurs to me that the purpose for the reflection is to check myself out. After all, the first thing you do is look in the mirror and examine the beautician's work after a full day at the salon. Out of the corner of my eye, I can see I'm still very red and puffy. I decide to get dressed as quickly as possible and explore my new silky soft flooring in the comfort of home, or . . . *perhaps I can explore it during my date tomorrow night . . .* the devilish thought skips across my mind.

I gather my things, wallet in hand, and head back out to reception to pay. The whole area doesn't seem quite as ominous as it did a half an hour earlier. Even the clouds outside seem to be a lighter shade of grey. Now relaxed, I happily pay and book a returning appointment. I push through the glass door with a newfound sense of empowerment and sexuality.

I have the urge to test-drive my new hairdo (or rather, lack thereof) as if I just traded in an old beat up station wagon for a Ferrari. With each step towards my car, a newborn confidence builds in me. I no longer feel embarrassed to admit the sexual desires that stir inside me. The waxing not only uncovered the physical barenness of my skin, it also made me feel as if I shed a layer of inhibitions and reservations. As I open my car door, a wide grin spreads across my face; I am ready for my next adventure.