

2022 600-Word Horror Story Contest

Winners

Third Place: Razor

By Kit Decker

My father used to shave in style: in the steam-filled bathroom he would clear a face-shaped patch of condensation from the mirror, and with a badger bristle brush he'd whip up a head of foam on a Gillette shaving stick wrapped in gold foil, then set about his whiskers wielding a double-sided Wilkinson Sword blade. He would dab at cuts with a styptic pencil that I thought was a dry white lipstick then beat a tattoo on his cheeks with a scant drop from the same bottle of aftershave that lived on the top shelf of the cabinet. Each side of a Wilkinson's blade was good for two shaves, never a third.

My shaving is less luxurious. Each morning, I'd drag three little buzzing, rotating heads over my lower face, miniature hay rakes floating under a microfoil, often before I was really awake. Every few weeks, I would empty out clumps of static dust that really didn't look like hair. The more hair I removed, the more it grew – squirming hydra bursting out of every follicle. It wasn't five o'clock shadow so much as eleven o'clock smudge, then it became a forest of bristles by nine thirty. I now wield a more clinical cutthroat razor, once a mere keepsake with a mother of pearl handle, kept in its original cardboard sheath.

In my early teens, a single hair sprouted upon my chin and grew two inches long before it had a single companion. It was, briefly, my pride and joy, a promise of deliverance from childhood; cutting it off was like the sorcerer's apprentice breaking his broom. Hair grew everywhere, even where it should not – my face was obliterated, tusks flared out my nose. I was the first in town to turn into a rhinoceros but nobody else turned with me. Hair now wells up not just in but *on* my nose, on the outside, shooting madly out of the alar crease: it reminds me of the samurai demon mask I used to stare at in my *Children's Encyclopedia of the World*. Stiff as straw, almost wooden, a thatched roof, even. Looping tendrils of keratin droop from my ears so I have hacked them to ribbons. I have shaved my ears down to bloody cartilaginous nubs, and now I've gone full-on Vincent van G with the straight blade, mother of pearl handle and all. I hacked off the philtrum with nail scissors.

I shave further and further up my cheeks. I am closing in on my eyelids. I shave my eyelashes, and this is not easy, believe me. The angle of the blade is so awkward. But no, I will not have hair on my eyelids. I shave them, too, and they bleed, they bleed copiously. I snip them right back to the zygomatic. It reminds me of bearding mussels. I trim my eyebrows, I want them gone, no snipping or shaping - I dig them out of my forehead tweezing out great clumps at a time. 'Corneal dermoids' - hairy eyeballs are real - I saw it on the internet.

I shower in nigh on boiling water, open the pores, have the hairs standing up and out and waving, ready to be plucked, ripped away, but they are still in there, so I will carve right through the stratum corneum, lucidum, granulosum, spinosum, basale - remove the roots.

With the edge of my palm, I clear a face-shaped patch in the steam on the mirror; pinkish water beads and runs down in little jagged rivulets. I have a cutthroat razor in my hand, steel honed to a wicked edge.