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Waxing Philosophical

by

Here's what it feels like normally: You lie down uncomfortably on a small white crinkly table after you've taken off your pants. The attendant examines your crotch and pulls aside the edge of your panties, asking you to hold it for her. She then applies hot—just a smidgen too hot—wax to the area with a tongue depressor. You can't decide whether it feels good or hurts. The sticky wax pulls your hair a bit as it's spread around. Next, the waxer takes a piece of linen and presses it down, smoothing it. This feels nice. What follows does not, and, just like any unpleasant experience, the buildup is almost worse than the actual event. She pulls your skin taut, quickly lifts up the linen and tears it away, tearing out the hair and what feels like the uppermost layer of your skin. It hurts, and before you can recover she quickly does it again and again, moving lower between your legs, closer to your more sensitive parts. This hurts more. Afterwards, she repeats on the other side.

When she's done, the waxer applies cold cream to the now-bare and red area, and you suddenly feel like you're an electrical fire with water thrown on it. She finishes by sprinkling talcum powder on you and the sensation is akin to when you step into a too-hot bathtub and your nerves incorrectly tell you that it's cold.

So that's how it usually feels. But this time it was accompanied by an additional sensation. As I've gotten somewhat used to the whole process, now I read a magazine while I'm waxed, so I don't usually keep an eye on what's going on down there (it distracts me from the agonizing anticipation.) This time, though, after Olga ripped away the cloth, it felt like blood was pouring out from my pelvis. I leapt up to see what exactly the wicked Scandinavian had done to me.

"Wot, wot?" Olga exclaimed, obviously upset that I might possibly sue her and worried that I'd overturn the wax pot.

But when I looked down at my absurdly half-naked body, there was nothing wrong. On the contrary, it was some of Olga's best work. I was smooth and not even red, and completely bare (sometimes the assistant has to pluck the remaining hairs, additional pin pricks upon your already distressed skin.)

"What did you *do*?" I cried.

"Nothing! Nothing! I wax as usual! New wax, is all! It hurt?" She asked, genuinely solicitously.

But suddenly I realized that the pain was gone entirely. I felt completely fine, except from the shock and the shame from standing around in my underwear with only one half of my bikini line clean.

"Nothing," I said. "Never mind. It felt different this time. Let's just do the other side."

I settled down again to have the other side done, but I couldn't concentrate on the magazine. I laid it down on my belly and stared at the ceiling, teeth gritted.

"Ok. All done. Thank you."

It was over already?

"You're done already?"

"Yah, yah. See you soon."

I hadn't felt a thing. Olga discreetly left the room and I redressed, paid at the front desk, adding the usual strict 17% tip, and went back to the office.

I was a little concerned about the odd feeling after the waxing, but I tried to forget about it. However, a few strange events occurred afterwards, which seemed completely unrelated at the time, but made me take pause nonetheless.

1.
Back at the office, I stared at my computer screen while my co-worker Pam babbled to me endlessly. However, I guess I stared a little too much.

"Cut it out," Pam whined at one point, halfway through a lengthy story involving some Chippendales dancers.

"What?" I tuned Pam out all the time so I thought that maybe she caught me.

"You haven't blinked, in, like 5 minutes. What are you doing, training for a staring contest?"

"No. I have too blinked."

"No, you haven't."

"Uh, okay, sorry," I said, pointedly closing and reopening my eyes. Throughout the rest of the workday, my co-workers kept giving me strange glances, so I had to remind myself to blink. Maybe it was just too much computer time, I thought.

2.

After work, I went to the gym as usual, plugging my headphones into the tiny television that sits above the treadmill. Distraction is key to exercising properly.

After what seemed like a half hour, I peeked at the display screen.

I had been running for three hours straight.

I was genuinely afraid. I didn't feel out of breath or anything. *Maybe the show was just really engrossing*, I thought to myself, but then nervously remembered that I had been watching a baseball game. A minor league game. The entire thing.

That's when I knew something was off.

3.

The next night, I was driving out to dinner with my friend Alexis, and some new pop song came on the radio. You know, by one of those girls who performs soft-core porn and then claims that it's part of empowering her femininity.

"Ugh, turn this off," Alexis said.

"I don't know, it's sort of catchy."

"*What?*" Alexis was genuinely horrified.

"It's kind of fun."

She grasped my arm. "Have you no *soul*?"

That's when it all began to come together. The non-blinking. The failure to notice the passage of time. The acceptance of evil pop music. And I remembered some other odd occurrences. I had forgotten to eat my lunch (whereas sometimes I get so wild for it that I eat it at 10:30 a.m.) My next door neighbor had brought home a new squirming puppy and I had regarded it with some ennui. I watched TV until 4 a.m. and woke up at 7 a.m., well-rested. It wasn't until I comfortably finished taking a cold shower and mulling everything over that I began to suspect:

Was it possible that Olga, in waxing out my stray hairs, had waxed out my soul as well?

It was ridiculous. I am not a religious person, and I don't even know what one actually uses a soul for. But what else could explain the sudden changes in physicality and personality?

It wasn't so much the lack of soul that bothered me, but I paid a lot for those waxes, and the idea of tossing my soul into the deal pro bono didn't sit well with me. I was on a budget.

I wasn't sure why I needed it, but I figured that I should try to get my soul back if I could. If I was going to throw it away sometime, it would be for something better than a bikini wax, after all. At work

the next day, I called the salon and asked for Olga.

“Do you have my...uh...soul?” I asked her. I wasn’t sure if she’d even understand my English, let alone know what I was talking about.

Surprisingly, she did.

“Yah, yah, I keep for you. You come get it at closing time. Seven o’ clock.”

I was relieved but also curious. How did she know she had it? This would be interesting.

I showed up at the salon at seven, as the hairdressers swept up the last remnants of hair and unplugged their curling irons and blowdryers.

“Is Olga still here?” I asked the teenage receptionist who was putting on her coat.

No longer on the clock, she merely jerked her head in the direction of the waxing room.

“Ah” she greeted me. “I have soul.”

She turned to the shelf in her tiny cubicle where she kept her lotions and tweezers and talc and removed a ziploc bag and handed it to me.

It looked no different than the other used waxing strips. A piece of medicinal-yellow hardened wax gripping grotesquely my disembodied pubic hairs.

“This is *it*?”

“Yah.”

“My soul?”

“Yah.”

“How do you know?”

“Is soul. I know. You go.”

“Okay, but how do I attach it?”

She shrugged. “I don’t know. It come back.”

“How did this *happen*, anyway?”

Another shrug. “New wax. Many people not happy.”

New wax, I thought to myself. If only the priests tried it when they performed exorcisms.

I wondered how she knew that this was actually my soul, but I didn't see any real point in pushing it further. If Olga was averse to going through the trash and giving me a dirty waxing strip, she wouldn't have gone to the trouble of giving me this, so I had to take her word for it.

So I took it home. I wasn't sure what to do with it. I couldn't very well re-attach the hairs, so I hope that I wasn't supposed to re-attach my soul. So for a week I carried the ziploc with me everywhere I went, in my purse, in my briefcase. At the gym I tucked it into the elastic waistband of my shorts. I hoped that it would come back through osmosis.

Friday, I think, it finally came back. I ate four Krispy Kreme donuts for breakfast and then still felt the need to get a hoagie for lunch. Would a person without a soul feel so passionately about bad food? I think not. I felt relieved.

It was rather anticlimactic. So if that was it, what the hell do you need a soul *for*, then? It wasn't like my life was that much worse without it. But I felt strangely detached, less human, I guess. The way you feel after a long flight and you need a shower but you can't get one. You can function perfectly well but you feel slightly off. Yes, I decided, the soul is more functional in the afterlife, but it keeps you human in the current-life. Not very spectacular or awe-inspiring, but, I'd say, still worth more than \$25 plus a 17% tip.

