



BIKINI LINES

by E.M. Tran

I AM shaving my bikini line in the handicapped bath stall of the communal sorority house bathroom. The dull razor catches on coarse black pubic hair and there is blood everywhere, but I keep going. The sheared remnants of my lady beard litter the shower, the largest and most coveted in the house. There is no time to clean the debris for the next unsuspecting girl hoping to snag what she believes is the holy grail of hygiene facilities. He texted and I said yes and now he is on his way. He is listed in my phone as “Beer Pong Guy,” and I can’t remember what he looks like.

I am putting on clothes but don't feel cute or safe in anything but a giant t-shirt, so that is what I wear. There are bits of tissue over the nicks

where I shaved, and it is itchy. It's too late for my crotch. I cannot save it. I throw something lacy over the bloody, stubbly rash I've created. College is hard when your parents are immigrants and frat boys in the South think you're a foreign exchange student. Beer Pong Guy was white-girl-wasted when we met at The Sugar Deck for Thirsty Thursday Pitcher Night. He thought I was Japanese and I had had two pitchers of cranberry and well vodka, so I didn't correct him. I have to ignore the little things and seize the moment 'cause this is what youth is supposed to be like and you can't be picky, right? I'm a six, maybe a seven, but a five if I'm with the wrong group of girls. Beer Pong Guy is on his way, and tonight, my bikini line is a three but my face is a seven and my size zero body is a god damn ten. Carpe diem, like they say in the movie *Clueless*.

Girls in the sorority house living room give me advice. They tell me not to tell any of my long-winded stories or talk too much. Also, laugh, so he knows I know he's funny. Don't get offended and bitchy if he tells a racist joke. Use a condom. Open up my throat. Put my lips over my teeth. Take a Claritin for my allergies so I won't snore. Bring breath mints. Wake up before he does to eat a breath mint. Steal one of his t-shirts. Look at his text messages, but only if it's a low risk situation. I tell them, don't worry, I shaved my bikini line.

I don't tell them that I don't understand how to "open up my throat" and that my orthodontist says I have a small mouth and low-production salivary glands. I wonder if my salivary gland condition will be an impediment. The one time in high school with my ex-boyfriend, I didn't know about opening up my throat and I was drunk and my jaw kept clamping so I think my teeth hurt him, but I couldn't feel anything and all I could think about was this *Cosmo* article about treating your man's junk like a really good popsicle. But he just kept saying, *Ouch*, and then my jaw got tired because it's really nothing like eating a popsicle, so I stopped, and went to sleep.

I am chugging a Solo cup of warm boxed wine to help the Claritin go down. Sarah Beth says, "Trust me, this will help." She pours me another full glass of wine and it goes down easier the second time. I am running up the stairs two at a time to brush my teeth. Crest's spearmint and Franzia's Chillable Red taste terrible together. I gag when brushing the back of my tongue and hope that isn't foreshadowing.

Beer Pong Guy honks his horn. Sunglasses hang around his neck by a pastel foam strap even though it is midnight. He isn't cute, but he is preppy and he is white, and I am a seven and only sometimes in the right environment, so *carpe diem*. We drive to his apartment in his big black

truck. At his apartment, he tells a joke on his couch about cows, or at least I think that's what he said. I ask, *What?* twice and then say, *I don't get it.* I can't understand his southern drawl. He calls me a city girl. There is a moment of fumbling silence. What a terrible misstep—how could I not laugh at his joke? Why did I ask him to repeat it? Never ask, just laugh. I am pressing my face against his. Our lips knock together, clumsy and wet. His saliva is on my chin. I know it is not mine because I have low-production salivary glands. I want to stop to wipe the dribble, but I am afraid to interrupt our momentum, I am afraid he will start speaking again and I will not understand the language he speaks.

We move to the bedroom. His sheets and pillows are green and brown camouflage. Before I can stop myself, I say, *Where's your bed? I don't see it.* He doesn't laugh but says *Good one.* He says he's surprised I can see anything with those chinky eyes of mine. I think bitterly about telling him my eyelids do not have an epicanthic fold like other Asians because I got epicanthoplasty when I was in Vietnam, but I don't know if he'll understand my parents paid good money to alter something as miniscule as an eyelid so that people like him wouldn't notice their difference. He says *ching chong ching* and asks if I know what he's saying. I tell him no. I wish I

could say something more cutting, but it is all so unoriginal, so cliché, that I can only say no.

I ask where the bathroom is because I suddenly feel ugly and need to look at myself in the mirror, and he says last door on the right at the end of the hallway. I am walking to the end of the hallway and fluttering before the bathroom door but don't stop, exiting down the stairs.

I am walking in the dark along Nicholson Avenue on the newly paved black tar. I feel embarrassed, but think, maybe I shouldn't feel embarrassed, and I almost believe it. I am disappointed I did not steal another large t-shirt, I am disappointed I wasted a Claritin, I am embarrassed, I am disappointed, I am walking. I am, I am, I am.

I stop at the pharmacy to buy hydrogen peroxide for my bloody bikini line and go home.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

E. M. Tran is a Vietnamese American fiction and nonfiction writer from New Orleans, Louisiana. She completed her MFA at University of Mississippi and is currently a student in Ohio University's PhD fiction program. Her writing can be found in *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Joyland Fiction*, and *Prairie Schooner*, where her essay was the winner of a Glenna Luschei Award and listed as a Notable Essay in the forthcoming Best American Essays 2018.

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