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Growing Pains

Alison Morgan staggered into the bathroom, eyes crusty from a long night of sleep. The skin on her face tingled with some unfamiliar, unclean sensation. Her fingers drifted towards the twin taps, a yawn stretching out of her throat.

“Ow!”

Water slapped against her body and froze every nerve. Her lengthy blonde hair fell down in a heavy curtain around her head. The hiss of water echoed all around her ears. Any attempt to open her still dry eyes was pointless. She massaged a bar of soap in between her fingers until a fluffy cloud of foam formed in her hands, the lathered soap slipped across her shoulders, her neck, her chin.

It stopped there.

Alison frowned and brought one of her fingers up to her chin. A thick, stubborn lump had formed along her otherwise smooth jawline. It was a terrible, oily thing that soap could only drip from. Her fingers pinched and scratched, determined to somehow knock it off of her face. Her skin screamed out in protest but still she struggled to claw the offending lump away.

It was in this misguided attempt to liberate her face that she noticed a line of thick fuzz brushing against her hand. Horrified, she turned off the water with a squeak. She hurried out of the shower and stopped before the mirror—sure enough, a hideous, black moustache had grown on top of her lips during the night. More of the wretched lumps decorated her once beautiful face, turning it a blotched red and purple.

If only that had been all.

The longer she stared in the mirror, the more she noticed that there were thick, wiry coils of hair all over her body. Her two eyebrows had fused into one thick line on her brow, giving her a more simian look. While her chest had remained childlike and narrow, those same coils were lurking across her breasts and down to her navel like a dark road. Those same red marks on her face had also journeyed down to the rest of her body, a few even sporting dark hairs of their own.

Alison stared at the creature in the mirror, a dumb shock taking hold of her. The slackened jaw, the wide, teary eyes and the unsteady hands touching the strange fur were all hers.

There was no denying it.

The ape staring back at her was Alison Morgan.

She let out a shrill scream that suited her new, animalistic form.

Tiny, ragged gasps replaced her steady breathing.

Hot tears leaked out of her eyes and onto her new moustache.

“Alison? What’s wrong? Is everything okay?”

Her body tensed. Her mother’s cries reminded her of where she was: her bathroom, getting ready for school, naked. The young girl trembled and turned her head to the door. The scent of waffles made an attempt to tempt her out of the door.

“I—I’m fine, I’ll be right down! I’m just in the shower.”

She heard no reply, but there were no footsteps either. She had bought herself an extra few moments in the bathroom.

Alison gave herself a second glance, fear replaced with irritation. There was no way she could go to school in this state. It was her first day. Her head had already begun concocting images of her sneering peers. Was that really how she wanted people to remember her? The girl with a thicker beard than her Dad’s?

Then it clicked. Dad. Razor. Alison needed a razor. The hairy girl closed the bathroom door and turned to the end of her bed. A blue summer dress and a green jumper were waiting for her—not the best of colours, but everyone would be wearing them anyway. She did her best not to look in the mirror as she scooped up the dress. The jumper would hide the hair along her arms and chest, but the rest would have to be dealt with.

Getting dressed was never something that Alison had put much thought into, but with this new blanket of fur covering her body even

the act of stepping into her dress was unnerving. Every time she smoothed over a piece of clothing or slid it into place she could see and feel the hair. Each little blemish itched and tugged beneath the dress. After one little stretch Alison could feel something warm oozing down her back. She shuddered, but she didn't dare think about what it could be. Hair and bumps were bad enough.

Alison debated flesh coloured tights, but one look at her legs and she knew that hair would be worming its way through the lycra. Removal was the only option. She grabbed her slippers and stepped into them. Downstairs the waffles were beginning to burn.

"Aly! Get your butt out of the shower and eat something, you're going to fade away if you keep skipping meals!"

"Okay Mum," Alison groaned. "Just gimme five minutes!" As Alison reached for the doorknob, she found her eyes wandering towards the mask hanging from the wall. It was a pale white with only red lips and black, painted-on eyelashes. Her father had brought it back from China as a gift a year ago, but it was only now she was starting to see a practical use for it.

She plucked it from the wall and pulled it over her face. Even here, a hot shame was flooding across her face. Her brother would laugh at her. Her parents would send her to the circus out of embarrassment at the worst. Alison had always hated the circus. Clowns gave her the creeps.

"No," she shook her head. "That won't happen!"

Alison gulped and opened the door as slow as she was able. The hinges let out a pained creak as she crept through the door frame. Her prize was waiting for her just three doors away. She hugged the wall and slid across the hallway. Once again the waffles were calling. Her stomach begged her to, just this once, eat breakfast.

It was then an all too familiar sound echoed came from her father's room. A man bellowing out some ancient, long forgotten tune forced its way through the sealed door. As Alison drew nearer she heard a hissing sound, just like the one that her own shower head had made.

"Crap."

Alison froze in place. She couldn't go in there. She didn't want to go in there. The idea tickled her gag reflex in that dreadful way that only her parents talking about 'last night' and holding each other a certain way could.

She had to.

She didn't want to, but she had to. There was no way that she could go to school in this state. It was for the greater good. It was either this or spend the rest of her life being called Monkey Face.

Alison reached for the door handle. She turned it. The door didn't creak. Steam flooded her senses.

She hesitated. Would this be worth it?

The girl nodded to herself, her lips forming a tense, grim line. Her moustache twitched.

This was it.

She stepped inside the door and the singing flooded the tiny space. Alison couldn't even hear herself think. The dark figure of her father squirmed and danced inside the little cubicle. She did her best not to look at the disturbing image and set her sights on the sink. As always her father had a bottle of shaving gel, aftershave and two razors waiting for him. The toothbrush was sitting over the drain, still dripping with mint-scented foam.

The young girl reached down for the razor and examined it. A straight razor should be enough, shouldn't it? Her thoughts turned back to her father with a white beard made of shaving cream. Would she need to take it with her? What if he needed it too? To be safe Alison squirted some into her hand and lathered it across her forehead, her lips and her chin. She would have to do her chest, back and other places after school. The mask rested on top of the toilet and waited for her. Her whole face had turned to snow. Slow and careful she raised the blade to her face and pressed it to the start of her bushy 'stache.

A loud squeak brought the hissing sound to an end. Alison's whole body tensed as she glanced to the door. The razor slipped and bit hard into her skin. Red dribbled through the foam and down her chin.

Once the curtain pulled back, the cheery singing was replaced with a pair of screaming voices.

The car trip had been long and silent. Alison had insisted on the back seat, but as a trade-off she had to surrender the razor she had acquired. A bandage clung tight to her cheek, only serving to make the moustache more pronounced than it already was.

“I think we’re going to need a long talk about personal space when we get home,” Alison’s mother sighed. Her daughter shrunk deeper into her seat. Alison was clinging to her backpack like a shield.

“I just wanted to shave off my moustache.”

“We’ve been over this a thousand times, Alison. You don’t have a moustache. Not a noticeable one, anyway.”

“Not noticeable? It’s thick and dark! I didn’t even get time to hide my pimples.”

Alison heard her mother sigh again but she didn’t care. In just a few more minutes the whole school would see her monstrous new features. She looked like King Kong with giant pimples. She was Pimple Kong.

“I’ll buy you some acne products on the way home but no one is going to notice a few zits.”

As Alison stared at her reflection she found herself believing her mother less and less. Beyond the window was a tall, blocky building. A small group of people were still loitering outside in their blues and greens. She couldn’t see their faces but she just knew that she would be the only girl there who belonged in a werewolf movie.

“Go on,” her mother implored. “If you think you look like a monkey, you should see some of the boys.”

Reluctant, Alison stepped out of the car, backpack in tow. She kept her head low as she journeyed towards the front door. As the sounds of chatter grew closer her nerves grew more frantic.

“Hey, you new too?”

Alison turned behind her to face the source of the voice. She let out a little gasp as she met the red face. It was a mousy girl with brown hair and a moustache as thick as Alison’s. Her teeth glittered like broken steel through the smile. Dark blemishes were spread across her cheekbones and snaked down her neck.

“Y-yeah. I’m Alison,” she stammered, unsure the girl was aware of her own transformation.

The little mouse walked up beside her and pulled out a sheet. “Okay, I’m Carrie, I’m guessing you don’t know where 1D is either?”

Alison shook her head and looked around. She soon found a baffling sight: there were monkey faces all around her. Some were just as ghastly as her, others worse.

“Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, it’s just . . .”

Alison looked back at Carrie, unsure how to respond. For a moment, she swore that the short girl looked normal despite the wires around her teeth. In return, Carrie raised her eyebrows and offered an awkward smile.

“Hey, why don’t we look together? I don’t know anyone so if it’s okay.”

“Sure, let’s go.”

Carrie led her up the stairs, asking about some reading material that Alison hadn’t touched. She caught her own reflection in the glass doors as they approached. Alison looked just as normal as everyone else. She could barely see the acne on her skin as she smiled.