THE SECRET CLUB FOR THE SUPER-RICH
CAN YOU GET IN?

FROM DRAG QUEEN TO DUCHESS
The ultimate Tatler makeover

WHAT’S INSIDE YOUR MAN’S PANTS?
IT’S NOT WHAT YOU EXPECT

JEANS OF YOUR DREAMS
The sexiest, most flattering, admittedly quite pricey denim. Worn by Bea Fresson

RUB ME THERE
THE HOTTEST MASSEURS

MY SCOTCH EGG IS BIGGER THAN YOURS!
THE COTSWOLD PUB WARS

WILD, SEXY, FREE
Posh girls have more fun
YES, IT’S TIME TO TAME YOUR LADYBEARD

Are you (and your tweezers) suffering in silence? Suffer no more! Gavanndra Hodge investigates the causes and cures of excess facial hair.

It is a Saturday morning and I am woken by my husband stroking my face. We have been married for over 10 years and he has never done this before. It is an unexpectedly romantic gesture. He must be feeling amorous. The kids are watching YouTube, we won’t hear a peep out of them for at least half an hour. The sun is shining...

‘Hi,’ I say.

Mike doesn’t reply. He keeps stroking, but in a way that feels more investigative than loving.

‘Have you done something weird to your face?’

‘No,’ I lie.

‘Then why is there no hair on it? Where’s all the downy fluff gone? It’s weird. You look like...’ he pauses. ‘Like a waxed lemon.’

THREE MONTHS EARLIER...

I was in Fenwick, on a recliner chair in the beauty department, as an immaculately eyebrowed Indian lady threaded my eyebrows. It was slightly shaming to have someone toil away to remove my excess hair in the middle of a bustling department store, but these are the regular humiliations that we women must endure to maintain even the most basic standards of beauty expected by society. She had nearly finished, and I was looking forward to the bit where she stroked my forehead.

‘Would you like me to do your moustache?’ asked the lady.

‘I don’t, I mean, er... It’s not normally something I do.’

I am fair. I am not a bearded woman. I do
not have a moustache. ‘Oh, you don’t do that,’ she said, and rubbed cooling aloe vera gel onto my brows, completely nonchalantly, like nothing terrible had just happened.

That night I examined my face, using the ‘magnification’ side of the beauty mirror, under the strongest light in the house. I have always had the occasional stray hair. Most women do. These are easily removed with a pair of tweezers. They do have an annoying habit of reaching peak lushness at unexpected and inappropriate moments, like when you are stroking your chin seductively at dinner with a man you have a massive crush on and discover a fresh witch sprout that will not be dislodged however hard you tug on it.

But things had got more serious than that, I realised, as I gazed at my skin. In addition to the familiar friends on my chin, there were cheeky little black hairs on my cheeks, I counted five, and sideburn hairs, thick ones, and yes, the hint of a moustache. This was not charming peach fuzz, the sort that makes you all Seventies soft focus in the sunshine – this was Mediterranean, Heathcliffian...

‘I long for peach fuzz,’ said one of the many friends I called that night for consolation. At least I wasn’t alone; it seemed that many women of 40 and above were getting beardier. ‘I never go anywhere without my tweezers now,’ said another. I had a feeling that this wasn’t something that would magically resolve itself. I wasn’t going to get less hairy. It was time to take action.

Action commenced in the offices of Dr Alexis Granite, a serious-sounding, smooth-skinned American dermatologist. ‘There are two types of facial hair,’ she explained. ‘There is the peach fuzz, the vellus hair, which is normal, although some women do find that they get fuzzier with age through a natural shift in hormones. And the terminal hairs, the thick, black ones. A few of these around the chin area is normal, but it is when we start to find them in the beard area that it should be looked at more closely.’ There can be a number of reasons for this sort of ‘abnormal’ growth, like familial hirsutism (if your mother has impressive sideburns, you are probably going to have them too) or polycystic ovarian syndrome [POS], which is the number one cause, says Dr Granite. With POS, she says, ‘the ovaries produce too much testosterone, causing acne, head-hair loss and facial-hair growth.’

Electrolysis and laser will kill the hair at the root, but won’t deal with the underlying condition. For serious cases, contraceptive pills like Cilast and Yasmin are prescribed, as these can manage wayward hormones. Spironolactone, a medicine that was created as a diuretic and for people with high blood pressure, can also be prescribed, as this blocks the effects of male hormones on the skin; and Vanilga, a cream that blocks the hormone within the hair follicle, so is good for small areas (and for excess vellus hair).

But POS is something that is normally seen in women aged between 20 and 40, particularly those who have not had children. I am 42 and have two girls. Dr Granite nods sympathetically. ‘Women’s hormones change as they age; in your 40s, testosterone can exert more influence. Over 50% of women will experience something like this – it is normal.’

NORMAL? To have a beard at 42? There was some good news, though – apparently, plucking the hairs from your face does not make them grow back stronger, thicker and in greater numbers. ‘Nor does shaving.’

Shaving. I somehow knew, all my life, that I must not shave my face – perhaps someone told me at school, who knows? But all that time was wrong. ‘Dermplaning’ is an exciting new beauty therapy that involves yes, shaving the face. This is more popular in Asian countries, so not that many therapists in the UK offer it, but the best person to see is Dr Rubia Malik, also incredibly smooth-skinned (I had started looking for stray hairs on the cheeks of every woman I met).

‘Dermplaning is really about exfoliating – improving the skin quality, by removing the top layer of dead skin,’ Dr Malik said as she cleansed my face. She used a small, incredibly sharp blade and downward strokes to remove crusty grey skin cells (she showed me them afterwards), as well as all those pesky hairs. Afterwards she applied emu oil, an anti-inflammatory, anti-ageing wonder oil, and went over my face with a buffing machine. My skin had never felt as soft as it did after that – clear, glowy and completely bald.

But although the fuzz on my upper lip did not return for about three weeks (vellus hair grows very slowly), the terminal hairs had returned within three days. ‘The hard evidence for hormonal imbalances causing unusual hair growth is weak,’ said Dr Martin Galy, a hormone wizard who operates out of the smart 23rd clinic in Chekka, which offers all sorts of aesthetic treatments, as well as hormone balancing to help prevent women shrivelling like spent flowers post 40. ‘But the response to hormonal rebalancing when people have excess or unusual facial hair is actually quite good.’

He described how, for women over 40, an increase in facial hair (often combined with a decrease in head hair, more spots and worse PMT) is not necessarily because the body is producing more testosterone, but because other hormones are getting out of balance. ‘As women age, the first hormone to dip is progesterone,’ he explained. Progesterone is produced by the adrenal glands, but also by the shells of the eggs that pop out once a month – the corpus luteum – which remain in the ovary and produce progesterone. The healthiest eggs emerge in your 20s, and as you age their quality depletes, so by the time you reach your 40s, you really have reached the back of the store cupboard, in terms of eggs, with just a few crappy ones left, the shells of which do not produce much progesterone.

Some theories suggest that progesterone blocks the conversion of testosterone into dihydroxy testosterone – a hair-growth stimulator and hair-follicle killer,’ said Dr Galy. He tested my hormones, and discovered that, yes, my progesterone was low. So we devised a two-pronged plan: progesterone cream to be applied 10 days a month (days 18–28 of my cycle) and some lasering to blast the hairs away. Between laser sessions, I had to shave (no plucking), and so purchased the Shiseido facial razor, which is pink (because we are ladies), has a tiny blade and is used by Japanese women to brighten their complexions. When shaving, it is important to use a sharp blade, sweep downwards and moisturise afterwards, otherwise you will get a shaving rash (like I did, after I first used my husband’s razor and his shaving method).

However, the rash subsided (emu oil helped) and the plan worked – I am now beardless (as well as less spotty and more luminous). The only person who doesn’t approve is Mike. □

Consultation with Dr Granite, £250, at the Cadogan Clinic (cadoganclinic.com). Dermplaning with Dr Malik, £250, at Grace Belgravia (gracebelgravia.co.uk). Hormonal consultation with Dr Galy, £380, at 23MD (23md.co.uk).