

Proust's Moustache

by Forrest Roth

My brother and I had often debated whether we could get our father to shave his moustache off, just to see if his sophistication remained intact without it. A direct request when we were in private school had failed miserably. So we studied him for a full term instead of *The Brothers Karamazov*. It was worth it. The second time around, for Father's Day, we presented him a gold-plated razor (functional but, undermining our intent, a novelty not meant to be used), encased in a lined wooden box with an engraving on top: THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES. We did better with this. He returned a gracious laugh. "Would anyone have insinuated as politely to Proust- Or Nietzsche-" Not Nietzsche, I thought. His vortex of facial hair can hardly be considered a proper moustache—may as well come out and say it. Proust, on the other hand- First-class work. A triumph by his nurtured follicles. Always impeccably groomed in photos. And I'm certain he would have been devastated had a friend handed him a razor in mocking adoration. My brother probably had misgivings along this line. He suggested the gift was a total bust afterwards, as our father's moustache resolved to keep an imperious mien. He even dyed it younger with a coloring kit. But I felt compelled to salvage our gag later in light of the renewed tenacity. I could only imagine his clean-shaven face, of course, and grow thankful never knowing how many of his mother's kisses died underneath that furry umbrella.

