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Menopausal Mammals

Of all the creatures in the known universe, only three go through perimenopause and menopause: **killer whales, short-finned pilot whales, and humans.**

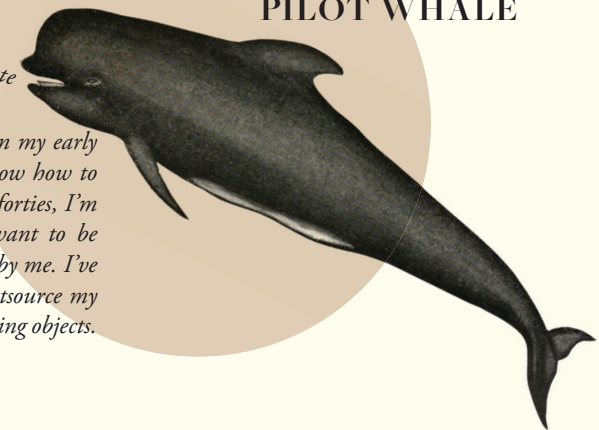
 **KILLER WHALE**



Friends report, from the frontlines of perimenopause,

wayward periods that disappear for months and then return; or periods so heavy they bleed through tampons and pads onto clothes; or periods that become like whispers, one little rush of blood and it's vanished. Also extreme irritability, uncharacteristic assertiveness, giving fewer fucks about what other people think, crying for hours for no good reason, and the desire to burn down houses.

SHORT-FINNED 
PILOT WHALE



Nobody ever told me that I would masturbate

a lot in my late teens, and then again in my early forties. In my late teens, I didn't yet know how to find somebody to touch me. In my early forties, I'm so grumpy most of the time, I don't want to be touched by anybody, not even, actually, by me. I've bought myself a Womanizer so I can outsource my orgasms to be the responsibility of non-living objects.



A friend who is going grey and refuses to dye her hair says

she can still pull off going out for drinks with the younger people on her team at work and blending in, but she can also play 'old' in big corporate meetings and command people's respect. She can pass as 'old' or 'young,' according to the situation. 'It's like being a double agent,' she says. 'I love it.' She knows this is a brief superpower for women in their forties, and she intends to make the most of it.

I am getting the mask of perimenopause.

Just like I got the mask of pregnancy. Hormones change, and this triggers pigmentation. My right side of my face used to be my preferred side, because of the redness of the left—but just this year, suddenly, the right side near the edge—at the hairline and all the way down to my jaw—has pigmented like a birthmark. I noticed it, accepted it, and cover it daily with foundation.



My daughter noted casually to me today that the word 'smother' has only one more letter than 'mother'.

Marionettes is the name for the wrinkles

that go from the edge of the mouth to the chin. It is also the name for a puppet worked by strings. There are places, it turns out, where you don't expect to get wrinkles until suddenly you do. Like earlobes.



My sister-in-law rubs testosterone cream

on her upper arm every day, to help with hot flashes. She says since she started using it, she gets no hair anywhere on her body.

I read somewhere that 47 is the hardest age for a woman,

in this culture at least. It's when women are most at risk of terrible depression and suicide; apparently this cuts across class and race boundaries. If we can make it through and out the other side of our fifties, then things—surprisingly—get better, not worse.



Do you think our partners should form a perimenopause support group?

I feel bad for them. It's not fun going through this, for sure—the sweats, the Fevers, the shortness of temper and lack of any patience whatsoever—but it can't be much fun for them either.

I can now see how old ladies end up with monoboobs.

My boobs are slowly but surely merging as one, like two amoebas who need to reunite in order to die.





Goal for my late forties: never again to wonder if I am fuckable.
New goal: to remain loveable.



*In a long-term relationship, the way you return to the same bed every night
can start to resemble the way yoga adherents 'take it to the mat'—*

*Research shows that women are biologically programmed
to be attracted to men their own age, even as they get older,
but it doesn't work the other way around.*



*it's a similar practice of discipline. You turn up, no
matter what else is going on. You take it to the mat.
You try your very best to sleep through the other
person's snoring, or insomnia, or night sweats, or
slipping-on-banana-peel jolts in their dreams.*



Most women get their first migraines at age 45.

Many also, at this age, finally get surgery to deal with the prolapsed organs they've ignored for too many years. Others are content to insert little cubes, like the ones you use to chalk the end of a pool stick before aiming it at the triangle of shiny coloured balls, to hold up their internal organs. Very few women who have to do this ever complain about it, even in private.



*I have heard it said that the secret to a happy marriage
in one's fifties is to have separate bedrooms.*