

Contact

By Heather Wheat

The day before my daughter's
sixteenth birthday, I apply a
wax strip to her lip, make sure
it's even, and wait.

The night I was in labor with her,
I did not know what preparation
meant. I was unprepared for
her, for life, for myself.

I press down again on the wax
strip, index fingers moving
away from her philtrum; the firmer
I press, the more hair comes off.

I wouldn't let her father touch me;
my mother soothed me, stroking my
hair, talking softly to me. I still, often,
wish for that comforting touch.

My daughter stares past me out the
window—anywhere but at me. We
struggle to talk, to see each other,
to find each other across a void.

I didn't speak at all during my labor,
except to say that her father's parents
could not come in; my mother was
enough; that indignity too much.

I ask, "You ready?" and she nods,
slightly, steeling herself for me to
rip hair and skin from her upper lip.
This I can easily do for her.

Her skin met mine for the first time; her
tiny body, slick with my blood, rested on
the skin of my chest. She drew her first
breath, did not cry. I breathed, "Oh."

I grab the end of the wax strip, hold her

skin down, and yank up, toward her nose.
She flinches away from the pain, sighs.
“Thanks,” she says, as I oil the red skin.

“Mmmhmm,” I say, staring past her,
out the window. The trees are just
beginning to bloom.