

ang(st)

the feminist body zine



Issue 4 | October 2020

angst: anxiety/ frustration

ang (अंग): body/ part/ member

A Note from the Editors

The theme for this issue is HAIR.

We chose this theme because we wanted to explore people's experiences with hair— is it a tool of oppression, a form of control, an impossible beauty ideal, a beloved friend, an extension of our identities, or a form of protest?

We present a collection of 33 powerful and remarkable pieces that capture the most intimate moments between our contributors and their hair. Some of these speak to identity— from the curls of Black hair to bleached bisexuality to the buzzcut of femininity. Some explore how hair defines our relationships with lovers and mothers and children and ourselves. Sometimes hair is a companion, through love, illness, grief, birth and death. Sometimes hair is rebellion, a statement against age, racism, beauty, disease. Sometimes hair is just hair. So, we present hair - cut and shaved, fallen and regained, plucked and bleached, sometimes lost never to be found again, always in the process of creating and being created.

TW/CW: This issue contains themes of and references to self-harm, violence, cancer, death, childbirth, physical and mental illness. Hair related references include body hair, pubic hair, straightening, plucking, shaving, blades, and hair loss. Please let us know if we need to add anything more to this list.

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My Personal Hair Cut

LYNNE SCHMIDT

I'm seven years old and naked in the shower. To my right are typical things: shampoo, conditioner, soap. But there is also a single pink razor staring back at me. My sisters are both old enough to shave, and they ask my mother for new razors when theirs rust. Two years behind my older sister, I haven't begun the rite of passage.

I know two things at this moment: I'm a girl, and because I'm a girl, I'm supposed to shave. But...what exactly am I supposed to shave? I look down at my prepubescent body. My leg hair is fairly stubby, but mostly invisible thanks to their blond color. I look to my arms, which kind of resemble a hairy monster. It's like my body is telling me what's right.

For the next six months, I shave my arms because that's what girls do.

Later, I was informed women shave their legs, so I left my arms alone and began doing what girls actually do. It wasn't until late into middle school when my blond pubic and armpit hair began to darken. I knew to shave my armpits, but no one ever said anything about my crotch hairs, so I left them alone.

Adventures and sexual escapades in high school never told me otherwise. Plus, I figured that if a guy had his hand down my pants, pubic hair should be the last thing to worry about. In college, guys told me, "No one will ever go down on you if you have pubes," yet their advice was wrong. The few guys who did give me oral sex never complained about my pubic hair cut, or lack thereof.

As a sophomore, I dated a timid yet beautiful blue eyed, dark haired boy. He'd never had a girlfriend before. As his hands began to dive into my pants, and mine into his, he stopped short. "Does my hair bother you?"

My hand stopped moving. I chuckled, surprised by the question. "No. Does mine bother you?"

"No."

And like that, we continued along.

After feminists raved about The Vagina Monologues, I dragged a significant other to a show. In the audience, I listened to a woman recount another woman's story. Her husband was cheating, because "If she'd shaved down there, I'd find her more attractive." Their couple's therapist suggested shaving the wife, together. They did, and she bled. She recounted pieces of herself falling into her hands. It hurt her, but they continued despite the razor slipping and injuring her.

In the end, she was shaved.

In the end, her husband still cheated.

Sitting in the audience as I heard this story, I made a promise to myself that I would never shave anything for a guy.

Still, when my body would be explored, and underwear moved to the side, my little black hairs would get caught, and tug, and hurt. So I began to experiment with my hair style, eventually settling on a “landing strip” and barely there under area. I didn’t look or feel like the seven year old girl confused in the shower. Instead, I felt like the twenty- something emerging woman taking control of what I wanted my body to look like. Adventures post-college would have guys hovering above me, mid thrust asking, “So, next time we do this, can you trim up a little bit?”

“Sure,” I’d answer, but I would remember The Vagina Monologues, the promise I’d made to myself. If he’s still able to get off, my pubic hair should not be a big deal.

I have met and been with guys who have told me with and without clothes on I’m beautiful. I have been with guys who have manscaped, and guys who’ve been hairy. I have been in unhealthy relationships where my significant other and I destroyed each other emotionally, and in healthy relationships where we’ve pushed each other to do great things with our writing, our careers, our lives.

In the years since my pubic hair has grown in, I’ve had a lot of time to reflect on whether or not I want to keep it. I’ve continued to shave my legs, and my armpits, and from time to time chop my head-hair very short. I make these decisions. I decide if and when I want to shave or cut anything. It’s no one else’s decision to make but my own. If I am with a man who prefers me to look like an eleven year old girl, chances are I don’t actually want to be with him. If I’m with a man who truly values me, not just my body, he’ll accept all of my bodily hair styles, not try to push me into a hair cut I’m not comfortable with.

Unless, you know, he’s willing to get all of his hair waxed.

Labels on Shampoo

H. E. CASSON

These promises
On plastic jugs
Full to neck with
Panthenol or
Almond oil
Sulfates or
Extracted
Cells of
Roses of
Begonias
Of oregano
Of hops, they're
Artful, architectural
Shaped to fit my hand
Odoriferous, to satisfy
Olfactory gasps inside
With just one squeeze
They guarantee:

Control, but also freedom
They will calm and energize
Refresh, renew, repair, remove
Build up and volumise
I'll be 10 times stronger, active
I'll be boosted, I'll have length
I'll be healthy, I'll be perfect
I'll have clarity and strength
I'll be sexy, I'll be softened
I'll be hot and cool and clean
I'll have penetrating power
With my fortifying sheen
I'm invigorated, purified
Hydrated and alive
My ends un-split
I'll finally fit

For just \$9.95

Wash Day Routine

HUNTER BLACKWELL

My head is bent over the sink basin,
staring down at stainless steel,
my mother's fingers scratching at my scalp.
Here, my mother and my hair can talk,
speak in a language I am not fluent in.
See my hair doesn't talk back,
my hair did not choose to live with my father,
my hair did not cry about staying at her house
the second and fourth weekends of every month.
My hair is just a mass of black coils that
always parts to the instruction of her fingers.

Soapy strands slap me in the face,
a warning for prying eyes to keep close.
Her body gently rests into mine,
elbows bent to encompass my head.
The TV downstairs plays The Jefferson's.
Should I ask her about her week?
I stand in silence— listening
to the laugh track and my mother harmonizing
as she detaches the hose from the sink.

Water crawls down my widow's peak.
Why the sudden change to go natural? she asks.
I tell her, I can't keep up with straight hair in college,
no Black hair salons are close enough;
I want to learn how to take care of my hair.
There's a hum, an understanding.
Or is it just the crinkle of a plastic cap
sealing in deep conditioner?
How close are we, sitting between her legs again,
detangling ends first, then roots?
Her fingers weave strands under, tight to the scalp.

She tells my hair to tell me she loves me.

Ajakolokolo

OKE OLUWASEGUN



Let's Call It Something Else

JOWELL TAN

it falls out in batches,
black patches contrasting
with my white marble flooring.
my head is barren
where my hair used to grow.
salt is sown; i've lost all hope.

in the afterlife i shall have
long hair once again.

Proof I am actually Medusa

VICTORIA FRASER

*Why don't you wear
your hair down?*

I don't think you understand.
It has a mind of its own;
not everyone likes
touching snake tongues.

*But it's so beautiful,
you have natural curls!*

And my ringlets will
slink off with a dumpling
or a doughnut if no
one is looking.

*I wish I had hair like
yours instead of mine.*

And I wish
you had a mouth
made of marble
instead of flesh.

Reflection

JOSH HOLTON



Grow Up

GRACE ROYAL

CW: homophobia, eating disorder

I'm ten years old when I decide that a cream, crocheted bandana is the thing to wear. I wear it everyday with my hair pushed back and I won't leave the house without it. I wear it until the thing falls apart.

I'm eleven years old and all out of sorts. I'm all on my own, one step sideways from everyone else. They're all growing up while I'm staying down. My friends go shopping without their parents; they call their mothers mum. We stand for the class photo and I'm the last girl left in a summer dress and my mummy has done my hair up into two pigtails that stick out my head like handlebars. The girls behind me give them a tug and pretend to steer me. I feel it and then I go numb.

I'm twelve and I don't know what to do with my greasy hair so everyday I scrape it into the same low ponytail and stick a flower in the side every day. I don't know what to do with myself so I sit with the three girls I consider my friends and they say, Grace, do you know how hard it is to be a group of three: someone is always being left out. I'd been caught in the illusion of being number four and I then feel empty and unstable until I buy more flowers to keep myself whole.

I want my hair cut short but no one will do it. I go from hairdresser to hairdresser and the most they'll do is take it to my shoulders. They like it long—I'm a girl after all and it's beautiful hair, such a beautiful colour, so beautifully straight—but I hate it, don't know what to do with it and I let it hang limp from my head.

I pretend I'm in love with Prince Arthur from the TV show Merlin. He's on my list, I say, because I'm normal. I'm just like everyone else. I have crushes on boys. I fall in love with male celebs. Or I fall in love with their hair at the very least. I nickname myself Grace Pendragon and ask to have my hair cut like Arthur's.

I'm fourteen and my hair is short short for the first time and I go into school and a friend tells me they don't like it; they question why I did it, why I cut my hair too short. I overhear another girl answer for me: it's because she's a dyke; I feel the

word in the pit of my stomach—feel it dry out my mouth like a sloeberry. I know what it means without having heard it before and I turn it over and over without quite knowing why.

I get colourful extensions and stick feathers in my hair; I let it grow asymmetrical, disorderly and strange. A boy asks for my number and I tell him I never check my phone. I change my sexuality on my UCAS form from straight to I'd rather not say. I switch my extensions every day—one day a sky blue, the next a deep purple.

For too long, I let my hair stay wonky and unbalanced. No hairdresser will cut it as short as I want it and every day I wake up at five am to catch the train and cry into books at the station.

I'm nineteen and my hair is short short again and these days I only wear shirts and baggy jumpers. They hide my chest, they make me repulsive, they un-girl me. On a dark cold night at the station, a beautiful girl compliments my hair and my boots and something finally lifts from my shoulders.

My hair is cut comfortably short short, shaven at the sides and I love it. I sit in the hairdressers as she snips away and listen to the salon conversation of liquid diets and weight loss regimes. I smile inside because I haven't eaten since breakfast and I've already done sixteen thousand steps before lunchtime.

My hair goes limp, loses body, loses shine. I deprive myself, de-body myself, lose myself in steps and calories and vomit. My hair won't sit right anymore. There's not enough of it but it's too big for my head. How lacklustre it looks, how well it fits with my sallow skin.

My scalp dries out, comes off in flakes. For weeks I fail to wash the shampoo out as I rush my supervised showers.

Two months in and my mother tells me my hair looks healthier again. It's shiny, has body, has shape and so do I. I'm healing, growing, fearing, changing, bloating. It's hard and it's heavy, but I look in the mirror and like my hair at the very least.

Drowning in Hair

ADDIE TSAI

The first time the blade of scissors sliced through Alexandra's dark locks was by her father's hand. He sat on the mattress that lay in an undefined heap on the floor, his bulbous calves grazing each side of her small, unformed bottom. That was before she learned to see the small touches of power as a kind of trespassing into the world of her body. What it meant for a punishing single father to lay claim on a young girl's flesh. Alexandra was always first. At night, she dreamt of the girls in her primary school, their long tendrils of crimped yellow and orange waves taunting her in her sleep.

On the rare days her mother would pick Alexandra and Coraline up from their father's house, Alexandra would plead for her mother to wake early enough to wind her shoulder-length hair of the darkest brown—so dark the white girls she went to school with insisted it was black—into the cheap pink sponge curlers kept under the bathroom sink: "Please, Mom! Bab-uh's gonna cut it any day now!" The Mandarin word for father, BaBa (爸爸), was the only word in Mandarin Alexandra and Coraline uttered regularly. Their father made sure to keep the girls from his life, so wounded was he by his split with their mother, a redheaded and freckled American butterfly he lusted after, hopelessly mistaken she'd just get it together when they accidentally got pregnant. He was still in grad school trying to figure out his way in this new terrifying land; she was still a girl at heart, too busy smoking weed and flirting with her customers at the local pizzeria to settle for anyone. They fell apart in waves—more like a tsunami, whose ripples the girls felt even without full recognition. Mandarin was his language, one he couldn't bring himself to share with his daughters. That one word, Baba, left over from before the dissolution of their fantasy of a united family. And the girls' poor pronunciation of the word, saying "uh" where they should be repeating "ah", with the right even inflection, frozen in time as when they first uttered the word as toddlers.

Her mother knew she always kept the twins at a distance, and so she was always a pushover, compensating for her casual neglect with these types of barter. The get was never worth it in the end. If it was that easy to yes, honey her way into drugstore curls and pancakes, how easy was it to relinquish her weekend to their father for a night of clubbing and sex?

When Alexandra went to bed that night, her hair wedged itself between her back and her floral comforter, tugging at the front of her scalp. She relished in the moment, tried to keep it with her always, the feeling of hair that could, with a crimper or a curling iron, resemble the girls' in her class. She prayed to a higher power she had never been taught to worship that her father would have a change of heart. She didn't want to look like a boy. And she didn't want to look like *her*. She had nothing against Coraline except the wound of sameness. It wasn't the brand of sameness she longed for. Alexandra already felt like a monster with her almond shaped eyes and pug nose, her freckles and darkened pupils. But the freakiness was

only exacerbated when it was duplicated. It wasn't enough they were the only mixed-bloods in the school, but being twins put it over the top. They weren't just any twins. They were the twins of a single Chinese father, so frugal he forced them to wear boys clothes from secondhand stores. On the rare day he decreed the girls could wear dresses, it was with thick stockings and crew ankle-length socks and dirty white sneakers. Even the gift of a dress—the promise of looking like those girls Alexandra wanted most desperately to become—came with another symbol of alienation, another sign she had been dressed by a father who didn't know the first thing about dressing girls.

Sometimes Alexandra wasn't sure if she wanted to be the girls that haunted her slumber; images of pink and orange tulle swishing against the stubble on the skin of her crossed leg as they made their way through the aisles of desks to get a bathroom pass from the teacher, their giggles exposing their secret vortex Alexandra so wished she could join, or whether she wanted something else from them instead. No, no, it wasn't that, she assured herself, imagining what someone would say if they found her out, especially given she'd already been outed as a twin. "She must want to make it with her sister, too," she could hear the boys heckle behind her, whispering perverted thoughts she didn't possess in her identical ear. Alexandra peered over at Coraline in bed next to her, her legs bound together with sweat as if they were a single unit, her torso twisted so that her legs fell over Alexandra's belly, slightly exposed as her thin cotton tank top rode up in the dishevelment of sleep. Alexandra cringed as she tried to free herself from the mounds of flesh she recognized as a version of her own. No such luck.

For this particular night, the urge was too much to fight. Her droopy eyes found their home against her bottom row of dark lashes as she fantasized her hand, hesitant and with intention, reach up and across to stroke Brittany's highlighted yellow sheets of velvet that dangled in front of her, Brittany's face hidden except for the sunlight that tickled her cheek. She defended against the twinkling beneath her cotton underwear, the little button flashing on and off like a Christmas light. It wasn't about Brittany, she told herself. It was the hair she loved.

In the morning, the girls dutifully ate their oatmeal in twinned silence, their spoons taking the same measurement, the same stroke but with the opposite arm and hand. Baba was in his room, pittering and pattering about. As the minutes pressed onward, the clicking on the wall clock a door slamming shut on the thickening absence of human voices, Alexandra's fluttering heartbeat began to slow, the air in her held breath easing out of her mouth ever so slightly, so as not to arouse suspicion. Maybe it won't happen today, Alexandra thought to herself. She took her free hand against her neck and softly brushed the hair backwards so it rested against her shoulder.

"Lai (來)! Girls, come!" Baba's voice thundered into the cloak of noiselessness between them. They jolted at once, first in a tiny pulse of the shoulders, and then rattling out of their chairs at the breakfast table. Never underestimate the Baba, Alexandra thought to herself. Coraline never seemed to care about the moment of

the haircut. It was the choice itself she cared about the most, no matter to what it referred. A sliver of a moment, one almost unnoticeable to anyone, if anyone happened to be a witness. Coraline glanced at her, her eyes rolling upwards in solidarity. It was a moment that revealed their union in their powerlessness, as if that one little gesture was enough to feel a sense of resistance to something they could not resist in the actual part of their bodies to which it applied. Despite herself, Alexandra felt her mouth curl upward, like the left-over pieces of fries in a fast-food bag Baba would bring home when he was feeling generous. Like a lock of hair she wished she could reach on the floor from the tragedy soon to be enacted upon her head. But, alas. Baba noticed everything.

Alexandra was always first. Baba liked to scold as he cut their hair, having some sense his girls didn't want to look like boys—"You know, just easier like this. Just like your Baba. No hair on floor everywhere. Efficient." It was no use arguing with him. An argument would just lead to more punishment. And punishment would lead to the hair shorter and shorter to prove who was in charge. The shorter the hair, the stranger they would be. To everyone. There was no mother around to fight for their autonomy, their individuality. Who knows what they would have chosen if they'd been given the option. Baba saw his girls like plants—if he watered them and fed them, they would grow as intended. Plants don't talk back. It was a different silence in Baba's bedroom, the only sound to be heard the snip of the scissors against Alexandra's locks. It would be dangerous to even hint at the violence in this act against her and so Alexandra did what she could to dissociate. She stared at a spot in the wall that had been chipped away from the normal wear and tear of an old house. It was the only thing that was hers, aside from the fantasies that burned behind her eyeballs of Brittany and Amber, whose popularity she loathed and whose simple prettiness she longed for. She had never told Coraline about the smudge on the wall that kept her from revealing herself in her face. As each snip felt like an erasure of who she could become, with whom she could commune, she stared unblinkingly into that little spot until she felt herself numb and disappear into the sameness of her and Coraline's bonded bodies. The tears she'd willed to evaporate lay there behind the eyes. As the remnants of unwanted hair fell across her face, she closed her eyes, and imagined the little pieces against the girls' gowns were silky strands of hair falling against her face, her hands greedily grabbing at it as if they were all for her.

Loss or Gain

SHLAGHA BORAH



Flyaways

MEGAN CANNELLA

My mother's anger smells
like stray pieces
of my frizzy hair
burning in her
ancient blow dryer.

From the Mouth of Babes on the Playground

LAURA CLISS

today a child informed me that I had
visible body hair
informed me with such
genuine consideration
as if helpfully drawing my attention to
a slight smudge of makeup out of place

they pointed to my arms
tanned and freckled
fine fuzz fair in the summer sun
before leaning in with wrinkled nose
on stretched tiptoe
to add
that they could also see
on my top lip
the slightest sign
of facial hair sprouting there

my sweetest of smiles
never wavered
concealing the grit of teeth
trapping tight the words I should not utter
as I paused
breathed
and agreed in as nonchalant a manner
as I could muster
that yes I did
as did most humans—
yes
female too

but we weren't done

there came a rapid tapping on my arm
enough to reset my teeth
clamped
the smile stretched just that little wider
turning back to the tiny assailant
who clearly had so much more worldly wisdom
to impart:

*but didn't I know that there were really easy ways
to remove it? some didn't even hurt that
much! it would make me much nicer looking
without it? people would like me better
without it? didn't I want people to like me
more?*

their head tilted
in wait

I blinked
smile slipping only slightly
and looked at this little person
standing before me
painful personification of
so much of society's shit

so saturated in fables of female subjugation
that they had already solidified into fact
in their fertile mind

and so I blinked
and hitched up my smile
and bent down to look them in the eyes
so willing and wide
and waiting

and I told them:

*I like my body the way it is and that means
it's perfect.*

they held my gaze for a moment
let the words settle
considered
accepted
and skipped away
the small seed of self-acceptance sown

I fancied that I could see the shoots already snaking
their way about their marvellously—
terrifyingly—
malleable mind.

Me Rajaron de las Raíces

KARLA RENÉE NEMANIC

I sit on the closed lid of the toilet—
The walls are that peach color I hate—

Plaster beneath paint— rolling and ragged—
Like the mountains my mother talks about—

*You know, I was your age when we moved here—
I was nine when we left Santiago—*

My mother's bird hands twist my shoulders right—
My chubby fingers fall to my lap—

My mother— who says she does not like
Or understand poetry— says—

She was a flower torn from Chile—
Torn up from from the only place she knew—

I pick flakes of paint— thick and eggshell white—
From the windowsill as I listen—

I was nine— her hands are bony and not nimble—
She pulls messed chunks of hair— knotted and waist-length—

A french braid of increasingly large strands—
It travels my scalp like the Andes—

She had never seen so many blond heads—
So many blue eyes— she says she was nine—

Curls stick through her fingers— escape her hands—
She begins unraveling the criss-crossing pattern to start anew—

They had no eyes, she says
Only sky-holes and white skin—

I flip a lead paint chip between my palms
Wood paneling stuck to one side— it's sharp—

She sighs— rips her fingers from my hair—
Heavy— whining— fumbling for shears—

And she cuts—

Locks— still half tangled— half braided— catch my neck

The black and white tiles are littered with wisps—

Brown lines piled— criss-crossed and scratched—

Like the mountains—

Tangerine Ambivalence

OORMILA VIJAYAKRISHNAN PRAHLAD



bridesmaid dress

OLIVIA BRALEY

it is three weeks before the wedding and you sit at your mother's kitchen table drinking bitter coffee with sugar and milk and working your way through *the washington post* crossword. you were asked to be a bridesmaid in your cousin's wedding and you said yes, seeing no alternative. you have only met the bride to whom you are a bridesmaid maybe three times at forced family gatherings around the holidays, even sat around the same table at thanksgiving, but overall know nothing about her. your mother rinses dishes at the sink behind you. over the sound of running water she asks you if you still need anything for the wedding. you tell her that your aunt forwarded you an email on behalf of the bride that said that you needed "nude or silver sandals" to go with the "vibrant teal" polyester department store dress you have hanging in the closet, reminding you that you are really doing this. as you say this, your mother hears you roll your eyes. she suggests you go with her to the mall this afternoon to browse lord & taylor. she is trying to be helpful and is probably right but you already resent this wedding and you also resent the mall, where you used to spend your days aimlessly roaming with your friends and stealing nail polish from hot topic in middle school and then wasted your days working at american apparel in high school. before they hired you at american apparel they took headshots and full body shots of you, front and back, in the parking lot of the mall to send to their hiring director. they told you they do this to see if you *have the look*. you got the job.

your mother turns off the faucet and clears her throat, getting quiet in that way she does when she has something critical to say. you wait. so, she begins. you knew it. *are you going to shave before the wedding?* you had a feeling this was coming. that uncomfortable vibrant teal dress is sleeveless and above-the-knee, a miracle given the wedding is at high noon in south carolina on a saturday in july. you tell your mother no, you are not planning on shaving. she tells you you should, it isn't a big deal. you say, *if it isn't a big deal then why are we talking about it*. your mother says she will call your aunt to talk to her about what she and the bride think. your mother calls her sister to put your personal grooming habits to a vote while you pretend to focus on the crossword. you hear one side of the conversation. *i have a question about the wedding ... i wasn't sure if you all know ... olivia doesn't shave ... i don't know why ... it's just some feminist thing, i guess ...*

your leg hair is your way of saying *i love you* to the body you started shaving in fourth grade after the boy you had a crush on laughed at you when you came to school in a skirt. your armpit hair is your way of apologizing to your right arm for the burn scar still there from when you misapplied nair to the little brown hairs that spread across it. your body hair is something you grew to love as it grew out, some part of yourself that you spent too many years denying. when you were in high school you read that kim kardashian got laser hair removal on her entire body and you envied her wealth, her proximity to perfect. you used to fantasize about dipping yourself in an acid vat up to

your nose, so that the only hairs that remained were your eyelashes, eyebrows, and on your scalp. you had razor burn on your arms and legs for years from obsessively running dull disposable razor blades over follicles that hadn't even grown back yet. after spending a lifetime cultivating this relationship, you are much closer to your body hair than to the bride of the wedding you don't even want to go to, even closer to it than you are to your own mother. you decide it is a big deal.

... yeah, i'll tell her ... ok, i'll call you back ... bye. your mother, now off the phone, tells you that the side conversation over what you do with your body has been resolved. she is happy to report that after negotiating on your behalf, your aunt has agreed that you don't have to shave as long as you keep your arms down in all the wedding photos.

google *inappropriate hairstyles* & click images

RAYN FOX

I

white men stole mama's hair
dey did it when grandma first brushed great grandma's ruby string
stretched out
year round
no matter how wet

straightenin iron smell stink da house

II

errything i wanted
was silk shiny
Dark & Lovely

my screamin scalp
my scalp screamin

i never looked like da box

III

i felt my first shame in sixth grade
at da bottom of uh water slide

sarah b. watched
curls kink
like horror movie

poofy! poofy! chanted like seance
as if to summon ghosts

IV

when mama strung beads in my braids
i shook my head to hear da music

when linda said she hated *the noise*
i asked mama ta stop bedazzlin me

V

black Blue Magic curse spread in scalp since childhood

i curl somewhere between 4A & 4B when i cast caster oil skeletons
mama swear
had she found dat shit
when i was reeeel littol
my hair'd be down to my butt

the length alone rapunzel syndrome

VI

in 2018 i shaved demons out my head
2007 britney brought me da fuzziest boi in razor blades soff
no line up
cradled

VII

in my rat tail time machine
i go back to erry summer & take
wuss mine : da pool on free friday freshcuts deep end

Your Hair, It's Everywhere

LISA LERMA WEBER

CW: grief, death, loss of a pet

My dog has been dead for a few weeks now. Still, sometimes I see a flash of golden fur out of the corner of my eye as if his ghost trots around the house. Other times, I'll find some of his fur embedded in a rug or on the bottom of a sock. It's strange how overwhelming little things can be when you are grieving. Something as simple as a piece of hair can break your heart all over again.

My own hair floats all over the house. Long, dark strands mixed with the short, light bits of fur my dog left behind. My husband laughs at how often he pulls my hair from his clothes or belongings. With each hair, he sings, "Your hair, it's everywhere, screaming infidelities..." from the song by Dashboard Confessional. It always makes me laugh. But it's such a melancholy song. And it reminds me that love is laced with uncertainty.

I worry about the ones I love, especially my husband who has been struggling with an illness the doctors can't or won't figure out. I worry that somehow this insidious coronavirus will sneak into our home, past barriers of disinfectant, and take my husband hostage. I worry that even my healthy teenage son could be stolen from me by this invisible thief. I worry about the rest of my family, dear and vulnerable. The worry and fear tangle up in my subconscious; no matter how I try to brush away the dark thoughts, I can't seem to unknot myself.

Sometimes my husband and I become overwhelmed with all the anxiety and uncertainty, and we embrace each other, run our fingers through each other's hair. It calms us, soothes our aching, tired souls. Other times, we cry as the grief wraps around us. We grieve for our dog who was so full of joy and love. We grieve for the loss of normalcy. We grieve for all the people who have lost their lives, for this country and the increasing threats to democracy and freedom—the victims of hate and injustice. And we grieve for the hope we tried so desperately to keep alive.

Grief, like fallen strands of hair, is everywhere. And it's screaming.

My Body as the Earth

MARGARET BALICH

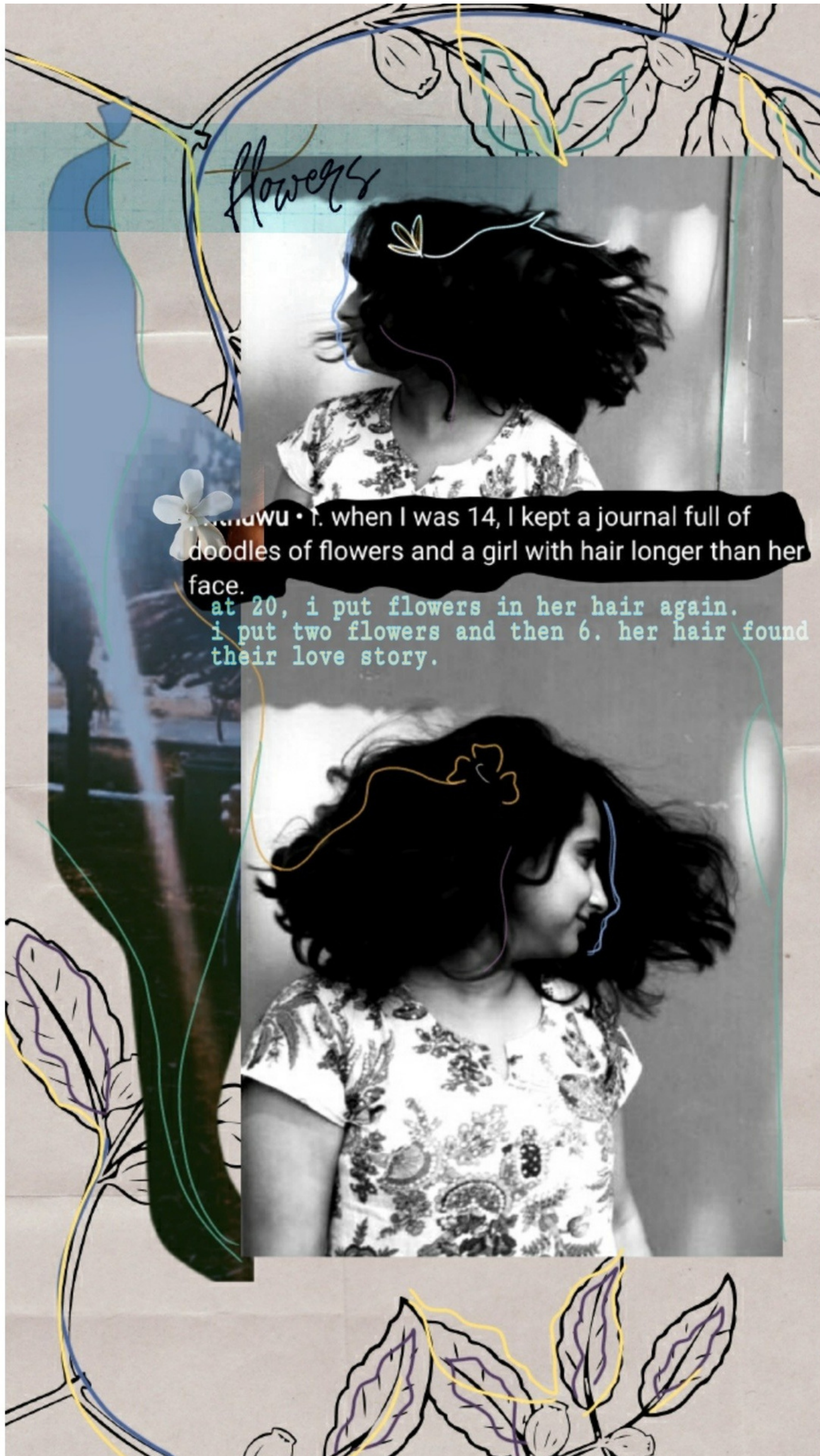
On day five, my legs show pinpricks of darkness
through pale flesh. I am returning to myself
as a negative of the night sky.

A garden grows slowly underneath my arms,
soft lamb's ear leaves and ferns and delicate orchids
sharing space like mourning women: draped in black.

No more shame. The saccharine sea between my thighs
will never be clean-shaven, will never be tame enough
for patriarchy to slip its hand in and steal a taste.

Flowers

PRITHIVA SHARMA



letters to my mother about french braids & other assorted metaphors

LEELA RAJ-SANKAR

elementary school mornings, our paper-doll bodies strung out on the laundry lines / always one foot out the door / half a bagel stuffed in my mouth / converse untied & on the wrong feet / those days when you switched between three languages so fast / it gave me whiplash / when i got dressed in the dark, put my shirt on backwards / more often than not / fourth grade, you brushed my hair / divided it into two neat sections, somehow always unraveled by / the end of the day / elementary school mornings, we sang / two different melodies / as we scrambled to find another hair tie / *did you do your homework, kanna? did you remember / to pack your lunch?* / secret #1: i regret the arguments, mama / yelling whenever the comb's teeth bit into my scalp, whenever the braids didn't turn out the way i'd imagined / (i don't remember why / i couldn't say sorry) / now, i stand at the window / i rinse my cereal bowl / i tug on my ponytail & try not to think about growing up / about our fights / my slammed doors / the fact that you are forty steps away & i will never know / how to say goodbye

now, the summer is sharp enough / to slice through my toothpick-thin bones / the fat bodies of bumblebees hum lazily in / the back garden / now, we sit in almost-silence / your tea / my coffee / this quiet song we share / in the white spooling from your temples / in the smell of henna on a saturday morning / in our tangled hair, the generations of women staring back at us through / the bathwater / secret #2: i miss crawling into your bed after every nightmare / i miss letting you do my makeup / i miss letting you hold me, mama. / (i'm still young, but not young enough / to be coddled / i'm still young, but not young enough / to need spoonfeeding / not young enough to admit / i still need you) / mom, i miss / myself. / i think that's the real problem, ma / that i grew up (*too fast, always too fast*) & i don't know who i am / anymore

secret #3: i wish i had told you how my day went. i wish i had been honest when i had the chance. / is it too late to try again, mom? would you do my hair if / i asked nicely? / if i never complained / again? / would you let me be your baby until / i feel old enough to move on? / secret #4, #5, #6: / my mother doesn't sit still long enough / to breathe. / my mother is a scientific marvel, practical to a fault / i've never known how to be / without the mathematics of her love. / the late nights / the red eyes / the endless working & calculating long after everyone else has fallen asleep / my mother & her plastic hairbrush / my mother & her watercolor tears / my mother & her endless determination / (i'm not old, but i'm old enough to realize this. i'm not old, but i'm old enough to know that there is so much in her / that she has given so much / away / old enough to admit / i still need her) / now, i dream / we'll fold laundry together on a sunday afternoon / now, i dream / the world no longer holds a knife to my throat, my hair still / a frizzy cloud around me / now, i dream / i'll say: *i love you / i miss you / i'm ready to come back to myself.* / i'll say: *i'm learning to love, mom / all ~~your~~ ~~my~~ our split ends & sharp edges / i'm learning to love, mom / i'm learning to sing along.*

Thoughts on My Recent Haircut

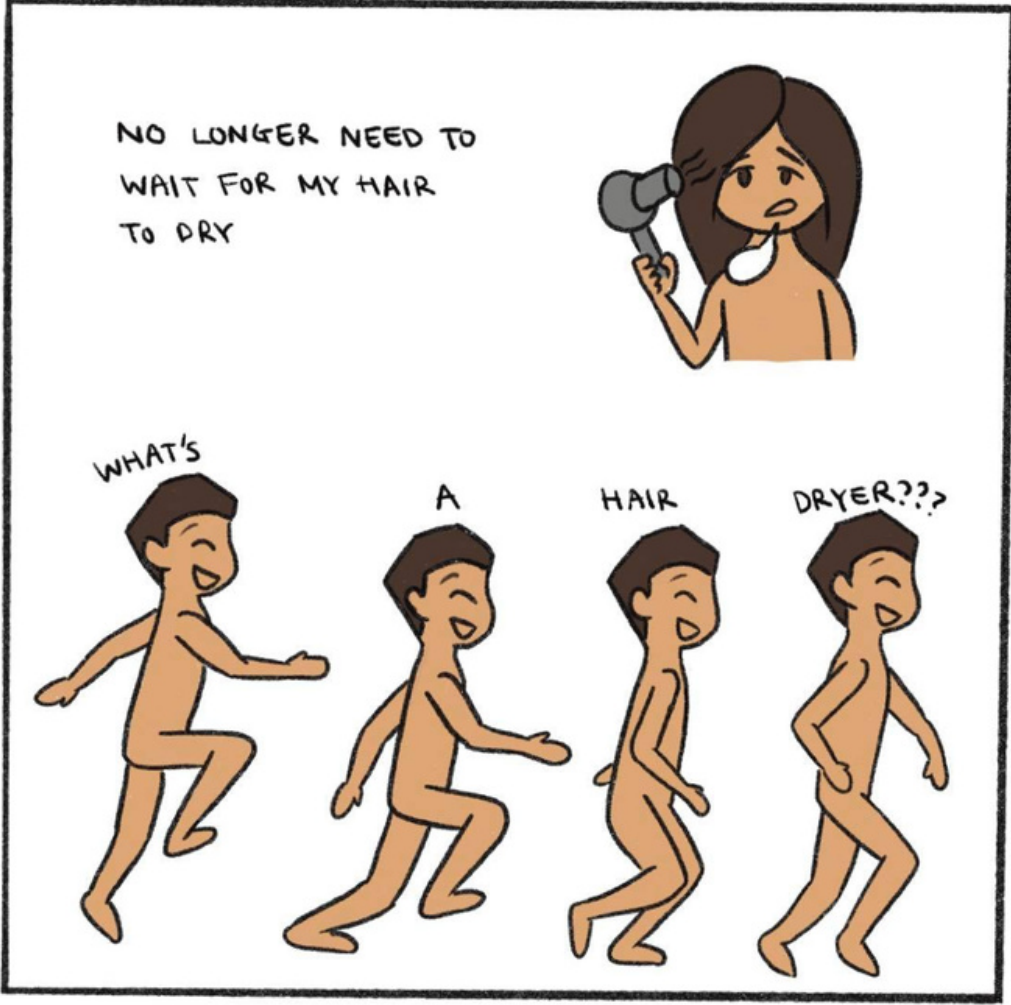
PARKER LI



AND I HOPE PEOPLE
STOP ASSOCIATING HAIR
WITH GENDER...



EXTRAS:
THE PERKS OF SHORT HAIR



Shave

KAITLYN CROW

CW: violence

I remember clumps of dark,
curled identity on the bathroom floor.
He cut my hair to tell me
that he didn't want me to be
what I am.

The sound of scissors
coming together and apart
cut against my eardrums,
the vibration,
cold metal against
the soft of my inner thigh.

I want you like this, he said,
so I gave in, wanted him to want me
like he did when we were young.

He cut until I was smooth,
until I couldn't remember
looking in the mirror that morning
and thinking woman.

How beautifully the hair blossoms
from between my thighs down to my feet
now that he is gone.

Bleach, Bigots and Bisexuality

NICK NEWMAN

CW: use of the word "queer"

So you've either seen, or had, the argument that not every person with dyed colourful hair is queer. I know I'm tired of saying it: Queerness is so much more than hair colour. Hair colour doesn't define queerness.

Ok, but hear me out... What if it does?

The first time I met my friend Shae, we were 16 and they had rainbow hair. Like, just picture the bisexual bob but striped, vertically, with all of the colours of the rainbow. And honestly my first reaction, fuelled by a fun dose of internalized homophobia, was: this is a lot. See, though they were my age, they were diving head (etc.) first into queerness, and I decidedly was not. Seeing them there, all 5 foot 8 of pansexual Scottish moxie, discussing polyamory like a brunch order, was like being slapped in the face by what I could be. What I should be. Talking to other queer people, they had similar responses to seeing someone with vibrant hair for the first time. Their first thought was either "oh my god I want this" or "oh my god I'm not ready for this."

But let's rewind a little. What does being queer have to do with dyeing your hair? Surely conversations about queerness should be centered around sexuality, gender identity and the people who deny us that expression? For me, it deserves a place in the conversation because it is a resistance to the social policing of our appearance. Unfortunately, society takes it for granted that we look, dress and act in a way that conforms to – to put it simply – what straight people want to see. This is not a luxury many queer people have. Whether it's because your presentation of gender doesn't fit with society's binaries, or your very pattern of speaking and interacting is picked apart and stigmatized by society, not to mention how queer neurodiverse people are treated - for many queer people, society's idea of normal clashes utterly with who they are. The first step for many to find their way around these goalposts (which are also arbitrary objectives that dead white guys decided on) is dyeing their hair.

Still following? Good. Here are three reasons why dyeing hair is an important part of a queer awakening.

- 1) It teaches queer people how to bear the brunt of identity-based discrimination.

(and I should write at this point how this isn't necessary) (that queer narratives don't have to be sites of hurt) (but, in the world we live in, at some point yours will be)

- a) And it's good to build thick skin.

- 2) To learn to express that identity. It's kinda nice to lock eyes with a bright-haired guy across a crowded room, because in that look is the conversation "Hey, you know what I'm doing, and I know what you're doing, and maybe we can do that thing at a place different from here?"

(don't get me wrong, you learn subtler forms of this conversation; but it's a pretty fun start).

3) Because dyed hair can be both your identity AND your shield, because it's amazing going out into the world looking incredibly, unabashedly, brilliant, because it can make you look handsome or gorgeous or just really really cool.

(and because sometimes, old ladies on the bus will look at it with eyes full of wonder and move close like they're not sure it's real and then say, real soft, I love it).

I first dyed my hair when I was 17. Dyeing your hair can mark the starting point to accepting your queer identity: to deciding that your life should no longer be bound by other peoples' comfort zones, that you deserve to be heard. But when I look back, the first sign of that change was when I first met Shae, and felt so uneasy around their rainbow hair. I think queerness holds its power in its ability to make people uncomfortable with their prejudice. And you might find this strange, but the last time a man leaned out of his van window to call me a slur, it didn't bother me as much, because I knew he'd go to work thinking about me. Me - and my box-dyed, sea-green hair.

Compels

PRACHI VALECHHA



Prachi Valechha

Remission

CLAIRE TAYLOR

CW: cancer

Her curls came back patchy to start, returning first to the sides of her head in puffy clumps like Bozo the Clown.

“Oh hush, you look beautiful,” Marie had said to that, but Camille told her to knock it off. She was tired of people saying that. Stopping by the house with a congealed casserole or a bouquet of flowers, and telling her how beautiful she looked. No matter her skin was dry and cracking, a mottled rash like a picked over raspberry bush spreading across her left cheek. Or that she’d lost so much weight the structure of her eye sockets was too visible, the hollows around her collarbones too deep. It didn’t matter if when she opened the door she was still wiping flecks of vomit from her lips with the tip of the scarf she had wrapped around her naked head. “You look beautiful!” they’d say and she didn’t have the heart to reply, “Oh cut the shit, I look like death.” Just smiled her tight smile and added the casseroles to the pile of donated dinners slowly overtaking her freezer.

The curls had disappeared in large chunks, clogging her shower drain, clinging to the static of her sweaters. “I have the wrong head for being bald,” she told Marie, but Marie said her head was perfect. “Nothing about this is perfect,” Camille replied. “Let’s remove perfect from our vocabularies.”

“Fine,” Marie had said. “Your head is sublime.”

They came back a little at a time. Curls popping up like seedlings in spring, tentative, fragile. “I look ridiculous,” Camille said, and Marie asked if it would kill her to just be happy she was alive.

Now the curls had returned in full and she really did look beautiful. Lush and plump, a golden shimmer to her skin that made her think about how we’re all just made of particles. She wanted to do something wild, like cliff jumping, or investing all her money in a young, unknown artist. She wanted to kiss Marie. She wanted to kiss everyone. Pull the air from a thousand different lungs into her chest and hold it there, a storage warehouse for breath. But she really wanted to kiss Marie. Take her soft hands and trace the length of each finger with her lips. Pull her down onto the bed and properly thank her for all she had done this past year.

It had only been Marie. Every day, bringing endless cups of water. Draping blankets over Camille’s lap when her teeth clacked like loose coins in a pocket. Massaging oil into the strained, aching center of her lower back.

“I can’t watch you go through this,” Andrew said before it had barely even started. When he walked out the door, Marie had stayed.

“I’m gonna die alone,” Camille told her, and Marie had taken Camille’s hands in her own and demanded she look at her.

“I would never let that happen,” Marie said, and, “I always hated that fucking guy.”

Donna suggested she sit with this feeling for a while. It was not uncommon, she explained, to be attracted to a caregiver, which may account for the sudden lust she felt for her septuagenarian oncologist when he told her it had worked--this horrible mess of treatment, surgery, pain. Her very first thought was how badly she wanted to loosen the knot of his tie and bring her hot mouth to his neck.

“This is a big shift for you. I’d like to explore the motivation behind it,” Donna said, but what she meant was, you just got your life back, don’t go throwing it all away by telling your best friend you want to bury your face between her thighs.

Camille was tired of waiting. Months of chemo, the slow drip of poison into her veins. Days spent in hospital rooms. Anxious hours before test results, phone calls she could barely get herself to answer. She had waited for death to find her, and now that it hadn’t, she didn’t want to wait anymore.

She agreed to spend a few sessions talking it through, though. She owed it to herself and Marie to know for sure this was what she wanted, that she was willing to risk everything they had in an effort to have even more.

So she turned herself into a world-class spelunker, exploring every last corner of her soul. Marie remained the light at the end of each dark tunnel.

Camille held her tongue through a couple awkward dinners where she feared if she spoke, she’d say too much. They sat together in silence, but not the comfortable kind they were used to. She swore, “I have no idea what you’re talking about,” when Marie stopped by earlier in the week with a homemade apple pie, plopped it down in the center of Camille’s kitchen island and, hand on her hip, said “Okay, what the hell’s going on with you?”

Tonight, she will tell Marie the truth. She’ll pour two glasses of wine, and before Marie can walk into the kitchen, dusting her hands on her pants, saying “All right, put me to work,” Camille will lead her to the couch.

“I need to tell you something,” she will say and, seeing the look on Marie’s face, rush to assure her that no, it isn’t that—she isn’t sick again. “It’s about us.”

“What do you imagine she’ll say in return?” Donna had asked at their last session when Camille told her she’d made up her mind.

Camille pictured Marie’s face taking it all in. Initial confusion, quick contemplation, a slight parting of her lips. Marie leaning forward, forehead pressing first against Camille’s cheek, then her mouth, warm and moist, opening onto Camille’s exhale. Marie’s hands across the bare skin of Camille’s shoulders, tracing the line of her neck, up and up into her hair, fingers threading into Camille’s curls—her glorious curls—gently tugging.

“I hope she’ll say, ‘You’re so beautiful.’” And this time, Camille wouldn’t stop her.

Negara(mbut)ku

MAY CHONG

This/my hair,
a nation unto itself:
roots made straighter darker
than mother's kopi o/
trimmed short/well-behaved/parted
above one eyebrow until

teen hormones hit
and undid my 'do.
It punched back in waves,
bristled and ballooned
like tree/mushroom/cloud
taking up space
unrepentant.
Our truce came long years later,

when we were wary/weary/worn
in a perpetual ponytail
eroding edges of my hairline.
Peace was in letting it
grow in its own time,
ignoring those who tried
to straighten it out/
straighten me out.

Crowning tempest,
who knows where you came from?
The people who matter love you anyway,
despite your heat, your rebellion

and how you itch.
How you fall. Dyed red/
dying unread/cut in
styles nobody really loved
in the end/curling
every which way/strand after strand
copper and grey/ready for the wash
and clean wet shine, nation mine.

A Little Relaxer

A. MARTINE

We get skittish
when we are called
'pretty.' We wait for
the trusty appendix,
like a *tap* on the
angry skull: for a
Black girl. Matter
of fact, we get
skittish for nothing
at all, *tap tap*
sounds to the feel
of prickly panic
on our heads. A
little relaxer in
the form of addendums
all your life will
do it to you. *Tap*
alerts the dormant
thing on your scalp,
that secret language
all us melanated
girls yield via
sucking-air teeth
and screwed *get*
this off me eyes.
A little relaxer
of a life is what
we've long
earned. A little
relax her, give
her what she
deserves with a
good for you and a
tap on the backhead
to boot. We get
skittish when we
are called 'pretty.'
Tap comes like a
Just-For-Me pinprick,
the cajolery like
everything else in
life: open ended,

waiting on the
shadow burn to
feel replete.



[Listen to the poetry performance here.](#)

Coiled

SAMARA POWERS

I wear the basilisk of my hair
in a low bun, twice pierced by
knitting needles — double-point
wooden lancets that cross and
bind, a simple spell of holding.

There's primitive magic
in her unbinding.

The wyrm wakes, spins
down unwinding,

splits into an aura
honey serpent

hisses and crackles

on winter days. I soothe
her with a braid

the Celtic knotwork
lies weighty down

my back

half-

held dragon

sways

and bumps

as I walk.

She is

uneasy, but

yields, restless,

dreams

of

wind.

The Mad Look: Quarantine Hair

KARA PERNICANO



Closing Arguments: The Counsel for Lowlights Recommends Leniency

MARY ELLEN TALLEY

Won't it soil the prosecutor's case
if expired dye hits the toxic waste heap
while the court-appointed beauticians

are still convening? We simply cannot
allow the prosecutor to glorify semantics
of foiled litigation as our defendant

did not receive informed consent
to cover up lost pigmentation
with something semi-permanent.

Let the court recall that the subpoena
was delivered while the defendant
was begging for a scalp massage.

Observe how celebrity trendsetters
plead the Fifth as oily hubris of youth
has become wild strands of inadmissible

evidence. We respectfully approach
the bench to remind our learned judge
that we are dealing in gray areas

of law and to implore the jury to return
a verdict of not guilty: we must preserve
the presumption of innocent virgin tresses

even when the mirror is accused of
white lies; we simply cannot expunge
the scissors' metallic DNA—

in case of a hung jury, the defendant bears
split ends no ill will since the upbraided litigants
have consistently failed to use conditioner.

Putting On That Face

MARGARET ELYSIA GARCIA

CW: violence, physical illness, death

Every morning when I flip my magnifying mirror over and examine my chin and neck, I think of my grandmother. Immediately, I become nine or ten years old again and I get a flash of her in her bedroom before me. She's tall again and standing at the high 1960s gabled glass window ledge facing the backyard. The ledge houses her magnifying mirror, her eyebrow pencils, cold cream, and lipstick.

It also housed the tweezers.

I'd sit in the rattan chair on the other side of her bed, and watch as my grandmother stood there by the window in cream colored girdle and bra and gold lame bedroom slippers as she—in her words—put her face on.

But before she could put on her face she had another task—dealing with the deep black coarse hairs that grew on her chin and neck while she slept, reappearing every morning. She'd picked that room—the smallest bedroom in the house—for its daylight. She stood there, before the mirror, and plucked them one by one.

This came with sounds of 'oof' and 'argh' followed by a close examination of the culprit—often a half-inch long hair. She would be let out a euphoric 'a-ha' as if she had snuck up behind the erring coarse strands and took them by surprise. She held her chin up to the light, victorious.

As my grandmother grew older, she kept up her vigilance the best she could, but eventually her eyesight began failing even with the perfect morning light. She started feeling for the hairs on her chin and neck and plucking them by feel.

I inherited her prodigious ability to grow facial hair and started in on my own daily routine after having my own babies. I began thinking of her when I readied my own face to meet not just the outside world, but myself, for the day.

In her 90s, she no longer had the dexterity to pluck the hairs, even by feel. One Easter when she lay in a hospital bed in a rehab ward recovering from an age related ailment, some cousins, aunts and uncles and I all made our way to her side. Some brought flowers and tea, sweet treats, and books she could no longer see to read and music she could barely make out.

I brought nothing having come in from a 10-hour drive. I bent down to kiss her and saw immediately what I knew she'd be uncomfortable with—hairs so long they curled on her neck and chin. She reached up to hug me and whispered in her annoyed Bronx voice in my ear.

"Margaret, would you do something here, please?" She rubbed her neck. I could feel her exasperation. I took out my tweezers and spent the next 30 minutes plucking out each

one. After each pull she let out a gulping sound as if the pain of the hair pull was a little too much for her. Nurses came by to check on her looking at me curiously as if I was a horrible elder abuser. She motioned them away with her hands and asked me to continue and I plucked each one while she ‘ooh’ed and winced. When I was done she held me to her and thanked me for making her—for that moment—feel like herself again.

Last year was her 98th birthday. On the day of her birthday, family from across the country gathered to see her. In her room in my aunt’s house, she needed help putting on shoes to go to the party in the backyard. She wanted help putting on a little lipstick. My aunt helped her with her shoes as I walked in the room. Her eyesight was really failing now, but as I put my face into hers and said her name, she knew who I was.

“Oh Margaret, you’re here. Can you do something with this?” she asked in the same Bronx voice, meeker this time. I remembered watching her ready herself in her bedroom. I was never tall enough to reach that window ledge. Now she was shorter than me. In another month, she’d pass away.

I took the tweezers out of my purse and began to do my work more tentatively than I had before. She winced and I’d stop and say, “are you sure” and she’d motion for me to go on. I didn’t want to hurt her and tried to stop halfway through, but she touched her chin and neck, felt a few errant hairs, and insisted I continued.

I finished her face and did my own. One last time, together.

Bliss

KATHERINE HILLIER



My Unkempt Angel

KATIE DILLARD

CW: childbirth

She inches towards the small of my back for nine months. In childbirth, whispers, *holy mother*. Shields me from the cascade of interventions expressed by doctors as future events, never requests. My attending physician, the one who manually dilated my cervix without permission in the exam room a week before, says we'll need to induce labor by Pitocin or by breaking my water. She shakes her locks at him, refuses forced contractions jolting my baby toward the light outside of my birth canal. When my water is broken, my hair sighs, *Aaah...* as the water gushes down my thighs onto the floor. *So what if everybody can see your hair down there? Who cares.*

She refuses to tell me why my cervix will not dilate on its own. I think it's my fault; I've always been secretive. I can't open up and relax so the doctors can get my baby and me out of here. My hair falls into my eyes, licks at the sweat on my forehead, caresses my neck. *Shhhhhh. Not true. You are not the problem. You are the aperture, the threshold between darkness and light.*

After the Fentanyl for my back labor contractions, I see a white, glowing cross. It is empty. My hair urges me to consider a C-section. *You are not God. Not even close. Don't make your son suffer.* She cradles my head as the medical staff wheel me into the Operating Theater. They call it this because there's a heavy curtain suspended at my navel so I cannot see the surgeon cut my baby out of me.

My partner asks me, "What if you die?" My hair sheds a tear and kisses him goodbye. She quickly whispers in my ear: *When you take the pill that is supposed to help you forget you were split open at the hips, you will not forget this moment. Remember the white light. Remember the jaguar pacing the room. Remember the watery, gurgly cry as he breathes outside of amniotic fluid for the first time. Remember your baby's daddy's "Wow." Remember your liminality.*

After my son is born, his grandfather shaves her down to two inches. I do it too, as a reminder that my newborn and I are technically the same age, even if he is considered zero in human years and I am pushing forty. She never complains, only grows in multiple directions, creating a perpetual maze of cowlicks, uneven bangs, widow's peaks and duck tails.

I pass the duck tail, a longer growth of hair from the nape of the neck, to my son. My partner jokes because my "redneck" father has it, too, but I see this tiny hair extension as a tether to my ancestors. My son's cornsilk hair cascades like a fountain around his cheeks and I remember myself at three years old. *Remember that I protect the skull, the skull cradles the brain, and the brain harbors the soul.* There's a rabbinic saying that every blade of grass has an angel stooped over it, whispering, "Grow, grow." My hair is the gentle touch of that intuitive angelic being, reassuring me to trust my body and what it holds.

Contributors

Lynne Schmidt

Lynne Schmidt is the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor, and mental health professional with a focus in trauma and healing. She is the author of the chapbooks, *Gravity* (Nightingale and Sparrow Press) which was listed as one of the 17 Best Breakup Books to Read in 2020, and *On Becoming a Role Model* (Thirty West), which was featured on The Wardrobe's Best Dressed for PTSD Awareness Week. Her work has received the Maine Nonfiction Award, Editor's Choice Award, and was a 2018 and 2019 PNWA finalist for memoir and poetry respectively. Lynne was a five time 2019 Best of the Net Nominee. In 2012, she started the project, AbortionChat, which aims to lessen the stigma around abortion. When given the choice, Lynne prefers the company of her three dogs and one cat to humans.

H. E. Casson

H. E. Casson went very grey, very quickly and enjoys the invisibility-cloak-like powers of grey hair. Their words have recently been published in *Flash Nonfiction Food*, *Lunate*, *Serotonin*, *Taco Bell Quarterly*, and *Workers Write*. They can be found online at hecasson.com and as @hecasson on Twitter.

Hunter Blackwell

Hunter Blackwell (she/her) is a Black bisexual poet and author. Her previous work has appeared in *The Write Launch*, *Barren Magazine*, *Crepê & Penn*, *Nightingale & Sparrow*, and others. She is a novice baker and cosplayer. So feel free to send recipes on Twitter @hun_blackwell.

Oke Oluwasegun

Oke Oluwasegun (b,1994) is a documentary photographer based in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria. His work is centered around personal experience, moments and everyday life. Oluwasegun began actively working in photography in 2017, focusing on social-cultural, health, and environmental related issues in Nigeria. You can find him on Instagram @okeoluwasegunmoses.

Jowell Tan

Born, bred, and based in Singapore, Jowell Tan writes prose & poetry after hours for fun and emotional release. His nights consist of writing, rewriting, watching videos on Youtube to avoid writing, and finally, writing again. Please say hello to him on Twitter / Instagram at @jwlltn.

Victoria Fraser

After flitting around random jobs like a fruit fly, Victoria Fraser has realized maybe she doesn't belong in the real world. Instead, she spends her time writing weird, fantastical poetry. If you listen closely, you'll hear her singing off key to her ukulele about why online dating is a nightmare (especially when you are bisexual). Read her musings on Twitter @drunkukulele.

Josh Holton

Josh Holton (he/him) is an ex-MMA fighter who took too many blows to the head and now writes and draws the weird. His work has featured in literary magazines across the UK and the USA. He was shortlisted for Spread the Word's Life Writing Prize 2020. Find him on Twitter @JHoltonWriter.

Grace Royal

Grace Royal (she/her) is a recent university graduate who writes both poetry and prose. Her work explores eating disorders, mental health, lesbian identity, the small details of life and the impact of social media. When she isn't writing, she can be found reading or looking after her eight guinea pigs.

Addie Tsai

Addie Tsai is a queer, nonbinary Asian artist and writer who teaches literature, creative writing, humanities, and dance at Houston Community College. The author of the queer Asian young adult novel *Dear Twin*, she holds an MFA in Poetry from Warren Wilson College and a PhD in Dance from Texas Woman's University. Addie is Nonfiction Editor at *The Grief Diaries*, Assistant Fiction Editor at *Anomaly*, and Associate Editor at *Raising Mothers*. You can follow her on Instagram @bluejuniper and Twitter @addiebrook.

Shlagha Borah

Shlagha Borah (she/her) is pursuing her undergraduate degree from Lady Shri Ram College For Women. She is a regular contributor and Select Writer for Terribly Tiny Tales and has been an editorial intern with Katha Publications. Her work has been accepted and published in various online literary platforms like Ayaskala, Marias at Sampaguitas, The Literary Impulse, GroundXero, etc. She is also the co-founder of the student-led collective called Pink Freud that works around destigmatizing mental health issues. Find her on Instagram @shlaghab.

Megan Cannella

Megan Cannella is a doctoral candidate, and her research focuses on 21st century dystopian motherhood narratives. She is a Midwestern transplant currently living in Nevada. For over a decade, Megan has bounced between working at a call center, grad school, and teaching. She has work published (currently and forthcoming) in 3 Moon Publishing, Porcupine Lit, The Daily Drunk, Verse Zine, and perhappened. You can find her on Twitter @megancannella.

Laura Cliss

Laura Cliss (she/her) is a feminist, vegan, reader, and cat-lover. She received her BA in English and History from Sheffield Hallam University before training as a primary teacher and spending a number of years teaching in the UK and Europe. She has recently moved back home to Cambridgeshire - UK, to start her MA in creative writing at Anglia Ruskin University in September. She is enjoying finding her feet as a writer and writes about anything that she feels an emotional connection to - moments, people... and sometimes cats.

Karla Renée Nemanic

Karla Renée Nemanic (she/they) is a queer Latinx poet pursuing a bachelor of arts at the University of Georgia. They have previously been published in magazines such as Marias at Sampaguitas and The Fem. Find them on Twitter @jajceglava.

Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad (she/her) is an Indian-Australian artist and poet. She holds a Masters in English. She has been widely published in both print and online literary journals and anthologies. Her recent works have been published in Otoliths, and Unlost Journal, and are forthcoming in Parentheses, Pithead Chapel, and elsewhere. Find her work on poetry.oormila.com and Instagram @oormila_paintings.

Olivia Braley

Olivia Braley (she/her) is a writer living in Annapolis, Maryland. She is a co-founder and Editor in Chief of Stone of Madness Press and a Reader for Longleaf Review. Her list of publications can be found at her website, oliviabraleywrites.com. Keep up with her on Twitter @OliviaBraley.

Rayn Fox

Rayn Fox is from Colorado but not the crunchy kind. They're an upcoming poet who loves to talk shit with the stars.

Lisa Lerma Weber

Lisa Lerma Weber has a lot of thick hair she has teased, permed, and even dyed blue. Her words and photography have been published online and in print. She is a poetry contributor and junior editor for Versification. Follow her on Twitter @LisaLermaWeber.

Margaret Balich

Margaret Balich (she/her) is an 18-year-old writer from Pittsburgh, PA. She has been recognized in Pittsburgh's Regional Scholastic Writing Awards, Carnegie Mellon University's MLK Writing Awards, and Hooligan Mag's Spilled Ink column. She hopes to study writing at the University of Pittsburgh while making music and finally learning how to ollie. You can find her almost anywhere @margaretbalich.

Prithiva Sharma

Prithiva Sharma (she/her) is a demisexual/biromantic writer from India, and is an Editor at Teen Belle Mag and Nightingale & Sparrow. She loves napping, horror movies and binging fanfiction. Find her work at <https://campsite.bio/prithuwu> and on Instagram @prithuwu.

Leela Raj-Sankar

Leela Raj-Sankar (noun; she/her, pile of dust in a floral print dress) is an Indian-American teenager from Phoenix, Arizona. She enjoys drinking obscene amounts of coffee and making far too many Richard Siken references. Her work has been published/is forthcoming in Perhappened, Ex/Post Mag, and Stone of Madness Press, among others.

Parker Li

Parker Li (she/they) is a queer Taiwanese-American artist specializing in digital and traditional art forms, as well as ceramics. They use their work as a form of resistance, exploring the themes of belonging, politics, and their transnational queer identity. When not working on art, they are reading history books and memoirs in the park. You can find them on Instagram or Twitter @humilityorigins.

Kaitlyn Crow

Kaitlyn Crow (they/them) is a Richmond, VA based poet. While juggling writing and dog-parenthood, they serve as a co-editor for K'in Literary Journal's Young Writers Section. Other works have appeared in: Vagabond City, Apeiron Review, and bluestockings magazine. Find them on Instagram @kaitlynwriteswords and Twitter @kaitwriteswords.

Nick Newman

Nick Newman (he/him) grew up in China and Scotland, and studies English Lit at the Uni of Leeds. His work appears / is forthcoming in Marías at Sampaguitas, Stone of Madness Press, and Lucky Pierre Zine, and you can find him procrastinating on Twitter @_NickNewman.

Prachi Valechha

Prachi Valechha (she/her) is a freelance cartoonist and 2D animator from India. She is greatly inspired and excited by the old mtv style cartoons, psychedelic art, anime - Ghibli, the paranormal, everything flashy and tacky, sex, violence and memes. She believes the world inside her head is a more acceptable one and keeps drawing in efforts to bring it to life. She enjoys conspiracy theories - the crazier the things sound, the better. She is also the creator of a fictional place called PeachTown and you're always welcome to talk or collaborate with her! You can follow her on Instagram @rainbowteeth.

Claire Taylor

Claire Taylor (she/her) writes poetry, short fiction, and the occasional essay. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous print and online journals including Capsule Stories, Sage Cigarettes Magazine, Dreams Walking, perhappened mag, and Canary Literary Journal. She is the creator of Little Thoughts, a monthly newsletter of original stories and poetry for children. She lives in Baltimore, Maryland and can be found online at clairemtaylor.com, on Twitter @ClaireM_Taylor and Instagram @todayweread.

May Chong

May Chong is a Malaysian poet and speculative writer with previous work in Strange Horizons, Apparition Literary, Anathema Magazine, Longleaf Review and Fixi Novo's 2020: An Anthology. When she's not pounding the keyboard, she enjoys birdwatching, good cheese, great stories, and terrible, terrible puns.

A. Martine

A. Martine (she/her) is a trilingual writer, musician, artist of color, an Assistant Editor at Reckoning Press and co-EIC/Producer/Creative Director of The Nasiona. Her collection AT SEA, which was shortlisted for the 2019 Kingdoms in the Wild Poetry Prize is forthcoming with Clash Books. You can find her on www.amartine.com and on Twitter @Maellstrom.

Samara Powers

Samara Powers is a Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee whose work has appeared in Bird's Thumb, The Christian Century, Inflectionist Review, SWWIM Every Day and others. She has two kids, a BA in Poetry, and works in marketing (thereby commercializing her pun habit).

Kara Laurene Pernicano

Artist and writer, Kara Laurene Pernicano explores intersectional feminism, queer love, trauma and healing through a hybrid image-text practice; she often hears a lyric quality in text messages and overanalyzes the use of parentheticals. Her creative writing has been published in Snapdragon, Waccamaw and Rabbit. She is a MFA Candidate in Creative Writing and Literary Translation at Queens College, CUNY and a Lecturer in English at CUNY. You can find her on Instagram @karalaurene and Twitter @KaraPernicano.

Mary Ellen Talley

Mary Ellen Talley's (she/her) poems have recently been published in Banshee, Raven Chronicles, Ekphrastic Review, and Gyroscope, as well as in several anthologies. Her work has received a Pushcart nomination. A chapbook is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

Margaret Elysia Garcia

Margaret Elysia Garcia (she/her) is the author of short story ebook collection Sad Girls and Other Stories, and the audiobook Mary of the Chance Encounters, and the co-founder and director of Las Pachucas theatrical troupe in northeastern California. She teaches creative writing and theatre at California Correctional Center in Susanville, CA. You can find her on Instagram @writerchickmama and @laspachucas.

Katherine Hillier

Born 1994, Katherine Hillier (she/her) is a freelance illustrator from the Northamptonshire countryside in the UK. Her work is informed by the nature that surrounds her and the folklore it has inspired, while she also draws on the pop culture and history that has filled her life. You can find her on Instagram @katherinehillierart and on Tumblr @katherinehillierillustration.

Katie Dillard

Katie Dillard was born and raised in rural Missouri. In 2010, she moved out west to pursue her MA in Creative Writing at The University of California-Davis. She has published poems in Prism International, Mothers Always Write, The Revolution (Relaunch), and several other online 'zines. You can visit her blog, [The Untamed Heart](#), for links to her work and follow her on Twitter @ktbeckmagic.

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