

Her

As we finally approached the others, and he immediately went to sit cross-legged on the ground, I scanned the faces of everybody there and felt an anxious tightening in my chest. I swallowed, noted a few curious glances being shot my way, and then hurriedly sat myself down beside him. I needed to stop jumping to conclusions that always revolved around this idea that nobody wanted me to be here.

I pulled out my phone to check the time. I did wear a watch, but I never remembered this until I already had my phone in my hand. I had failed to realise in my panic that we had sat down next to a girl that he was making it quite obvious he was interested in. He always did this. There was no way he would be keeping me entertained; he was busy. I tried not to be hurt. It was very definitely not his fault that I wanted to use him as a flotation device.

She was sitting with her back against the cast iron arm of the bench, just diagonally across from me. She had icy blonde hair that fell around her shoulders in choppy layers, and her lips were a dusty pink. Initially, her eyebrows seemed wild and much too dark for her face, but the more I looked, the more I could see how incredible they were. She was wearing a faded blue t-shirt and very ripped, loose fitting jeans, and her hands were busy playing with a lighter. Big eyes flitted between the sporadic little bursts of flame between her fingers, and his face as he told her a story.

Just then, he made a witty observation about something or other, sending everyone else into fits of laughter. She smiled on one side of her mouth and exhaled a little, almost like a snort. She rolled her eyes minutely, and then locked them with mine. I realised then that I hadn't laughed either. In actual fact, I didn't even know what he had said, so it was more that I hadn't been paying attention. I felt my ears burn at her momentary eye contact. She had been too cool to laugh along with everyone else, and she must have thought that I had been trying to do the same. I wanted to let her know that I had no idea what the joke was. It was irrational. I blinked a few times to bring myself back to thinking normally before chancing another glance at her. She was looking at me, and she was smiling like a jackal. I dropped my eyes to my shoes once more.

A warm breeze carried right through the group, low enough that it momentarily created a trail in the grass and lifted an empty packet of cigarettes for a foot or two. I was facing the wrong direction, and so my long hair got swept up, clinging to my vanilla chapstick. I grimaced and pulled it away from my face, smoothing it down and gripping it in fistfuls near the ends.

"Your hair is so long."

I followed the slightly raspy voice back to its owner. She pointed at me with the neck of a mostly empty bottle of Diet Coke.

My own voice caught in my throat as I ultimately failed to think of a response, so I ended up making a sound that was too heavy with consonants to even be mistaken for a word.

Big eyes waited on me for no more than a moment, before their owner reached for her jacket and stood up. Her t-shirt was short and her jeans were low, so for a moment I could see her hipbones and the calligraphic suggestion of the top of a tattoo, before she tugged the pastel blue material down over her waistband. She called out a goodbye with a cool sweep of her hand, and then she was gone.

It could not have been more than thirty seconds before I followed her.

Her silhouette was one of softly rounded angles that dipped and swayed, and dramatically changed direction just to run into one another. I stopped her by touching her elbow. My fingertips were cold, and I bumped my nail bed off her bone with the misjudged force of my reach. The pain was slight, but electric.

Stopping and turning in one move, she looked defensive before registering that she knew me. As her expression relaxed, I felt mine tense into the bizarre mask of one who is trying too hard to control their own face.

Time dripped like oil into the space between us, but she didn't grow restless, or at least not outwardly. Big eyes searched me gently for my purpose in having followed her. I don't know whether they found what they were looking for.

Another breeze caught my hair up and brought it to her, and this time it was her fist that grasped it out of the air.

"Your hair is so long," she told me again. I felt as though the foot of space between us combined with how comfortably she could hold the ends of my hair, negated the need for any response.

She looked it up and down, root to tip, turning it over between finger and thumb. Big eyes snapped back up to meet mine, and I no longer felt totally at ease. My heart grew anxious, and my palms followed suit. She gave me the briefest smile I have ever seen.

I don't remember how we got from there to her kitchen, but all of a sudden I was looking at myself in the mirror above her table. She stalked behind me like a lion, her fingers trailing across my shoulder blades and her dark brows furrowed in contemplation. Swallowing felt too noisy. I didn't want to bother her. She met my eyes in the mirror, and held my gaze captive there. I didn't know how to look away.

The light touch of her fingers gave way to the grip of one hand on my left shoulder. The other sent a shiver like a message down my spine as it gathered all of my hair and wound it around and around; my hair a spool of yarn covering her fist. I didn't realise the scissors was on the table until her left hand released my shoulder, reached out and picked it up. The sound of it opening was like the unsheathing of a dagger.

She cut slowly and upwards, giving each little group of hairs time to tumble over her knuckles, severed and blunt. Her gaze was unrelenting. She didn't need to see what she was doing. When she cut through the final few, my head rocked forward, released. My eyes were closed, and her breath was warm on my neck as she blew the stray hair from my shoulders, sending the nerve endings of every inch of my skin into overdrive.

With two fingertips, she pushed my chin up. I opened my eyes and met my own scrutiny in the mirror. I think I looked terrified. Her expression was ethereal.

My hair was so long, lying limp in her victorious fist.

Her eyes were green, and almost empty.