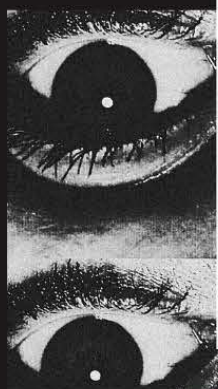
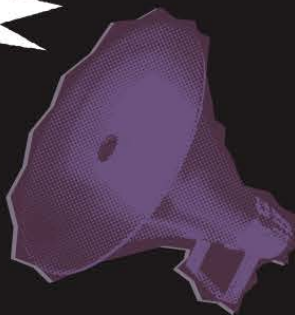
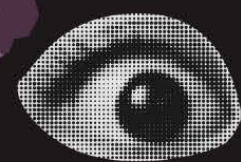


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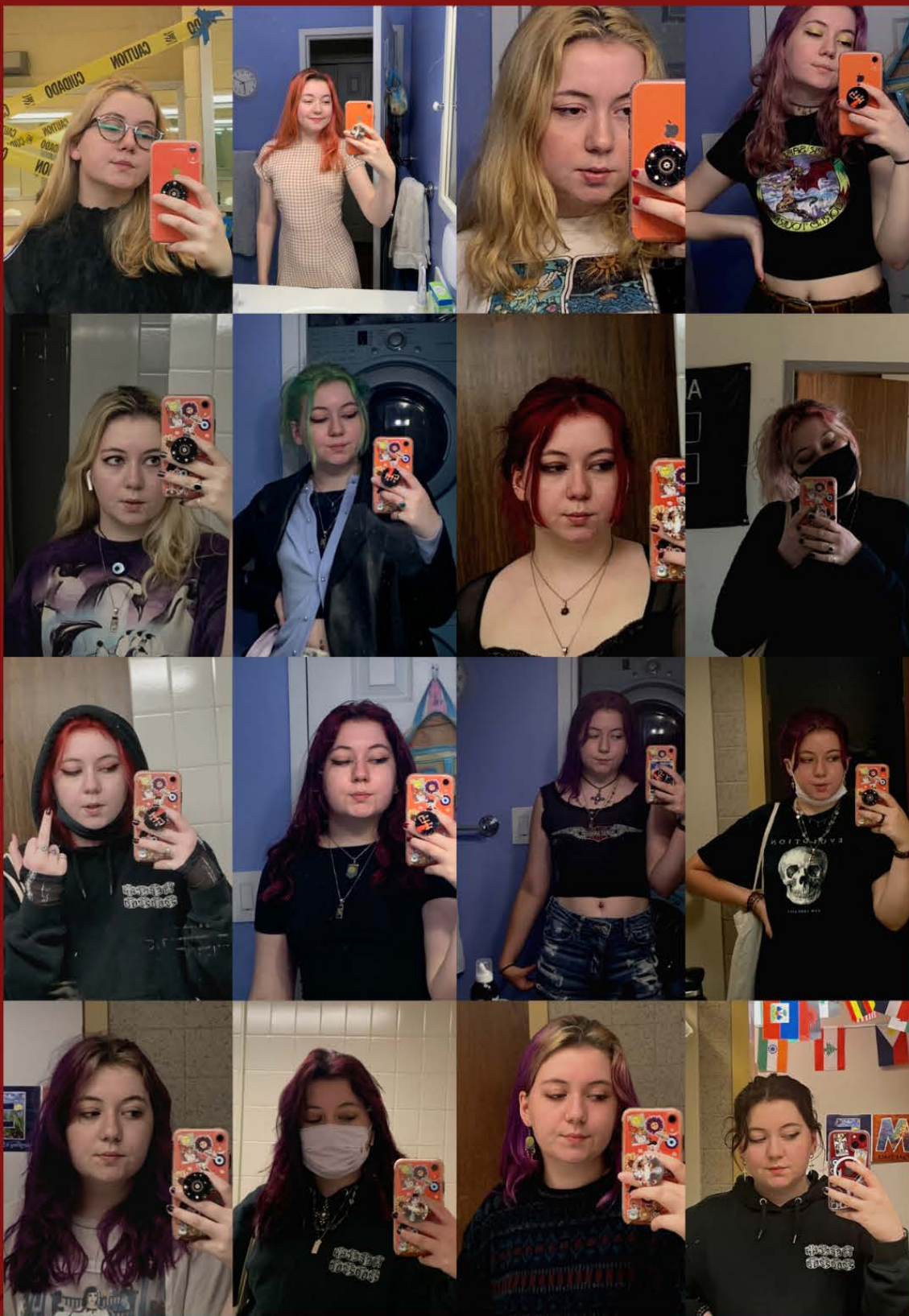


HaiR

MONOLOGUES



ELLA PEARCY





SMALL CHANGES MEAN PLENTY



For Yule, growing out his hair was only the first step. He found it kind of funny; how slow the process was. He knew the girls in his classes always complained about their hair taking forever to grow out, especially when they'd gotten haircuts they weren't satisfied with. Since he was a kid, his parents liked to keep his hair on the shorter side so it wouldn't grow into a rat's nest the way his dad's used to, back when he had more hair to speak of. That was understandable; he already had enough issues combing it out now that it was longer. It still wasn't that long, not even chin-length, but it was long enough for his liking. Quite soft, too. That was his favorite part. The first time she dyed her bangs was the day she came out as genderfluid to her cousin, and his parents. Actually, her cousin Hunter had helped her with it. He always had steadier hands than her, fit for a surgeon one day, though he couldn't handle the sight of blood very well. She could, but she also had no interest in the profession. Too much death. He'd gone up to the bathroom with her after arriving for a family dinner, talked to her, helped her bleach parts of her black hair, and colored it the brightest pink the dye would allow. Then, they'd gone downstairs again, and Yule told her aunt and uncle that she was genderfluid, but she still liked her name, and she was still the person they'd always known. Thankfully, she was met with a giant hug from both of them. Behind them, Hunter grinned, and gave her a thumbs-up. So Yule kept dyeing her bangs the same bright pink. It was a nice color, and reminded her about the acceptance her family had met her with. Her hair was the length her dad's once was, nearly as curly, and as soft as her mom's. She and Hunter shared the same black hue; darker than their parents'. He smiled every time he saw himself in the mirror. Smiled every time one of his friends ruffled his hair and went on about how soft it was. His hair was one of his best features, in his esteemed opinion. He wouldn't have it any other way.

Nina Fichera





SAMUEL ASHTON

PHOTO OF A REAL VIKING, CIRCA 1999

I remember drowning
in a leather chair too soft and deep for me to hold
my posture; so deep its green that I feel lost
in vast pine forests—
He tells me where he is from.

He says
We were Vikings once, and shows
a picture. He says we were bearded; long
and thick and woven strong, but
holding aloft a flimsy sword and real, wooden shield in his hands, he
is smooth faced.
His hair flat under a tall, horned helmet, huge atop his head,
he smiles
at the camera, at me, knowing
he is ridiculous, he is genuine
in his costume.

I recognize him,
know the grass; almost hear it blowing in the wind,
know that it lies not far outside
the house, know that
though in this he is younger, his eyes
have not lost their mischievous twinkle;
his lips not their smile.

Now, drowning
in his leather chair, too soft and deep, I notice his face is still smooth. I ask
Why?
Because, he says,
here, there is no need
of woven hair, of mighty kings. I am older,
still mighty, but I do not think it will grow.

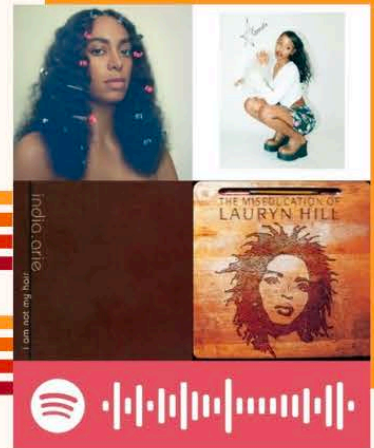
To me, he is a giant.

That's okay, I say.
One day I will grow one; long and thick and woven strong—
and we will be Vikings again.



NAZARI COOKE

"For some reason when they see dreads they think stupid. They think people with dreads are dumb, so let them continue to think you're dumb and stay one step ahead of them" - My Father



You know them dread heads do it the best (oh, yeah)

TIGHT KINKS VS. SHIMMERY CURTAINS: A HAIR ANTHOLOGY



AIMEE MADURO

I: Tight Kinks vs. Blonde Boys

When I was in high school, a boy yanked his fingers through my hair.

Robert and I looked wildly different. He was a clean-shaven blonde cliché. I was all dark tangles and split ends. He'd been my friend since eighth grade and my heartthrob since ninth. Over the years, I'd developed a habit of running my fingers through his hair. He had short, soft strands that gave way easily. They were gentle; inviting.

My hair was nothing like that.

We'd been roughhousing before first period, shoving each other and laughing. He'd gotten a grip on my curls and yanked hard, ripping a knot out. Black snakes twisted and hissed between his knuckles. My scalp ached and throbbed at the assault.

I watched his smile of humor morph into shock. Shock immediately became disgust. Maybe disturbance or even confusion. The frowns, those furrowed brows. They all look the same, right?

I remember being disgusted with myself.

In college, I'd be guilty of embellishing the story. I'd tell friends that he'd been furious at me for my hair tangling in his hands, and I'd fire back about it being his own damn fault for not being careful. I honestly don't know if I was ever truly angry with him for it. Was I supposed to be? Was it bad if I wasn't?

II: Tight Kinks vs. The Audacity of an Emoji

"You have short, curly hair", Sadie told me one weekend.

"I do have short, curly hair." She had a habit of frequently stating the simple, straightforward facts of things. "You're tall. You have curly hair. You have glasses." It was irksome at best and infuriating at worst, but harmless enough.

She asked to play with my curls the next time we saw each other. Or rather, she didn't ask. It was more akin to pleading, to begging. Her text was punctuated with the pleading emoji. At first, I was unsure, then uncomfortable, then annoyed, then angry.

Maybe I was overreacting and wanted a reason to be mad. Sadie was having a bad week, a bad semester. Surely it wouldn't kill me to be nice. A few minutes of yanking would probably be worth it if it cheered her up.

But she'd be yanking and tugging and pulling at my snakes. I couldn't name why, but I knew she'd be like Robert. We were friends, *of course* she'd be gentle. Didn't I trust her to be gentle?

Did I really think she'd be cruel with my hair?

What about her made me not trust her?

Why was Sadie even asking to begin with?

Saying we were 'close' was a bold-faced lie. After two semesters, we were friendly but not friends; classmates but not mates. What gave her the right to touch my hair? And that damn emoji.

"I'm sad, pity me, let me do what I want." I could almost see her trembling puppy eyes, practically hear her whining tone. The thought infuriated me. Did she really think the waterworks would sway me? The nerve, the audacity! They taught us as children to keep our hands to ourselves.

A part of me was grossed out, too. I didn't want anyone's hands in my rat's nest. It was rough and thick and tangled and gross. No one should have to touch it, let alone want to. Why would Sadie want to touch me?

TIGHT KINKS VS. SHIMMERY CURTAINS: A HAIR ANTHOLOGY



AIMEE MADURO

III: Tight Kinks vs. The Vinegar Bath

Lice infestations were a childhood rite of passage, albeit an insufferable one. The school nurse's advice about not sharing hats or hair brushes seemed futile in my case. I never touched anyone else's ball caps and hated brushing my hair, but clearly that didn't spare me.

My father never bothered with lice treatments on his weekends. I think my mom (foolishly) hoped he would be my savior. After all, it was his head of hair that was bestowed onto me. His sole attempt was shoving a spiny aloe vera leaf into a blender. The texture must've looked wrong, or maybe the plant was rotten. He took a single whiff of the mixture, then dumped it in the trash, leaving my scalp itchy and untouched. So much for that.

I almost felt sorry for Mom as she soldiered through bath time. Right after rinsing the body wash off my skin, I'd stand nude and shivering in the bathtub while she towered over me with her arsenal. She'd sink a needle-thin comb into each lock of hair and dig against my scalp to tear the nits away. I could feel the prongs prodding my skull and winced at every dragging motion. The comb was adept at catching onto the tiniest of knots and yanking my head back with its momentum. My knots weren't bugs, but the comb couldn't care less. Maybe they were bugs?

For one particularly stubborn session, I sat in the tub clutching my knees while my head was drenched in vinegar. The smell and taste suffocates them, Mom said. Maybe she was trying to suffocate me, too. The foul liquid dripped down my neck and towards my mouth. Illustrations of colorful vegetables decorated the vinegar bottle, so I expected a flavor like salad dressing, something pleasant to ease this otherwise torturous moment. The first drop of vinegar reached my lips and I stuck my tongue out to greet it, then quickly bit it back. The taste was awful, as if a match had been lit inside my mouth. I'd frequently lick my upper lip to clear the vinegar, forgetting the sourness until I gagged on it again.

I could hear Mom's aggravated sighs behind me. I didn't blame her; my hair was long and tedious, so naturally, the treatment routine was, too. I remember hearing her leave the bathroom, her shadow disappearing from the tiled wall before me. Maybe she was grabbing rubber gloves or another bottle of vinegar.

I saw her shadow against the tiles again and heard a snip. Then another.

Snip. Snip. Snip.

My mouth gaped open and shut like a fish and my lips trembled. "Y-yo-" "That's right, I cut it!" She didn't sound triumphant. More like exhausted or irritated.

Irritation. That was it. Was it just with my hair? Was it ever my hair at all? Was it me?

IV: Tight Kinks vs. Self-Deception

Even writing this now, my words feel foreign. If you asked what this piece was for, I couldn't tell you. Is it confessional, an admission of guilt? Am I trying to soothe a long-dormant rage or stoke its fire? Is this really how I feel about my hair? How I've always felt?

I don't believe the words I write. *I don't.* I know my hair is beautiful. It's special. Even coming from my hand it feels like a lie. I read somewhere once that if you lie to yourself enough, you start to believe your own lies.

Why don't I believe it yet?

TIGHT KINKS VS. SHIMMERY CURTAINS: A HAIR ANTHOLOGY



AIMEE MADURO

V: Tight Kinks vs. Miss Jessie's Rebellion

I'm looking forward to my next haircut, I told my family. I'll grow it out a bit longer, just a couple more months so there was more to work with. Meanwhile, my Pinterest was overwhelmed with search prompts. "Short hairstyles." "Short shaved hairstyles." "Curly shaved hairstyles." What curl type did I have? Did I want it long enough to toy with when bored? Maybe an undercut or shaved sides? What if I just bought a razor and buzzed it all?

Ideas didn't change my hair in the present moment. My current style was the most "afro" it had ever looked: coils long enough to retain a twisted pattern, bouncing up and then outward. They framed my face surprisingly well after wash day. It was day four post-shampoo that it looked a bit depressing.

I'd been using the Fancy Stuff since high school, bougie products recommended by my bougie "curl certified" hairstylist. For the first time, I'd been blessed by the presence of another Asian woman who knew the ferocity of our manes; she couldn't possibly steer me wrong. I used each bottle of Fancy Stuff faithfully, worshiping the curly bible. My mother's wallet must've been fuming. Thirty dollars for shampoo that lasted two months at best? God forbid my own allowance paid for it.

I was standing before the Walmart beauty aisles. My hair gel was running dangerously low, and I rationalized getting a cheaper variant of Fancy Stuff. I'll have shorter hair soon enough, I reasoned. It's silly to waste money if there's so little to style.

The usual shampoo commercials on TV held none of my trust. All the models dramatically flinging their heads around looked like shimmery curtains had been glued to their hairlines. Granted, everything on camera was fake, but this felt different. White hair looked different. It didn't look like mine.

Bee-lining for the black hair aisle was most logical but intimidating. I didn't have tight kinks on my head. I didn't belong in this aisle. But somehow Tight Kinks Shampoo felt safer than Shimmery Curtains Shampoo.

Supposedly Miss Jessie was a curly saint; her bottle said so, but there was a hesitation when I reached for the shelf.

It didn't fit my bathroom aesthetic, I argued. All my current products were green, pink would disrupt it. A skinny bottle wouldn't last long, it's not worth twelve dollars.

What exactly quieted those voices of doubt? I have no answer, only theories. Perhaps it doesn't matter much in the end. Miss Jessie seems proud to disrupt the green of my bathroom counter.



THE HAIR MONO- LOUGES

BY EVELYSE CRUZ

i grew up listening to india.arie
it took a while for me to see
that while i am not my hair, my hair can be me
mohawk or locs or out and puffy
i had grown accustomed to letting it be
no one around knew how to tame it or how to set it free
my roots grow in dark and tell stories of telling stories
and now it can tell you when it was last washed
in all its curls and knots and glories
i remember fourth grade and freshly done braids
being called medusa set the memory in stone
and even as my hair free flows it still never fades
so when i wake up and my curls are undone
and i set off with a comb and water
willing it as a battle to be won
i know that my hair is something that can just be
and that i am not my hair, but my hair can be me



Not-Girl

patchwork epidermis eats / itself from the inside— out nails dig, find / marrow
beneath / *on the inside— we all look the same* skin / born again finds
me— this time, I will leave my legs / unshaven I am not androgyny's
wet dream, but I've been trying to be / raw as— silk / sores / sewage—
 skin skin skin skin
hairless / desired hair / deceitful, always more than expected—
 then wanted / fit to chop / layer / thin— pull
 I want to shave my head *I want to shave my head*
 but there is a gash / in the back of my skull—
I learn to braid my hair, bobby-pin, tuck / away hope to pluck myself away
 to be / removed from land mountain sea—
 to be to be to be to be—
 without definition without desire
 for one / once.

K E N D A L L C R U I S E