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ON HAIRCUTTING BY MICHELLE MOSTAED

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I can remember the first haircut I performed on a real person. All my baby dolls had been butchered and I had nothing left to feed my habit. I eyed my little sisters sun baked locks, drew her into my pretend beauty parlor, and allowed each snip immerse me deeper into my craze. I was born with peculiar desire to cut hair. I extracted some kind of thrill from it; there was some innate fulfillment I seemed to derive-still do. It became an act in which I found a satisfaction that hit the spot so precisely that it was poised in the center realm of the bull's eye. The only thing I did not love was the element of irreversibility haircutting held. Once cut, only time could grow it out.

Although it is an instinctive proclivity of mine, I have improved dramatically with age by frequenting my own hair stylists, baffling in admiration at their handiwork. A ferocious note-taker I became as they cut. Fascinated, I would log every detail of precision into my memory. I gave careful attention to how she would pull segments of hair up above my head with a wide tooth comb, allowing the excess to droop over like a floppy dog ear so she could snip a layer. I absorbed what caused it to cascade down just right, what made it angle, fade, and blend. I would rush home, eager to reenact what I had just learned. I propped myself into the bathroom sink, allowing it to cradle my small frame snugly. With no one else to practice on, I became my own Guiney pig by default. I was left regretting the uneven chops I would make to the back as I had to wait for it to grow out.

As the years past, I outgrew the bathroom sink. Scrounging for people to try my work was no longer an issue, but the lines began to form around me. Word of mouth soon brought in a steady stream of friends and mere acquaintances and turned them into loyal customers. Haircutting has become a something I do-my mode of being perhaps. There is not a week that goes by, that I don't perform multiple haircuts as a favor. I find the safest harbor for my scissors are in my purse alongside me everywhere I go.

Of course there were always the cuts I wished I had thought about more before I impulsively chopped. Once the hair was cut, I felt as though I was letting a secret escape into divulgence, not able to be unvoiced. The cut couldn't be retracted, reversed. There is a certain amount of pressure that comes along with it. A Woman's hair is her glory, or so the Bible says. My mom's words instructing me to "leave well enough alone" seeped back into my mind from a far corner in my memory.

Her words resonated deep within me one day last semester as I set out to cut a friends hair. It

dripped down her back and soaked through her t-shirt; I fingered the dead ends and pulled my comb through her dark, wavy hair. I parted a straight line through the center and then began. Snip. Her head eased into a natural tilt and I repositioned it to an uncomfortable straightened pose. I clasped the frail ends of her rich brown hair in between my two fingers and snipped again, it carelessly fell to the floor that was soon showered in snippets of brown. When she asked me to go shorter I did-cutting all the way up to the imaginary line she drew on her forehead. I should have trimmed it little by little, but I felt pretty confident and so I just made one even chop. I wanted to take it back. I looked down at the clump of hair in my left hand, the small, sharp scissors in my right. I forced a smile as I looked at her face now framed by new butchered bangs and shrugged my shoulders awkwardly. Again, reminded of how irreversible cutting was.

The mistake cut would eventually grow out with the steady accumulation of time. Another trail of my mom's words once found their way through the crevices of my mind and into my memory, "time can heal all wounds." But as I went about my next task numbly with a regretful feeling locked inside me, I thought of wounds I still bore, wounds that time hadn't healed. My heart swells with hurt as I think of how I allowed such a treasured friendship with my best friend from High School to end. The conflict seems shallow as I glance back, but at the time reconciliation appeared too difficult. We went our separate ways and lost contact. The more time elapses the further we grow apart and less chance we have in mending.

If anything, I have found that wounds can't be taken care of by time. After a bad haircut, I beg for time to hurry and grow out the mistake, but what about real life? It almost proves the opposite is true. The harder time presses against me, the weaker and more worn out I became. Soon I have no strength to push back, my effort slows, and I let go of the friendship I once had hope of mending. I wish badly to go back to a place where restoration seemed possible, but there is so much vastness escaping in between us. I feel lost in the sea of irreversibility. The insufficient raft of time can't keep me floating and I'm left to treading the miscues, struggling to paddle back in search of land. I'm swallowed by mistakes and feel helpless as I wash up on the shore of regret.

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