

[Two years ago, my hair was down to here. And now... well...this.]

The first question that multiple friends of mine asked at the sight of my scalp was, “*Is your mom gonna freak out when she sees you?*” I was surprised. Since the haircut, I had been consumed in my own world: the value of the unobstructed sound of the wind, the landing of snowflakes, the haste of time.

But the questions others posed to my newly shaven head did not care so much for the worth found in particularities or singularities. Instead, the questions were focused on others’ reactions and judgments as essential to the worth of the haircut. The questions also implied that these reactions were likely to be... “complicated”. I wondered how or why my exposed and vulnerable head could possibly be read as off-putting... not sure what to make out of it, I started shifted my focus from sounds and sights to comments and looks. I thought perhaps my look was emitting some kind of toughness, or impenetrability. As a result, I simply decided to embrace a feeling of solidness.

A few weeks later, on the nine-hour flight home to Argentina, the popular question started to haunt me: would my mom freak out? A staple of my visits home had been a mother-daughter, hours-long visit to the hairdresser. My dear mother took pride on the fact that, once a year, a neat tidy-up of the rough ends I was too indifferent to cut actually took place. My newly shaven head had extinguished the possibility of repeating our ritual.

I could feel the pulse of my quickening heartbeat as I approached the door to my family's apartment. As I entered, I saw my mother's eyes go from my face, to my head, back to my face. Without hesitation, she uttered: "Delfi, estás **igual** a cuando eras bebé! [Pause] "Delfi, *you look exactly as you did when you were a baby!*" She was smiling, almost laughing.

Parents, I am told, have a special talent for inadvertently pushing their kids' buttons -- with the utmost love, of course. I had **already** embraced this newfound firmness and solidness of being, only for my mother to dismantle it with a simple, subtle, and disarming remark. Her silent hug, and slight patting of my "baby" head, perforated my illusion of toughness.

I later left the summer in Buenos Aires to return to campus in the midst of a snowstorm. As I stepped out of the airport, I was stopped in my tracks. [LONG PAUSE, LOOK] *It was fucking cold.* The piercing wind on my scalp **weakened** my stand. And, worse, it strengthened my mother's subtle point: the bare head was a growing testament to fragility, not solidity.

Uncharmed, I re-focused my attention on the experiential effects of my haircut. One of them was a newfound openness of sight. Now, no matter how much I moved or twirled or shook my head, my vision remained unbothered. I started to stare for longer, and more deeply, into the nuance and beauty around me. I became more aware of the forces that moved me, their origin, and their strength.

It was a couple days later that I saw it. It was 4:05am. I was exhausted, walking from the art studio, through Harvard Yard, towards my bed. I was surrounded by a desolate silence and paleness that only the afterbreath of a snowstorm can awaken. About to exit the Yard, I spotted a sight that froze me in a state of paralysis. Barely visible, on the top of a snow hill, was a brittle leaf rotating on its axis under the command of the moods of the wind. Securely yet not forcefully punctured unto the snow, the leaf's side gently kissed the snow around it **in a perfect circle**. It was a vulnerable, delicate, endless pirouette.

The fragility of the composition affected me to the point of tears. In awe, I stared at it for what felt like hours. The sight was so beautifully alive, so exposed, so easily destroyable. I felt myself crumbling, falling in love; a heart-aching, over-whelming, ever-evolving plunge. All, everything and anything was worth the view. Hypnotized, I studied every feature from every angle, trying to memorize its minuscule details, its minuscule movements. Then, a thought crossed my mind: *this must be what it feels like to see your newborn baby for the first time*. Aided by my haircut, I then knew that my mother still sees me -- still loves me -- in this way.

That night, I was truly alive: seconds stretched at their own discretion, the landing snowflakes *tickled* me, and the wind sounded like *laughter*. The love I felt for that leaf, that dance... they proved to me the truth that had been hiding behind my mother's gesture all along: *I am strong because I am lovable. I am lovable because I am frail*.