

Washing my daughter's hair

by [Julie L. Moore](#) in the [November 3, 2021](#) issue

Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror. —Rainer Maria Rilke

In copious curls, her brown hair
reaches the small of her back,
a tangle she can barely brush

for she feels as though a thousand needles
perforate her scalp and a vise
tightens on her temples,

as the iron weight of this unknown
affliction crushes her,
month after unrelenting month.

It's the not-knowing, she says,
that prowls through her days like a shadow

unhinged from her 27-year-old body,
haunting every corner of the house,
darkening her mind's acute angles.

Rendered helpless as a supplicant,
she kneels before the bathtub,
leaves her aching arms at her side, bends

beneath the faucet.
I soak her hair, lather
citrus-scented shampoo throughout—

I must be gentle—
caressing her tresses,

then rinse and massage in conditioner.
I want to free beauty from terror,

so with wide-toothed comb, I work

my way up from the ends, unknotting
each strand from the other,
then rinse again, wishing all the while

to mix in a Pentecostal fire,
spirit more immediate than prayer,
to muster a miracle from water and fear.