

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.