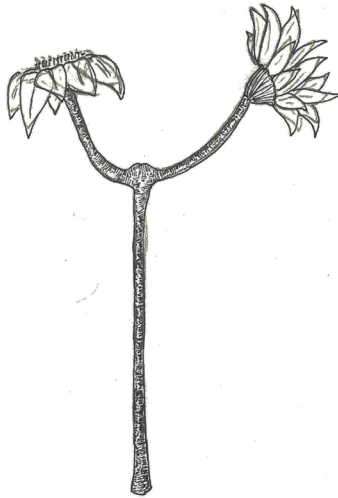




A Family History of Hair



The split ends is being born a twin, the relationship between twins and twinhood
as an inescapable state of being.

| | | | | |
|------------|---|-----------------------|--|----------|
| Split ends |  | acting as parenthesis |  | enclose |
| what could | | have been said but | | was not. |

The first and last time we ever went fishing. The lake was still except for patches of yellow and pink, the heavy bodies of tourists after a meal. Families were out barbecuing, their paper plates blowing in the wind. A girl with ankles the colour of conch shells was leaning over the water, spitting toothpaste, which swirled, joining the starry formation of the foam. The reflection of her hair was seaweed in shades of blue and black, going up like a rope towards the sky. 'If I catch a fish, i'm going to go talk to her.' I told him. A dragonfly landed on my pole, my

brother was the one who caught the fish. When I threw down the fishing pole and stormed off, I could not quite explain to my grandmother what the problem was.

–What’s wrong?

–Nothing.

–[Silence]

She had a long dress. She pushed her sunglasses to the top of her head.



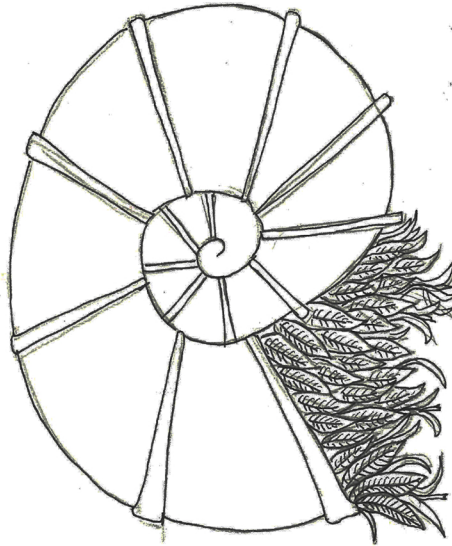
Why do you always try to swim upstream?

Because we have to be different, otherwise we wouldn’t
be at all. It’s a question of survival.



–Is it because you didn’t catch a fish and Elam did?

–No! It’s not the fish!

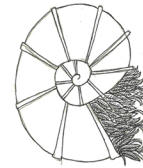


In relation to
difference



which is
sameness,

the
sameness

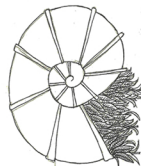


is claustrophobia,
without difference.

The buzz-cut was a time in the family history when the military was on all our
minds.

When my father served he made sure his hair was cut to the standard length,

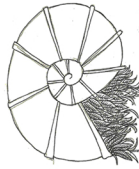
to



The outpost where he was stationed was very small and on top of a hill. There
were only three of them. When they were not listening in to transmissions they
took turns watching the desert dunes, where nothing ever happened. The fridge
was stocked with cottage cheese, pickles and olives. When I was thinking of

getting out, he told me that he regretted not putting up more of a fight. He followed the rules too much, he said.

I tried a lot of things to avoid

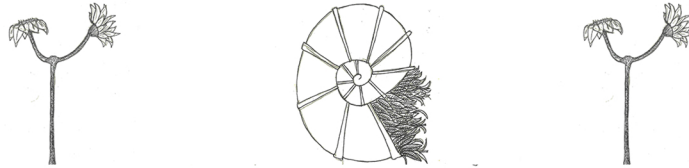


and getting my hair shaved.

Like my father, I followed the rules. There were ways of getting out, that were twisted in and out of what was legal. There were procedures to follow, check-ups to do. I started with a long-shot: allergies. The doctor's office was crowded with labeled jars: Pine 030, Wheat 674, Pollen 221 were some of the more common ones. There was a huge bumblebee stuffed into a vial, its wings stuck to the glass. I wanted to reach out and stroke its yellow and black fuzz. The doctor pricked my forearm with a needle, and dabbed a cotton-wad soaked in the different vials on the bloody point. My arm was red and swollen by the end of it.

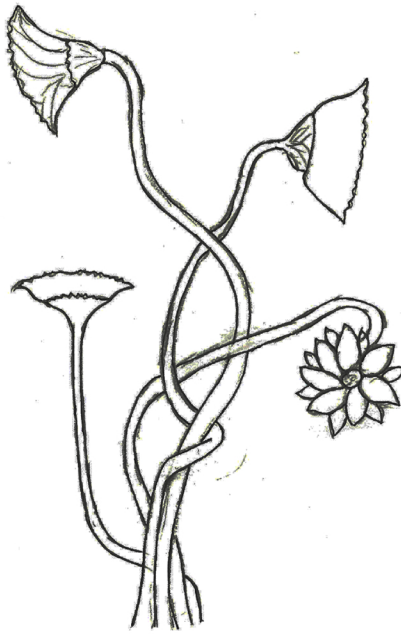
When that didn't work I went to see a psychologist. The psychologist and I had been talking about the army and about getting out. I wanted him to write a letter for me. The letter would convince the military that I was un-fit for duty, or in other words insane.

– ‘I think you can go. I think it’s possible that you’ll do fine. How will it make you feel if you don’t go, but your brother does?’



–‘And the letter will do more harm than it’s worth. You’ll get out, but at what price? It’s not olives or uzis, you can do something in between. Something less extreme. It’s just three years.’

He used to be an actor so sometimes I didn’t take things he said very seriously. His office was filled with buddhas and Persian carpets, pictures of Thailand in black and white and a colourful, plush frog in the corner, so I didn’t understand what his problem was with writing the letter. He meditated, for god’s sake.



The braid approximates, in a small gesture but without any words, 'I love you.'

It is highly unlikely

,almost impossible,

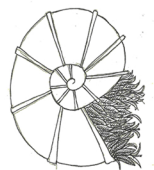
that a



will be

made

from a



At times the



will go unnoticed in the sense of



'I love you'



My mother takes care of things. She has dozens of flower pots in the living room.

A small olive branch my brother was given as a gift was now spilling on the floor,

heavy with leaves. She had gotten white, purple-spotted orchids after my grandmother died.

My father understood that this was a gesture of



My mother stayed up all night with Shluli before we had to put him to sleep. The vet said he was suffering and that this was the only way. After Shluli, we got Sumsum.



Sumsum can never replace you, Shluli.



She was a mess of hair. A rug of a dog. You could not tell heads from tails. In the dark, on the way to the toilet in the middle of the night, she looked like a bear sprawled out on the tiles in star formation. She liked squeezing her head into small spaces, into corners, under desks and in between chair legs.

My mother tore off a chunk of bread and threw it to Sumsum. When she did not move, my mother picked it up off the floor and held it against her nose. Sumsum raised her head off the ground, only slightly. She had had an operation yesterday. The vet had discovered a tumour during a routine check-up, and now her

stomach was wrapped up in ivory-coloured gauze. My mother had a vein on her forehead which would pop out when she talked about politics or when her mother came to visit. Now, sitting by Sumsum's side, the vein was like ivy creeping on her face.

My father made a collage in commemoration of the operation. It was on the fridge, pinned up by tiny dog-shaped magnets. The magnets, clockwise from the topmost right, were of a Rotweiler, a Poodle, a German Shepard and a Schnauzer. The collage was made up of a series of pictures with captions underneath them. The pictures were of Sumsum in various places: the kitchen, on a trip to the desert, under the table, in bed. In every situation you could not exactly tell what you were looking at. The pictures were printed in grey-scale, appropriate for an Old English Sheepdog. One caption read: 'Sometimes I am pretty confused and don't know what's in front and what's behind.' This was my father's way of showing my mother that





The shedding

is losing

one's

sense of self

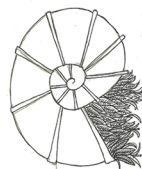
or losing someone

you love.

It can be both an unravelling of the
and a tightening of it.



It can be a product of the



but also in anticipation of it.

It can be one

losing the other

but this is



unspeakable



My father takes the orchids, crumbling earth and searching roots and all, and puts them in a deep glass vase. He fills up water from the tap. His hand is damp with perspiration and he nearly drops the glass. He is trembling slightly.

He feels as if in the act of watering his dead mother's orchids he is

both



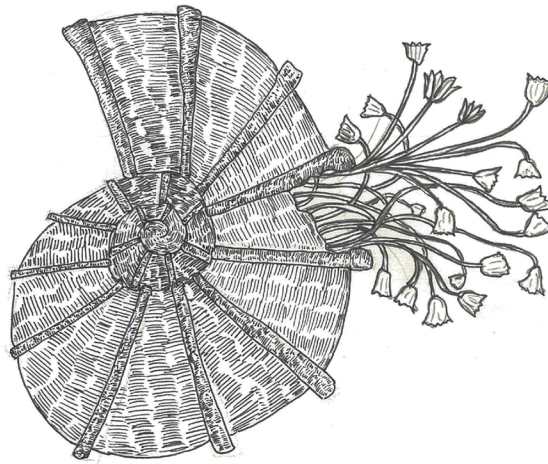
and



He has developed a habit of looking through the drawers and going through the piles of paper and cardboard boxes filled with old photographs and sheet music in the piano room. There is a fold-up bed which he sits on while he looks through them. It creaks and he feels more alone than if the room were silent. He does not go to her bed where he stayed up with her in her last moments.



Her hair was in wisps on her head, as thin as a membrane on a condensed glass of milk. The only sound he remembers was the ventilator. Now it is his own breathing. He cannot get it under control. Loud and heavy. His heart is loud. Louder than the rustles and whispers he has accustomed himself to. He looks out at the bougainvillea, its branches creeping into the room from the open window, its paper-thin petals covering the tiles like lotuses on a river. He pushes his glasses up the bridge of his nose.



a case of bad

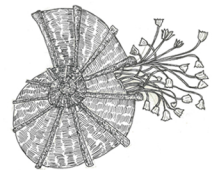
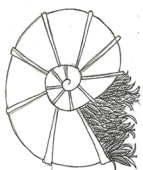
The bad hair day can mean one of several things. luck

a curse

an omen of things to come a

misunderstanding.

The bad hair day, like a cousin twice-removed, is connected but not directly related.



My grandmother told me that she can remember the exact day she started feeling bad. This is the day the cancer started, she had said. She was coming to pick me up from a friend's house. She parked the car in front of his apartment building, blocking part of the road.

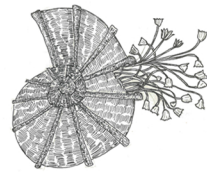
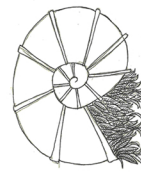
She waited. Once or twice, she honked. Upstairs, I was waiting for her phone call.



I'm sorry I didn't understand.



A car sped by almost knocking her sideview mirror.



'You donkey!'

She opened her purse and took out her lipstick. It was a shade of maroon. She was about to apply it, then looked at the mirror once more. She dropped it back in her purse, letting out a tense breath. She had forgotten to turn off the oven. Or had she? She was making a soufflee and she could never get it to rise like she wanted it to. She would pick me up then she would pick my brother up, and she would make us something to eat.

Feeding the



was never easy.

One didn't like this, the other didn't like that. She would set up the table with the silver candle-holders even though it wasn't a holiday. She would pick a lemon

from the tree in her garden. It would be in a colourful bowl, swimming with oranges and those deep blue grapes.

This was her way of



She needed a glass of cold water.

She

felt

herself



That would sort her out, it was just thirst, a bad night's sleep or too much of that grapefruit ice-cream. How long can I wait around for? She thought. She needed to go to the market before it got too late. You needed to wake up early for the best fish. Catch them while they were sleeping. She thought of a large salmon lying on its side in the ice. It was surrounded by ice cubes and other dead eyes. For a moment its scales shone so brightly, like a kaleidoscope, and she thought that it had come back to life and would leap off the table covered in ice to swim back home.