



# **SHADES OF ME**

By Arianah Rivera

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# HAIR

Sitting down on the chair  
She detangles my hair  
“She’s a little damaged” she says  
I turn to look at her  
Such long luscious locks that hang  
Down to the small of her back  
Each broken curl burned straight  
Each with a story to tell  
I turn back saying nothing

Focusing on the mirror  
She looks frustrated  
Combing through my hair  
As I do the same  
To read her thoughts  
Are you upset by how kinky it is?  
It frizzes with every unskilled pull  
Yanking at my memories of pin straight hair

All the compliments I received  
The pain I endured  
Doing anything for approval  
Because beauty is pain  
Evident in your tears

Your fears  
Cramped fingers as you braid down

Tighter and tighter  
To tame something  
That has no intention to do such  
And when you give up  
Every part of you that screams in desperation

To be loved  
Sought after  
To be the favorite  
Why does it tear you apart to see  
Such a complex coiffure?  
Is it jealousy? Malice?  
Maybe to give me a better chance.

Inflicting the pain of your past onto me  
Maybe if you didn’t feel seen and loved  
All this pain will be worth it  
I’ll become the object of their affections  
Because in some way  
I reflect you

There’s a reason why different hair textures exist  
Because no two curls are the same  
I don’t look like you  
And maybe I don’t want to.

“Finished!” she says with a smile  
And all I can do is stare back  
At my silky straight hair



## COMPOSED: HAIBUN

To be whole again.  
That's what they want me to do.  
Yet I think of you.

I used to be conflicted  
Dealt the double-edged sword  
Yet  
It meant nothing to me  
Until you.

Soft, delicate lips  
Kissing me so tenderly  
Lashes fan my cheeks

Scattered, dazed, and confused  
As each passing judgement  
Took a piece of me with it  
And pierced right through me

Was it wrong for us?  
Maybe because it was me  
Who was so unsure...

After us that hole in me grew back  
Desperate to be filled  
So I did,  
With what was normal  
Pleasurable yet shameful

I can't have my cake  
And eat it to. Do I choose  
What they want, or you?

Such a long journey to revelation  
Questions don't have to be answered  
And now I'm too late

I don't wanna be  
Whole. My puzzle was complete  
As long as it's you

Please be my missing piece

## BY THE SHORE

They say waves are calm,  
Serene.  
They know how to stay in their place.  
They don't stir trouble

Light pierces straight through them,  
Yet dancing to every move made.  
The sun caused fractals  
Changing your tone  
Because you are forever changing

Light yet heavy,  
Dark yet bright.  
Deeper and deeper  
They're endless.  
You're endless.  
There's depth to you.

My own waves are rapid and strong,  
They are tsunamis.  
Your tides turn, thrashing unpredictably  
Such tenacity

Wild, but you can see  
How majestic they are  
Free-spirited.  
Restless, never smooth or still  
Frantic.

To be unconfined, unfiltered.  
You can't fulfill that serenity expected

But oh, what beauty  
Your savage waves bring.



# NAKED

In the mirror

I saw

Broad shoulders,

Tall stature.

Full waist,

Round hips.

Plump thighs,

And everything wrong.

In the mirror

I want to see

Broad shoulders,

Tall stature.

Full waist,

Round hips.

Plump thighs,

And everything beautiful.

# MANGO

Swaying in the brisk summer air  
Swing-high-swing-low  
There hangs a mango.  
What purpose it has!  
Expectation.

Tended with such care  
Nourished  
With every last drop  
Sunlight angled perfectly  
Nutritious soil  
Such a grounded foundation

Plump and round, supple  
Such desirable nectar  
Peering out  
Ever so slightly  
Too good for the crows to pick

Skin dares such bright hues  
Oranges, reds, yellows  
Different shades, different shapes  
True to itself and all its uniqueness  
Never picking just one

Attached to a tree so vast  
Deep-rooted, centered.  
Confined.  
How despondent

Just one!  
One passerby to spare a glance  
Pick it over the many mangoes  
Dangling within the tree.

Why don't you like my colors?  
Shall I change them?  
Is my nectar not sweet enough?  
I'll try not to be so sour.

Pulling my thoughts back and forth  
Why not pull me off the tree instead?  
I guess we all can't get what we want.  
We're simply incompatible

Weep, weep, weep, and they  
Reap, reap, reap what they sow  
Juice trickles  
Drip, drip, drip like so and I wonder  
How low must I hang  
To reach something  
Unattainable.