



ROOTS  
&  
EDGES

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A chapbook by SL. Findlay

# ROOTS & EDGES

Anecdotes and thoughts  
from a curly haired girl.



Today I've decided that I am going to let my hair down.

I've always let it down by using all the chemicals that had created been for our hair types- to make it a little softer, a little straighter, a little more manageable and little bit less of itself. I always tried to pin that one stray curl down, curse it for being rebellious, for it should be obedient and subdued like the rest of the hairs on my head. When all were lying neat and flat then everything was alright with the world. The inventory of hair products in my cupboard ranged from hairbrushes of all sorts to hair sprays and gels, heat straighteners and curling tongs and the ever most important chemical straighteners and relaxer kits. Strangely enough I hardly used any of it because all of that was in the hair salon already and that was my weekly Friday afternoon appointment. I was accustomed to just paying the odd eighty rands every week for the perfect hair, straight and sleek, and in turn saving much time and effort and the embarrassment of a failed blowout.

But please don't blame my poor little curly head for being this way- for shunning my natural hair for a more western look. You see, I was just trying to fit into society, blend in in the photos of me and my silky-haired friends. You see, this was the message I had been sculpted with all my life, and I was pretty sure it was etched into my innermost being. "Blend in, try not to stand out in the crowd" had been rubber stamped in my mind and that is the same message I



had told my hair. It started from a young age, this whole “journey” if I may call it that. At first it was only for special occasions like birthdays, weddings, parties, and special event days at school. My hair was pretty long so my mom would keep it braided just for tidiness and hygiene purposes and also because it was low maintenance, so it saved her some trouble. My mom wasn’t a very fashion conscious woman, she kept her hair very short but don’t get me wrong, she was still stylish as ever. Now when it came to me, I was still very young so I didn’t know or really care much about hair and trending styles. So in primary school I could get a blowout perhaps once a month or something like that. It was the most exciting day but also the 2 hours of my day I dreaded most.

Now, let me inform you, as you may also relate, the same lady has been doing my hair at the salon for just about 20 years now. My mom took me there because that is where she had her hair done and it has never occurred to me until this very moment writing this, but when I was old enough to afford paying for my own treatments, I never changed my choice of salon- I just kind of stayed on because this was what I knew and where I was comfortable. It’s like the family doctor- you build a relationship and to go and find another doctor would mean having to get used to that person again and having to explain all your problematic areas all over again. There was definite value in staying with Aunty V- that’s what I called her- my hair doctor.



As the years went by and I grew older, I could go more often. By then I was used to the stiff neck from lying back onto the cold, thin rim of the wash basin. I was also used to the thirty prickly hair curlers digging into my scalp, used to curl my hair into thin, manageable sections so that the heat evenly distributes resulting in straighter hair. I became used to the thirty minutes of sitting under the intense, omnipresent heat of the standing hair dryer, flipping through at least three tabloid magazines and doing all the crossword in the games section. And lastly I never quite became used to the burning of my scalp every few seconds whilst Aunty V was blowing out my hair. Sometimes she would be pulling my hair in the brush even harder because I was desperately trying to pull away from this blasting waves of heat whose sole mission was to melt my scalp. Being a bit older I know realize it was a pretty traumatic experience, every single time.

When I hit high school then I became increasingly unhappy with my blowout. It wasn't as straight as the Caucasian girl who sat beside me. My hair looked thick and bushy compared to hers- in fact it was extremely frizzy rather than silky. This is when I was introduced to the miracle treatment that would be a definite game-changer. This is when I was introduced to the reverse perm. A reverse perm is actually the process of taking curl out of hair. So instead of having my hair relaxed every 2 months, I would just have it reverse permed and be



looking sleek for the next 6 months. This also made my mother's life easier as she would no longer have to sit for hours combing through my forest of hair trying to untangle it so that she could braid it. Once again I was led to believe that my lively curls were the enemy and that straightening it made life easier for everyone.

For years I straightened my hair. I also started cutting it because I had reached a phase in my teens where I was totally unbothered by "hair", as long as it was manageable and tied back from my face I was okay with it. People, often the older ladies in the salon, would always ask why I am cutting my "beautifully long" hair and I would often just reply with "Ah it's just hair, it'll grow back!". When I went swimming with any of my friends with straighter hair I would feel less embarrassed because instead of frizzing into a full blown afro, my hair would just be a thick bunch of curls, albeit they hung lifelessly.

I think the process of altering my hair from its natural state to something more accepted was very much a physical manifestation of me altering my natural self to fit into my peer group. Of course the feeling of acceptance beats the feeling of exclusion.

Until one day I accepted myself as a my own best friend.

This unique friendship would lead to greater self-awareness and in the long run, greater acceptance of



myself and others like me. This revolution came at the perfect time, I think had I had this realization earlier it would not have been as impactful as now, for it is this realization that fuels this book and ultimately this movement. These days I heat straighten my hair for different reasons. I am completely comfortable in my own skin and being surrounded by my hair in it's natural and ever-so-glorious state.

I work in an office of ladies only and on extremely hot, damp days we always complain about how the humidity is the beast of destruction when it comes to our beautifully crafted hairstyles. We bitch and moan about how it becomes frizzy and pretty soon turns into your best nightmare. One day my manager asked why I don't get a Brazilian Blowout treatment on my hair and without hesitation I replied, "I love my curls!". The pride and assertiveness that I said it with certainly shocked me to my core, I could just imagine how she must have felt. This was office talk so naturally the other two ladies present were also involved in the conversation. Everyone's reactions were the same. It was a gasp and then a confused "Oh!?" and then the general consensus in the room - although it was not necessary to say it - was something to the effect of "I've never heard anyone say they love their curls before. How can she love her hair when it is so thick and unruly? Wow, never in my life! This is definitely new."

And so I began thinking- this condescending attitude towards what we call "ethnic" hair is unacceptable



and if it sustains itself it will be carried over to my children and in turn their children, creating a domino effect that should rather have not existed at all. You know, it's always easier to follow the crowd and have a peaceful and friendly atmosphere than to swim upstream, be a little controversial and make waves so that people know there is more to life than just the immediate gratification of agreeing with the majority.

So this has become my mission. To encourage women with curly hair, to embrace it- and to encourage women with straight hair to embrace the curls too. It's not a sin to be unique, and the more you accept your rebellious hair, the more you'll realize that it is actually so full of life and that that life just needs to escape and infect the world with its liveliness and vivacity. Be unapologetic in embracing your hair. Make it known that these strands of hair have a mind of their own and won't succumb to the pressure of a Caucasian-orientated society to blend in and obey the demand of straightened hair. These days you'll hardly even see me with straightened hair, "And all the products and chemicals?" you may ask, well, I've replaced them with my crown. My beautiful, majestic crown of hair.

When a baby is born the head is usually the part of the body that comes out first. When the top of the baby's head is visible for the first time it is called the crowning of the head. It is a very special moment. Thereafter, the unique spot towards the center of



your head where your hair grows in the opposite direction, is called a hair whorl but more commonly known as your crown. So why not? Why not call this hair of mine- which just so happens to be the opposite texture, length, size and look that society has scripted- my crown? I feel that it is very fitting and relevant, especially since I regard myself as a queen of God. With this said, I shall wear my crown with pride. I have done it so much harm from wanting to fit in with the crowd, yet still it grows back strong and never lets me down. I hope that you treat your crown the same. It makes you who you are. Imagine if we all had straight hair? We would not have trends and fashion because all hair would be the same and we would know no different. Being different- in all aspects of life- allows for experimentation and for us to constantly learn about things that do not fall within our comfort zone or our territory or norm. It is the world's way to constantly learn, innovate and progress and how would we be capable of that if we cannot recognize that our differences are what make us unique but are also what binds us together as a society. Do not want to turn someone into something they're not. Embrace them and learn from them. In the same breath, do not feel the need to be something you are not. Be yourself and love yourself and if you are having a bad hair day, let your hair down, let it loose, it might just be a new hairstyle for all the Zoolanders out there.



SL. WOLFE



Pretty Girl

Pretty pretty girl  
with the pretty pretty hair  
why oh why  
the big big frown?

Pretty pretty girl  
with the big big crown  
please oh please  
show me your pretty pretty smile!



Big Balloon

Her hair was like a balloon  
a big hot air balloon  
and it carried all her dream and desires  
carried them to beyond the sky...

you see, they say the sky's the limit  
but with hair like hers  
she never did have a defined summit.



Royalty

She would never be fit to be a Princess  
or even a Duchess  
as a matter of fact  
her denims and washed out colours  
were tacky to say the least  
but when she unraveled her hair  
and let it loose  
she became everything that royalty could ever  
demand.



Soul's Ink

I spill my soul out onto these pages  
with ink I expose to you my innermost  
and you read me  
with such indulgence  
savouring each word  
each letter  
each fragment of my essence  
treating my delicate, sensitive pages  
with the caution of a first time reader

a story yet to be completed  
though still wanting

to you I will always be  
an open book.



Tied Up

Every morning she'd tie up her hair  
ready to conquer the tidal waves that await  
in the turbulence of the corporate ocean.  
She smoothed back her unruly curls  
a direct reflection of having to smooth down  
the fins of the sharks in business suits  
when she set foot on their turf

She was a leader  
a conquerer  
a champion  
everything she couldn't be when her  
animated curls framed that darling smile.



Mess

My hair is such a mess!  
she said  
as she hurriedly fixed herself up in the mirror.  
My hair is such a mess!  
she cried.  
Yes dear,  
your hair's a mess  
a beautiful mess...  
and so was the universe  
when it magically created the earth.

Remember the magic lies in the mess,  
embrace it.



Tattoo

They all come and go  
like a temporary tattoo  
not a single one could stick

Wash she the oil that couldn't mix with the water?  
Or was she the water who created a muddy mess  
when she mixed with the sand?

The only permanent tattoo  
engraved deep into her personality was her  
collection of bronze locks...  
and that she knew for sure mixed with water, oil, heat  
and cold

and has never let her down.  
Ever.



Lover

It wasn't too short  
and it wasn't too long  
it fell just perfectly on her shoulders  
snuggling into her neck  
providing warmth when she was cold  
and gentle caresses of love when she was lonely.



Lioness

Her hair was here and there  
and basically everywhere  
but don't get it twisted

she was a lioness

and her mane only made her look  
that much more vivacious  
when she was on the hunt

and her hair matched her grace  
and elegant poise  
as she held her head high after winning the race.



Mosaic

She was a mosaic of sadness  
her melancholy colours glistening  
in the radiant energy of her others  
a silent reminder that she was still living  
beneath all the rubble

but love for herself would be the glue  
that could piece all her fragments together  
and make her wholly beautiful once more.



Velvet

All she wanted  
was for him to kiss her velvet lips  
but every time he tried he missed...

perhaps velvet wasn't his flavour  
perhaps she had to be more vanilla.



Note To Self

I've always loved you  
but it's been a while  
since I've had a moment  
where I'm so deeply in love with you.

A moment like this.



Half Full

They fill the empty spaces  
the walls block their ears to their jest  
laughter and romance travel from the holes in the walls  
to the tiny cracks in the floor  
she runs her hands through his hair  
it smells of honey bees and cherry blossom trees  
he pulls her close and buries his soul in her majesty  
and for that moment  
their glasses are half full  
pouring out their love completely.



Note To Self II

Loving you is like

diving into the ocean  
and finding a beautiful underwater cave  
when all that was expected was a shallow coral reef.

You are everything pretty  
and everything deep.



Magazine

You turn the page young sister  
but never do you close the book  
this bullshit you call fashion  
has finally got you hooked  
some say the darker the berry  
you know, it gives better tasting juice  
but you tell me you need the blonde hair  
to pull off those Loubi boots  
magazines, Trace and tweets  
they've got us feeling like we could never  
march to their beat

Unshackle yourself young sister  
burn the media at the stake  
they deserve not a page in your story  
so why give them your precious time?  
Think further young sister  
let them not restrain you to a measure comfortable for  
them... be yourself according to yourself.

Take heed young sister  
don't let them control your soul and convince you  
that in your world you are only a visitor.



Make-Up & Lace

Make-up and lace  
it's what gave her her grace  
the thing that set the pace

to conquer the world  
or to conquer his heart  
all she needed was  
make-up and lace.



ROOTS & EDGES



Today I've decided to colour my hair while getting my usual blowout. I'm at Auntie Valdean and I know it will take a good two or three hours. Today it's the terrible threesome. Three generations of coloured women sharing the sentiment of a hair salon experience. Mrs. Connelly who is eighty-something, Auntie Valdean who is fifty years old and myself at the tender age of twenty-four. I don't think that I enjoy anything more than a chill session with these ladies. The topics of conversation range from children and grandchildren to traveling to sports but one strange thing is that the conversation is never about hair- the one thing that has brought us all together. The only time that hair is discussed is when you walk in- a basic catch up on the state of your hair.

Today I walked in and just said "same colour as last please Auntie Val?" and she replied with a cool "okay". I'm sitting with the dye on my hair and a towel around my shoulders. The conversation has moved to swimming and swimming pools in yards and I'm enjoying myself more than I would at a gathering of only twenty-somethings. Mrs. Connelly is young as ever- you would think that she is 20 years younger than she actually is.

Her short salt & pepper grey hair falls wistfully on her head framing her dainty face ever so femininely. What a wonderful chatty lady.

"Come let's rinse!" Auntie Valdean summons me to the basin. I recline in the comfortable leather chair



and get ready for my head massage that comes free with the wash. It is blissful.

I close my eyes and enjoy the moment whilst giggling to the naughty adult jokes between the ladies. After this my hair will be rolled in curlers and set to dry under the standing dryer before being blowed out with a brush and hand dryer and then flattened with a hair straightener. The final steps to that ultimate sought-after sleek look. Mrs. Connelly leaves and Auntie Val makes sure she makes it safely down all the steps before returning to roll my hair. It's just me and her and I feel like I'm getting the VIP one-on-one treatment. Your hairdresser is your confidant, the person you tell everything to about everyone and you somehow know that the news will get to other ears that come after you but you don't really care because you become so indulgent in the moment. It takes about 3 hours for me to feel as if I look presentable again and each hour is worth it. It's a treat but everything is natural- from the red natural dye to the heat straightening instead of chemical straightening. I've found that the results may be temporary but the positive effects are long term and totally worth it. The next step is to get the blowout. She removes the curlers and my bouncy curls spring to life.

"I feel like walking out just like this" I muse to myself, but I'd rather stay for the full treatment. She uses a variety of brushes and creates sections in my hair to make it easier. Every so often I become a spaz as she burns my scalp with the heat and it results in



a good chuckle from both of us. Suffer for beauty is what they say and I guess this is what they meant. Finally - the flattening of the hair to make sure that no rebellious curls come to the party.

This is where I take my first breath of air. Up to now I was not conscious of my breathing- it is as if my body had been on autopilot the entire time- the experience is that overwhelmingly intoxicating. She systematically flattens each section and you can see the masterpiece come to life. I think it's safe to call it "a day at the salon" even though the actual process only took about three hours.



ROOTS & EDGES



First Love

The smile in her curls  
and flirt in her step  
will have you wondering  
if your first love  
was really  
your first love.



Earth Child

Queen  
you are conceived from  
the infinite and perfectly crafted grains of beauty  
from the earth  
you form an integral part  
of this here universe  
each atom perfectly interacted with each other  
atom  
and you were born  
from a spark of brilliance  
a moment of beauty

fear not my dear queen  
you are the only one of your kind  
don't feel alone I say

everything in nature is perfectly designed  
why would you think otherwise of yourself?



The Lights

She was just like the others  
stumbling and falling  
finding herself  
face down, head over heels  
'til she realized the spotlight wasn't on her  
but rather  
it was a light that lead the way for her  
and she walked confidently in the waterfall of light  
leading the way for the other fragile souls.



Hair

Hair is hair is hair  
and it grows  
year upon year upon year  
sometimes it grows fast  
sometimes it grows slow  
sometimes it grows everywhere  
sometimes not at all.



In the years past I have learnt to love my roots and edges. The little curls that spring out of place are just as beautiful and “fashionable” as the stray hairs of straight hair that are placed out of place strategically to look “effortlessly chic”.

In the years to come I hope to inspire more ladies of the Curly Hair Clan, to truly love it and flaunt it! They say if you embrace your flaws, no-one can use it against you. I say you should embrace your natural beauty and let others feed off your positive energy. It is no secret that you can do more with curly hair, so why not be more too?!



**Love your roots and edges for they keep you grounded and protected when negativity doth blow your way.**

**Your strength lies there.**



# Roots & Edges: A Chapbook

## By SL. Findlay

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