

Excerpt from “Reunion”
by Desi Poteet

I lopped off a breast and watched my hair fall out in clumps during treatment. What was the point? To cling to a life spent navigating from one doctor’s appointment to another hoping for the next miracle cure? What if I had left my body intact? How long would—

“Alex?”

“Mike, I’m in here,” I answer, sliding the worn photograph in between the pages and closing my journal.

He slams the front door. I can hear him tossing the keys onto the hall table, adding another scratch into the wood. He’s kicking off his shoes, and I imagine dirt and pebbles scattering across the entry floor. Now he pads down the hallway in socked feet.

“Rachael’s getting married,” Mike says, as he steps into the bedroom waving an envelope in the air, his brown hair damp with sweat.

“I didn’t know she was dating anyone. Did you?”

“She’s planning on marrying some guy named Chris next month.” He hands me the envelope as he sits down on the edge of the bed. Sweat drips from his brow and rolls down his cheek. I slip out the card and study the invitation.

Cardstock—ivory deckle. “Look at the artwork. This is Rachael’s.” Delicate plumeria border. “Do you feel up for going, Alex?” Blue calligraphy. “Do you?” Chris & Rachael. “Alex?” “Can you take time off work, Mike?” Country wedding. “Alex?” A week-long celebration. I look into his eyes. “I’m fine, Mike.”

He stands up, leans over and kisses me on the forehead. He smiles at me, lips pressed shut. *I’ll survive*, I repeat to myself over and over as I lie in bed, waiting until I hear the front door slam on his words, “See you later,” as he leaves for work.

I lock the bathroom door, add bubble bath to the steaming water pouring from the faucet, place a razor on the edge of the bathtub, and brave the mirror. I run my fingers across my scalp, through the fuzzy growth, and consider my options: cover with a wig, shave into a bald dome, hope for a miracle growth-spurt, wear a scarf. I never thought I’d be solving a bad hair day with any of these choices at thirty-four.

“You look like an Easter Egg,” Mike says, scowling at my blue spikes.

“How was work?” I ask, tearing lettuce leaves and tossing them into a glass bowl.

“Not as colorful as yours, apparently.”

I bite my lip, fighting for control. “I’m just experimenting, Mike. It washes out.”

“It washes out? By this weekend? The wedding is this weekend. Why can’t you experiment with wigs?”

I grab a knife and hack away at a tomato. Why can’t you experiment with compassion? I want to ask, but instead I add oil and vinegar and toss the salad. We eat in silence. And later we go to bed, lying far enough away from one another so that we don’t run the risk of accidentally touching, even in our sleep. I lie there thinking that there must be something terribly wrong with me if I can’t confide in my husband and tell him how close I’d come to choosing red instead of blue.