

THE SUMMER OF HAIR

When I first moved to Barcelona I got lucky. I found - pretty much by accident- an apartment 5 minutes from the beach. That's how she quickly became part of my routine: 7 AM runs, late afternoon swims after lectures, beers in the evening with friends (and to be fair often alone). It also became my favorite grieving place when my grandad past away.

For someone who grew up 500km from the coast and lived far too many years in a land locked country, the beach felt foreign to me. Most of my associations with it came from very brief childhood holidays with my parents. Having her so close to me and letting her become a part of my routine felt like a beautiful blessing during a very tumultuous time in my life.

Coming from South America, topless was quite the shock to me. The first couple of times at *Platja de Bogatell* I tried not to stare too much at other women's breasts, but failed terribly, I was marveled at how different they all looked from each other. After a while I got used to them and managed not to stare as much, but somehow I could not dare to take my own top off. I am not particularly self-conscious about my looks, in fact considering that I grew up in a country with one of the highest rates of anorexia in the world and that several of my childhood/teenage friends were bulimic, I would say I have quite a healthy relationship with my body. Nevertheless, for some reason the idea of taking my top off made me feel very embarrassed, another decisive factor might have been that back home, if you took your top off, it would result in something like a horde of drooling men forming a circle around you. Then one day, a week before leaving my flat by the beach and after almost a year of building up the courage, I finally did it, I took my top off. And it was a point of no return: the sun on my breasts felt glorious and when the breeze would blow on my boobs it felt so refreshing. Don't even get me started on the first time I swam without my top on: why the fuck hadn't I done that before!?

This experience opened a big wide door for me. I felt so free and comfortable in my own skin that I stopped doing things to my body for other people. I had always hated wax and seen no point in it, but since I was 13 I regularly waxed my legs and with 16 and losing my virginity, followed my pubic hair to the point of having almost nothing. Sometimes my skin would get so irritated and itchy, once when I was 21 I bleed a lot after waxing. I still

have that scar between my left leg and my coxis. After that, I stopped waxing altogether and moved on to shaving. Hair removal but without pain. It felt like a compromise.

Some years later I thought about letting my pubic hair grow out, but my partner at the time made me feel really self-conscious about it so I quickly dismissed the idea. After leaving that partner I let my pubes grow, just a little trim here and there. I thought to myself these hairs don't show, it's ok.

One afternoon after I had left my old apartment and was living in a place by the city center, my friend Kate invited me to come along with her to the beach after class. I had my swimsuit in my bag which meant I could come straight from University, but then it hit me: I was wearing trousers even though it was 30+ degrees because I hadn't shaved my legs. I thought it's ok, I can just take a 30 min detour, stop by the shop to buy razors, go home shave my legs and then cycle 20 mins to the beach. Wait... what? No! That made no sense! Fuck it, it's just hair- I told myself. And so with quite a bit of shame I went to the beach with (barely) hairy legs. I convinced myself that it's ok, it's just Kate. She won't mind. She won't stare at my legs. She won't think I'm disgusting. And so it began... the summer of hair - which was incidentally also the summer of love, but that's a whole other story (or maybe it isn't?)

As I write this in Costa Brava I am rocking a summer dress while proudly being the person with the hairiest legs in the house, after the dog ...but not by a lot.