

Two Boars

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Slowly. Running from my scalp down through the long strands falling over my shoulders. The bristles wiggle through tangles and snags. Making my hair soft and weightless. Weightless as fog over a boreal forest, over pine-mapped backcountry trails or plots marked with crosses and stones.

My father combed his beard with a boar bristle brush. I wonder if he sensed him. Who would think to look in pie crust, glue, fertilizer, or in the bristles attached to a square backboard with a wooden handle?

Ordinary everyday things.

I have a pouty lower lip, I think while watching myself in the mirror. Again, raising my hand to the top of my head, I brush all the way down to the tough coarser ends. I keep reworking the same sections of long dark hair. I spent my lifetime watching. A lifetime watching his beard turn from brown to grey.

I wouldn't have known just from looking that I could find you here. Unsnagging knots in my hair or resting, resting behind the medicine cabinet. Here. Among my toiletries.

I thought I'd find you in the forest.

Lumbering across the backcountry trails. A path carved out by cloven hooves beneath you and those that came before you. Before me. Blackberry brambles, nettles, and ferns. A lineage trampling out a ritual of migration across lifespans. Predestined and passed. Passed to me. Dad, you didn't have much, but you did have what you knew of the woods. You had all the time we spent on those trails. I know you would have wanted to leave something behind.

I squeeze my eyes shut as I tease out a difficult strand that won't unknot. I picture you resting in the ferns. Belly pressed and laid into the soft earth. Grey-blotted eyes, a spotted snout, and soft brown stripes. Stripes that run laterally, stretching with the expansion of your lungs. Slowing.

Flesh, blood, tusks.

Bristles scratch softly. How did they scap your body? What words did they use when they deconstructed you? Body to carcass. Creature to material. Bones, hair, and nails to minerals, bristles, and upholstery.

I can't go back. I still see you there.

In the forest. Charging. Through tangles and twists of brambles. Squealing out as metal rings in the air. Wings flushed from the coverage of low-hanging branches. Tree sparrows part, weaving like needles through the fabric of the sky. The ground meets you cold and hard. Thorned vines of blackberry-spotted thickets snag and knot around you. Tightening, they tangle. Your hands swinging at your sides, underneath the cream-colored mittens I crocheted you—mistaken for the flag-raised tail of a white-tailed deer. It's hard to see through the dense tangle of branches and vines. It's easy to shoot a boar.

I hope they cried when they took that shot, but I doubt it.

Done. Throwing softened strands of long dark hair behind my shoulders, I can now place such an everyday thing back on the shelf. Behind a bathroom mirror—clouded. Framed edges peeling with layers of slapped-on paint. In the medicine cabinet—so unsuspecting. Above the sink. Your bristles hold oils. Glistening, they could almost be mistaken for black waxy plastic.

How do they cut and gather you to make such fine everyday things?

Somewhere I imagine smokestacks and plumes spit poison in the shape of clouds. Like a crematorium spitting out the ash of those we loved. Distant factories and you on their fractured lines, just another order. Behind the scenes, worker's hands remove me from your full processing. Removing me from the full ritual of your death.

I can only guess what the steps look like between death and consumption.

I thought it would be hard to find you. I pictured having to search for you in our well-scavenged woods, our backcountry trails. You had an eye for spotting wild mushrooms, puffballs, and morels.

It's hard to imagine you anywhere other than in the forest and yet here you are in such everyday things.

Why am I so surprised when it's you? Wasn't there life in all our commodities—at some point? So everyday and ordinary that we are abstracted from what they contain.

Dad, I kept your boar bristle brush.

Tangled in nettles, lips purple—blackberry stained. Resting. Belly pressed into the earth. Bleeding out red, you mixed into the soil of our backcountry trails.

I feel guilty for wanting to ask,

at what point did you stop being a boar and become a brush?