

Little Green Brush

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My number one childhood fantasy: if you could leave your bedroom as it is right now, bookmark in the exact spot, gum wad on the bedpost, rumpled gym shorts in the corner, and doll chins tilted just so, on and on, nothing touched for fifty years, shut the door and go—to return, someday, and see everything meticulously there, as you last touched it. I was obsessed, even prearranging objects in fake-casual scenarios that I might “forget” and then “remember” in half a century.

No question I’d survive for something so miniscule. Handing myself a purpose, I practiced, permanently imprinting slightness into my brain. The impression of rolled tape showing through the back of a poster, and the way the edge of it curled up barely, like a wave. I would come back. I would come back and I would see the tape impression and know that only I would know it was always like that.

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There’s a moment in a 1973 version of Bowie’s “Space Oddity,” where, for just one moment, he looks right at you, really holds your eyes with his, and it’s almost too much. *And there’s nothing I can do*, he sings with what I’d call a knowing smile, an accepting smile, sliding his eyes away. There’s nothing I can do, too! you sing back, desperate, euphoric.

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Because of my father’s predilection for never throwing anything away, my childhood fantasy has been partially fulfilled. Twenty-five years later, I return to my bedroom whose original desk remains, full of a third-grader’s stash of notes. In the top drawer, behind a nest of disintegrating rubber bands, I find my first hairbrush, labeled on its hardback, “Little Green Brush.” How my mother would, perched at the edge of the couch in her too-big pajamas, grip my shoulders between her knees and pull the brush across my scalp while I squirmed to be already outside.

Lifting “Little Green Brush” now in the flat November light I find, coiled in its harsh bristles with my blonde baby hair, a few hollowed-out worms.

I don’t trouble the hair or the worms. The worms had their victory and then they died there.

Sing into the unlit stage where a face was.

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What remains of me in bristles, is hair blonde and close as a lion's fur. What remains of worms are carapaces. Putting disgust aside, I confess the worms are maggots, whose carapaces, indeed, once held hearts. The heart of a maggot is an arch or series of arches evolved to pump blood through the body. To live: basic. No different, this, from the way a human heart evolved to pump blood through the body, though to speak about a human heart is so often to speak about love.

Or, where lack of love, "heartless."

An ant drowned in my water glass as I puzzled this.

A pop-up proclaims water is the only thing that never dies.

At nineteen, in a New York lake, I nearly drowned with someone I loved, with whom I shared a bed, talked poetry, ate pancakes with at 2 a.m., but who would not actually touch me. Every day, I was desperate for him to touch me. Dragged white-lipped from the lake and ambulated away, we finally hugged across a hospital bed, against the IV's trailing our arms.

Later, I summarized the entirety as, I had to almost die to get that hug!

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The last time I moved across the country, I threw "Little Green Brush" into a garbage bag on top of the old cilantro.

I try on a posture that's all about letting go.

No longer nostalgic, even if I think:

hair and worms and old cilantro hold hands until they lose each other in the big heap.

