

The Brush

Author(s): DIANA BABINEAU

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DIANA BABINEAU

The Brush

*The shooting stars in your black hair
in bright formation
are flocking where,
so straight, so soon?*
—Elizabeth Bishop

Before my dad installed wood floors,
my mother's room
had carpet, dark brown threads
that gave way to
my toes, curling themselves in soft plush
as she pulled and pulled at my hair, straightening it all

into tight formation. I focused on
the television:
Tom and Jerry trying to snap
a paw or sever
a tail. I smiled at their failures, their mis-
channeled love. (What would one be

without the other?) Everything
was brushed into
manageable decency and I wondered
about these daily
rituals of hurt. My scalp adjusted,
grew tougher, and I thought all pain must dull

eventually. When the wood was cut
to size, polished
smooth, hammered into neat
rows, my toes
no longer curled into softness. I'd grown
strong, I thought. But the bright blond boards

revealed the mess—unruly black
strands to be swept
aside. I was taught to collect these pieces,
then discard. I learned
we leave parts of ourselves everywhere, though
mostly at the feet of our loved ones.

RICHARD JACKSON

Elegy Walking Through the Woods

*an angel come to me and taps
my lips*
—Ralph Angel

There's a touch, as if of a passing cloud, that we hardly
feel until later. It's the chill that time leaves behind,
the track that tells you who or what has passed before,
the grass folded down where the deer spent the night.

That morning, for instance, when my dog lay two weeks
on the spot where her companion died. She knew
not death but an absence that filled her heart
with the darkness of migrant stars.

You can walk away
from a place but not its time.

Or else, the footbridge
here I can no longer cross after another loss.

I am
walking on an ancient riverbed high above the river
that tells us how we are poured out like water.
There are millennia stored in the earth beneath me.
There are times, standing still, when you can feel
the earth move again revealing our loneliness
among the depth of years.

How cold now,
the late day's light. There are innumerable prayers
nesting in the trees. A coyote flickers between
the trunks. The fish lie dormant in their dreams
among the boulders strewn about, —what you would
have called gifts from the cliffs above them.

Now daylight
starts to find a place to hide among the caves and hollows.
An owl has left behind what it hunted as a sign
we are never safe.

Some of these words have hunted for
an easy consolation,

yet how deftly the wind whispers
your angel's voice through the spare winter branches,
how fragile this horizon of birds whose name I have lost.

There's a strange evening light that seems to linger
in the woods beneath the darkness, what my father
called *tomorrow's spirits*.

It seems right, now, to walk
among them, while the sun sets, while a full moon
begins to rise among the spare lines of a few cirrus clouds.

I've opened that moonlight knowing you are there.

—Little River Canyon, AL