

# THE BEAR

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The forest is devouring me, I disappear in soft mouthfuls of mud. Brand new white sneakers; they'll never be shoes again. Then I waded in more deeply at the thought of how angry Mom will be, even though I've bought them myself. I felt as if I needed new clothes when I started high school. Not all those colors, as if I was ten and in a circus. I also bought one of those necklaces with my name in cursive. Carli. What am I doing out here, what is it I'm telling myself?

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We looked at a lot of pictures together, the project group: art, burning giraffes, women with drawers like dressers, soft clocks. That's how I wish time was, I whispered. We were the only ones still sitting there. How? He asked. Soft, just soft. I touched the clocks in the picture in the book. Time is so edgy, the schedule is made of boxes, I don't fit. And then I realized how ridiculous that probably sounded. I blushed. But he didn't laugh. Jacob from third year. He did that night though. He had some kind of red splotches on his neck, like the map of an unknown country.

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The sun is going down. I have never been in the woods for such a long time. It's just me. Everyone is at home making dinner. Warm houses. I want to be out in the bigness, I don't have enough room in my body. Just me and the leaves, green and white on the back, shiny. They whisper silver. I lean against a tree, listening; I am little again, the sensation of bark, I imagined that the trees were trolls, at night they walked around with heavy footsteps and threw ropes at the stars, which they wanted to catch, but they weren't dangerous, and when I leaned in towards them, they knew I was one of them, I was a tree, I never told anyone, not even grandma. I had forgotten that, to be little in the woods, now it appeared from a drawer. I stick a hand into my pants, into my underpants and scratch. Aloe vera is supposed to help, I have coated it again.

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First, I tried with the plastic scraper I use on my legs. But it couldn't handle the long hairs. I took mom's metal scraper, she wouldn't notice if I rinsed it off. I placed my hand flat against the hairs, they curled and sprung easily back into place. Like moss against my hand. A little piece of forest. It tickled. I took the sharp scissors from the cabinet and cut the long hairs, until the whole thing was shorter. Then I took the can of shaving cream and covered it in foam, the hair got stuck, I had to leave the water on and rinse off the scraper constantly, I had never shaved it all off before, the letter said that you were supposed to, was that the way the boys in third year wanted you? I had never touched a cock, only outside the pants, but that was in eighth grade, and he had also had his hand up under my dress, but he was rubbing way too hard, and when I whimpered, he thought I was asking for more, luckily he finally threw up. It took a long time, mom knocked

on the door, what are you up to, you need to get going, I'll drive you, how cool that you're going to that older student 'tuck in' dinner, she knocked again, are they going to read aloud to you and tuck you in or what? She laughed hoarsely. Go away, Mom, I shouted, what if she knew that I was using her scraper, I got it all off,

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flushed it down the toilet, then I washed the foam off in the shower and touched the pussy. Or whatever it was. It was like having an entirely new body part. Something that stuck out, a mountain with a crack. A completely foreign part of my body. I looked like a child. It was a wee wee. It felt weird to put on the red underwear.

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Wee wees only wear cotton, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, I smiled at the thought of arriving at the party in the kind of panties I wore in first grade. The red lace itched. Then the white shirt and the black skirt. I looked like a waiter.

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The pond is deep, it was created during the ice age, a long cut filled with water, I've always been afraid of it, but not today, today the pond called me, now I'm standing here. What do you want with me, I think, as if the pond can answer. Ripples on the surface, the wind is gentle, soon it will be night, darkness meets darkness, perhaps the pond prefers darkness. I think of all the times I've been here with my grandma, I was so little, we always picked things, we picked the forest, grandma knew what things were called, to me it's just green and brown in a big mix, common wood sorrel, I recognize that, there's one, there are more, I eat a bunch, tart on the tongue, in the whole mouth, I am alive, now she no longer exists, Grandma, and yet still, I think of the things, I have in my backpack, the things from her, why wasn't I allowed to see them until now? We were supposed to say thank you to the forest when we went home, thank you to the pond, thank you to the birds, I suddenly remember that, I say thank you, at first, they are broken words, they don't want to, I cough, then I say it again, thank you, the wind answers gently. Then I take off my clothes and walk out into the pond.

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We were all dressed in cat ears and tails and were only allowed to say meow. It was kind of sweet. I made claw hands and meowed at him, he was already pretty drunk, but not as far gone as the others. We were supposed to serve them, some food set out on trays in the kitchen, the music was super loud, I brought in potatoes in cream, I dropped some on the table, William said lick it up, I bent over and did so, while they clapped, it tasted good, I should have eaten more before I left home, I smiled at Jacob, and his neck burned red, I licked my lips, more applause, then I was supposed to gulp down a glass full of something blue, and another, Jacob smiled, another, and then I ran out in to the kitchen to get the meat with the others, no, first I had to go to the bathroom and scratch myself, my pussy was full of spots, red spots, and it still felt foreign, no one is going to see me like this, I thought, I smeared some expensive face cream on, it was next

to the mirror, William's mom's, maybe it would help, but it didn't, not at all, it stung, so I had to wipe it off, someone was knocking on the door, are you okay? It was Sara, I unlocked it and nodded, I went in and poured drinks for the boys, and every time I poured, I had to drink as well, I went out

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into the kitchen to scratch, then in again, music, Sara and I were dancing together, closer, they shouted, we couldn't help laughing, closer, kiss each other, my cheeks burned, Sara grabbed my head and kissed me, she tasted like the blue drink, dessert, they shouted, now it's time for dessert, there was a whole bunch of cans of whipped cream on the table, the dessert is us, shouted William, he came very close, his nauseating breath reached me first, he began to unbutton my shirt, I looked at Jacob, he was sitting still, say something I thought, say something, but he didn't... I was standing in my bra, red pushup, the kind that's in all the commercials leading up to Christmas, I hoped it would make them a little bigger, everyone else's look so big, now it's my turn, shouted William and took off his own shirt, I am your dessert, whipped cream on his chest, lick him, lick him, lick him, I bent forward and licked one dollop off, under the white a nipple, I became dizzy, do you want more dessert, Carli, I sat on the floor, he opened his fly and stuck a cucumber through and sprayed it white, go on, lick, you know you like it, Jacob didn't say anything.

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I don't want him to think that I had never had one in my mouth, not because I didn't want to, but there had never been an opportunity. William stuffed the cucumber into my mouth, I was choking, one of the others sprayed more whipped cream on it, you know you like, it, go on, I couldn't breathe, I could feel the blue in my blood, I threw up, on the floor, oh, hell, gross sow, look at the rug, that was once a white carpet, I saw, one of the others pulled me up, it wasn't just my pussy that was foreign, I couldn't recognize my body, it was shaking. I had to get out of there. At once.