There are two constants in life. Death, taxes, and the need for a haircut. Scratch that, three constants. Hair always grows somewhere. Unfortunately, with the lockdown this meant some of us had to take matters into our own hands. The results were not great. I have had long hair for a long while, but I had had enough. One attack by buzz clippers later and my head looks like an unevenly groomed poodle. As I said it is not great. Thank goodness the restrictions are finally lessening!

No surprise that my usual place was booked solid. I would have to take what I could get. Every day someone might see the scruffy, misshapen mass on my head and wonder “What’s up with him?” Nightmare fuel. Luckily down off Mane Street there was an opening at the B-Salon. The place certainly looked like a B-rated establishment. The outside had those old school barber candy canes, but it did not spin. The windows were covered up with newspapers. I guess that doubled as privacy screening. Some folks got right nasty if you watched them getting trimmed up.

I slipped inside. Maybe no one saw me go in. A little bell tingles as I step inside. Pretty much bringing you up to speed here! The room is eerily abandoned. Never has such a small business felt so big and empty. Huge barber chairs lined up one side of the wall. The other had magazines piled up, as if anyone waited for appointments in this drab place. From the looks of the out-of-date National Geographics no one had looked at these in ages. Strange, usually haircut places stock Glamor mags and celebrity pictures so folks can pick out what cut they want.

“Please, take a seat at number three. I will be with you in just a moment.” The voice cuts through the room like a knife. All husky, chortling, and goofy. There is a strange accent there too, something I just cannot quite place. Towards the back end is a door. Obviously through there is some sort of employee lounge. Probably a bathroom. Whatever. I stick to the plan and plop my rear down in the third one.

“Alright. Thanks?” I mumble. The chairs are freaking monstrously huge. The arm rests are four times the size of my arm, and I had been hitting the home gym lately. Very cozy though. You really sink into the cushions. Just sitting on them makes my back muscles relax and pop. While I had been hitting the home gym, I should really do more yoga. Either way nothing to do but wait. Strange. Usually in a salon they make you face a mirror. Here there is just a shelf for the trimmers, clippers, and combs. Cocky S. O. B….ears?!

Two massive paws fall firmly down on my shoulders. They are about four times the size of my biggest muscles. Five strong claws rap gently over my collarbone. Am I about to be mauled? I can practically feel their heartbeat through thick pads. Thick white hairs cover the top of them, and my vulnerable areas like a shawl. Funny not really white fur, but translucent. Funny how when a polar bear is about to eat me, my brain reaches for to Snapple Facts. I really should work on my survival instincts.

“So, what can I do for you?” That same voice comes out of a giant bear mouth right above me. Okay, maybe I am not about to die. The polar bear above me is huge and dressed in a tight vest and loose shorts. They must be boiling in all that fur during the summer. They stare down at me with beady, black murder eyes. Their bumpy, onyx nose twitches in probably irritation. What can they do for me? Think brain. Think or die! The bear licks their lips. The sharp teeth break me.

 “The… usual?” I sputter out in shock. Like a dog salivating to a bell. It is a call response. I go to my barber, they ask what you want, I say the usual. Apparently, it bears repeating. I fake a chuckle in hopes it makes me seem less appetizing. The monstrous beast behind me seems to mull that over. That is it. I am dead. I had a good run! Bought some stuff, ate nice food. The bear pats my shoulder.

 “Sounds good, sweet pea. Could you bend your head down for me?” Their words cut through me like a menacing laser beam, but what can you do? I bend my neck down executioner style. The bear starts to whistle a tune of murder. Suddenly a black tarp swoops around my neck like a guillotine. Here it comes. The bear does not want blood getting all over their nice linoleum. “Tut tut. Did you do this yourself?”

 I nod. Do bears eat you for bad haircuts?

 “You can relax. We will fix you right up.” Very gently, the bear picks up a pair of scissors. I let out the breath I had been holding since they touched me. Huh. I guess this is fine! The bear continues to tut and grumble about how uneven my lines were. How embarrassing! They clip and trim around my ears like a pro. I really wish they had put up mirrors. Of course, then I would be staring at the murder machine while they worked. Something about having a lumbering polar bear behind you set my nerves on fire. “For the usual we use product, that alright?”

 I nod my head again. If I keep playing along, they might not eat me. They grab a bottle of purple stuff off the counter and mist it over my hair. It smells like river water and something familiar. It makes my stomach rumble slightly. I should have eaten lunch. The bear pauses in their cut, and I can feel a deep belly chuckle vibrate my chair. Perfect, few animals will eat people who amuse them! This stuff has a weird stink to it and makes my nose itch. Holding in a sneeze is hard work, particularly when it feels like someone has grabbed your nose and rubbed it full of grass pollen.

 “Trust me you aren’t the only bear to mess their hair up good. Petunia, you don’t know him, why that bear practically shaved himself bald! Can you imagine? A Kodiak moment for sure.” More laughs, more trims, more spritz with the strange smelling stuff. So darn familiar! It is on the tip of my tongue. My nose wrinkles as I try to place the scent. Strange, for this situation, the tip of it seems a bit darker than usual.

 “Does that stuff stain?” I grumble out, breathing that metallic, ocean scent in. Was it from the beach? No, this was definitely an inland camping smell. That stained look gets darker and darker before my eyes. I should not be seeing this much of my nose. Am I swelling up? Each breath it feels like someone has their fingers in my nostrils and is tugging upward. Worse, the skin is freezing in that position. I smack my lips. They too feel swollen and thicker than before. Even worse than that, my canines are getting sharp! Not to self, call my dentist for an emergency appointment.

 “Of course not. That is just your undercoat. As it gets wet you start to see your natural colors. We could trim closer to your hide if you want but I don’t recommend it. Full tan bears were so 2000-and-lame.” The bear keeps working, slowly pushing and pulling my face to get the perfect cut. Their pads feel so itchy on my cheeks. Are they rubbing the stuff in? I should have shaved before coming. My beard scruff feels like a forest as those rough pads brush through them.

 “My hair’s much more dark brown. I don’t think I have to worry about that.” I try to say. The words come out huskier. My throat must be swelling up. “I think I might be allergic to that product!” It just comes out as a series of bellows and grunts.

 “Anyway, so Petunia, he was all oh no my hair! And of course, he shaved it so thick everyone could see he had started to go bald.” The bear drones on about their customers. Like every haircut ever. Once they got started talking to themselves it was over. Whatever they wanted to do was going to happen, but it will grow back. Provided I do not get mauled. “Oh, take a deep breath. Going to buzz the ears. This is pretty loud for some bears.”

 They are not kidding. The polar bear grabs my right ear in their massive grip. I wait for them to rip off, but the bear just tugs and pulls. My ears slide up the side of my head easy enough. They feel so itchy, as if there is hair inside them. The whirr of the clipper quickly kills any thought. It is so loud, and they run the blade over my ear! It should hurt. I keep waiting for the blade to cut me, but instead there is only the sound of trimming hair. It falls down to the black tarp in large clumps. What do you know, that is pretty light brown.

 The polar bear laughs and runs the clippers on the inside of my ear. Again, so loud, and even more of that same brown hair just falls away. They move on to my other ear. It is just the same. A quick tug into a strange position, like folding a ravioli. They do not miss a trick either. My ear flicks in relief as soon as the clippers move out from inside. Of course, they just move down to my cheeks. I try to say I do not want a beard trim, but the bear runs them down the length of my nose. So much hair falls away, all of it slightly lighter color than the stuff on my ears. Must be what they meant by coat.

 I grip the barber chair and try to suppress my worry. Once the bear is done, I can probably run to the hospital for an epi-pen. It is not that far. Plus, I will probably be running from the nice barbear. The joke makes me want to laugh. Why does it hurt to laugh? My throat feels caught by that massive tarp. It had been so loose before. Now ever time I move it feels like both pulling my hair and strangulation.

 “Relax, we are almost done! Just let me do your chin and we can work on the rest of you.” They hold my head still in one paw, and clipper with the other. It runs up under my chin, brushing up to jowly lips. It kind of tickles my teeth. I can feel them shake and move from proximity to the cutter. Another spritz with that smelly stuff and the polar bear finally stops. They reach down and grab a massive mirror from beside the chair. They even untie my neck! It comes off with a massive fluff. My chest feels so hairy. Instinctively I reach up and touch my neck. It is super hairy, furry even. The bear holds up a mirror and I stare at my reflection.

 “Oh! It’s salmon!” That is the scent in the water bottles, and why it was making me so darn hungry! Also, my reflection is a big, grinning grizzly bear. Something about that should be setting off alarm bells but I feel frozen by the reflection. Those dark beady eyes just draw me in. The cut on my head-fur is just fantastic.

 “Yes, that is our most requested scent around this time of year. Now you can hold the mirror if you want, but I need to trim your shoulder and back. I don’t know why you wore such tight clothes today.” They tutter and hand me the mirror. I stare down at the hand holding it. The same one that had touched the new fur on my cheeks. It had touched that same salmon scented river water too. It did look surprisingly large. My nails have darkened as well, forming into familiar looking claws. The mirror has a funny grip, extra coarse so I could hold it with my new pads. Those were growing in alarmingly fast. The fingers on my hand squeeze and push together into a huge bear paw. I should be terrified, but that salmon scent makes me too hungry to care.

 The polar bear easily claws off my shirt as they worked. They spray and buzz down my spine. It feels soothing to have that vibrating machine pressed close to the skin, like a metal massage. At the same time that huge barber chair grows comfier and comfier. I can feel myself sinking in deeper to those cushions as my body put on mass. They buzz my arms into thick, massive claws. I feel my stomach far more insistent now. It swells and fills out, covering in that same dark fur. At least it would be expertly groomed.

 “So anyways, what was I saying?” The bear continues telling me about their day, and customers. Gossip knew no species barriers it seemed. Eventually they work down to my lower body. It was old hat by now. Just a few quick sprays and my pants would never fit anyways. The polar bear does provide me a soft courtesy towel while they were shearing over my bare, bear bottom. “Please hold still if you can.”

 I freeze and grumble. Holding still and following this beast was the name of the game. However, they are no longer so looming. Now that my body had gained an extra ton the bear looked practically normal! Maybe they stood a bit taller, but I likely had bigger paws. That was a weird thought. Still, better to be polite. I stand up cautiously. I can feel the bear grabbing my hips, squeezing like a tube of toothpaste. My spine shifts, and finally something puffs out. I can feel it twitch, like a big, brown fuzzy puff ball. My tail, I just grew a tail!?

 The tail practically tinkles behind me while the bear grooms my legs. I wobble and stand up, but not before they spray my feet with that stuff. It sinks into my shoes. I can feel it get there, as suddenly they are four sizes too large. Big ol’ bear paws shred their way out of cheap leather. I had just bought those too. This was starting to be an expensive haircut.

 The polar bear waves their claws, surveying the work. I stand up after a fashion. My body keeps wanting to lope forwards onto four legs, but at least I have options open. “There, I think that worked out pretty good!”

 “Are you kidding, what did you do to me?” I bellow out. My voice has lowered about six octaves, and it was a bit too easy to snarl. I counted to ten in my head. Deep, cleansing breaths. “All I wanted was a haircut.”

 “Sorry? We only do bear cuts here. This is a bear salon after all.” The polar bear just laughs and leads me out back, and into a new clearing. My nose easily detects the scent of other bears in that direction, and salmon. A fresh river is nearby. Eventually I should figure out how to turn back, but no one wants to think on an empty stomach!

 I head on out with my new bear friend for lunch, but not without cursing auto correct to hell.