

glorious

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I really love the place I get my hair cut. It's a combination barbershop and speakeasy in Williamsburg, Brooklyn... naturally. It's a very *male* place, though I know it is frequented by some folks who don't identify as such. The barber who is *my* guy at this shop is a 30-something year-old named Paul. I think of him as a kid, which is strange because he's clearly not. I'm only around ten years his senior. Something about hitting 40 made me start assuming I would now be the oldest person in any room. Paul has tattoos, a wife, two sons, and is a former wannabe pro skateboarder from Long Island. He's

handsome and funny, and I love the way he loves my glorious beard. Oh, “glorious” is his word, not mine.

Paul always greets me with one of those straight guy handshakes—really robust and... manly. He’s genuinely happy to see me every time. I can tell. He likes me.

“What’re we doin’ today?” he always asks as he ties the cape behind my neck. We’re a couple of years into our relationship now, so he probably knows I’ll trust him and follow his lead, but he asks anyway. I mean, there was one time where he suggested we do a skin fade, like really tight on the sides and I had a visceral reaction against the idea. By my next visit, though, I knew Paul had been right all along, and we went for it. And now it’s my usual thing. My hairline went from “widow’s peak” to “oh no, it’s definitely receding” by the time I hit 25, so I’ve had some time to get used to the fact that I would not be among the *haired* for long.



Still, I can be a little thrown off by how bald I look when my head is shaved.

During the last year of my time with aimee, my former Reiki and flower essence healing hairdresser who I met in an archetypal performance art workshop (also Brooklyn-based), I started each appointment with the question: “is it time to just shave it off? Look how thin it is up here! Is it sad yet? Just tell me when it’s time to shave my head, I am so okay with it.” Each month she would assure me, “no, I can still do something cute with this.” Until it was time and we started just clipping it almost to the scalp. During one of my appointments, aimee suggested that I could probably just go to a barber shop to do this new style and spend a lot less money. She assured

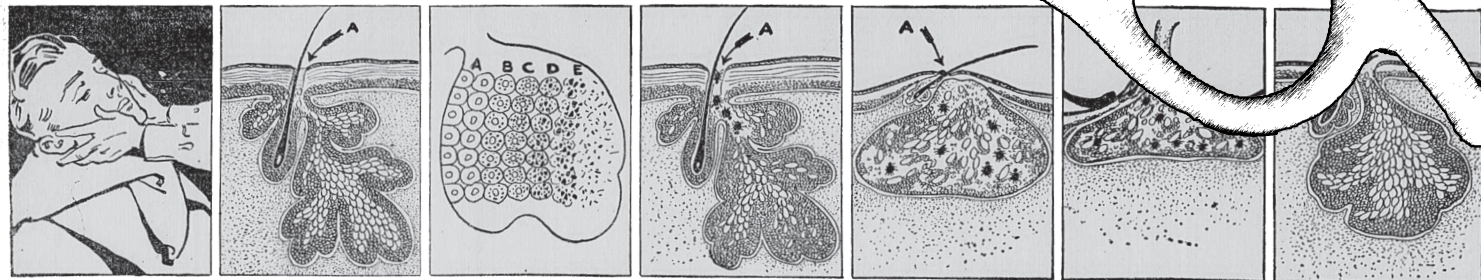
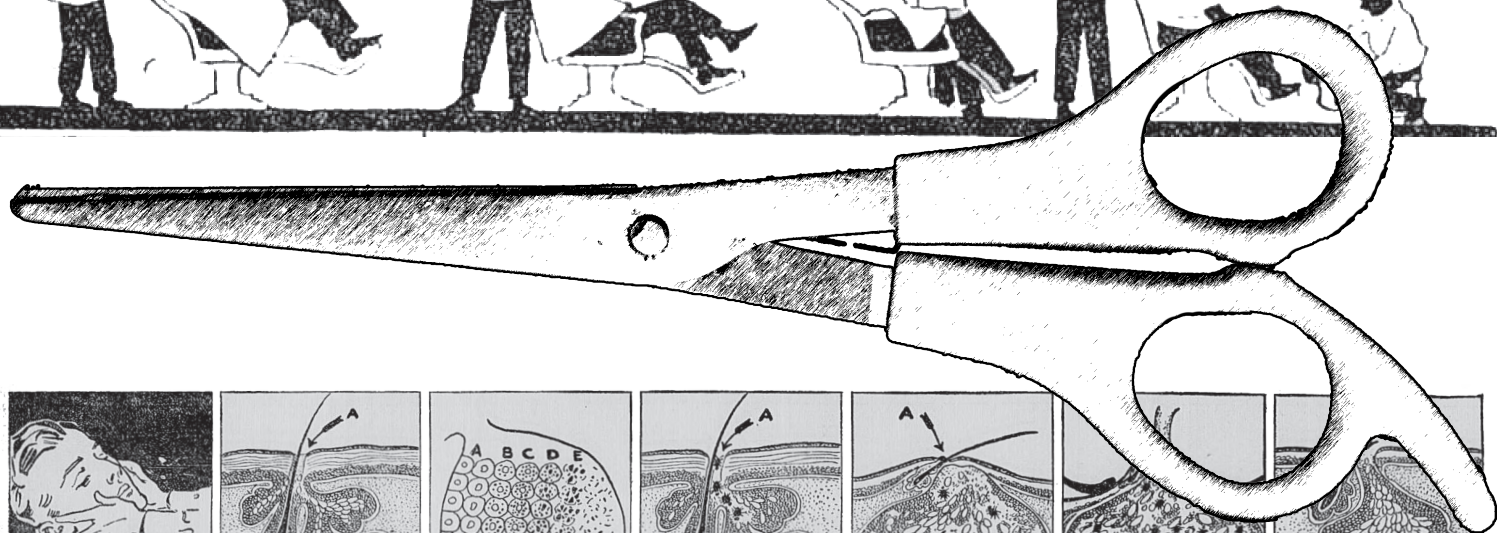
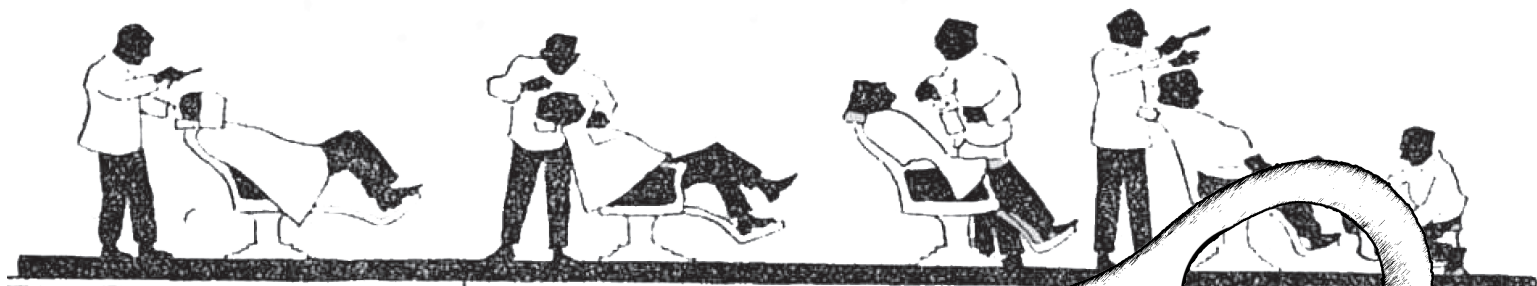
me that we could still be friends and see each other even if she wasn't cutting my hair. For someone who avoids relationships with gusto, I guess I have a history of a deep attachment to people who touch my head. Luckily, aimee sensed this and approached the conversation with gentleness and care.

And that's when I found Paul.

Surprisingly, I only realized recently that I might have a crush on Paul. I knew I appreciated that monthly intimacy with a handsome guy, and these monthly visits probably have a lot to do with the fact that my manwhore habit has pretty much become nil. I always knew that my sessions with male escorts were less about sex and more about pretending for an hour that a hot guy wanted to roll around in the sheets with me. I mean, I didn't mind getting jerked off by said hot guy, but a trip to the barber shop is much cheaper and arguably more respectable... depending.

There's no arguing the fact that a shave and a haircut *is* an intimate exchange. It's a good hour of close physical proximity, conversation, and care—and my life is largely spent without intimacy. That could sound kind of sad, but as much as I want to sometimes work up some self-pity about this fact, my long-term singlehood is my choice, and I am signed on to it for better or worse. At least for now. So things like haircuts, and visits to the urgent care center for stitches when I fell and got a piece of glass embedded in my hand, well, those are lovely moments of intimacy for me. I recoil from the thought of care from a significant other, but being cared for in a barber shop, a hooker's boudoir, or a hospital—those, I'll allow.

My subconscious, though, had some different ideas. A few weeks ago, I woke up with the uncomfortable realization that I had just had a sex dream about my barber, Paul. Now, it wasn't a *wet* dream, thank God, but I still found myself laying there in this



The Scientific Explanation of "Black Heads" or "Enlarged Pores"—How a Healthy Oil-Secreting Gland Works and How the Microbes Are Rubbed Into the Gland by the Hairdresser and Seal It Up Causing It to Swell Into an Eruption Until It Finally Bursts, Leaving an "Enlarged Pore."

awful puddle of shame. Like, somehow I had betrayed our brotherly barber shop bond by dreaming about touching our dicks together. This actually happened when I was a kid. One of my best friends in 6th grade was this boy named Chuck. We were still young enough to be friends even though he was on the handsome football player track, and I was on the awkward choir kid track. We didn't know yet that our social standing was about to be vastly different, so I was spending the night at his house. After his mom tucked us in and closed the door, it was quiet for a minute. Then, he whispered up to my perch in his top bunk, "Wanna rub weenies?"

Intrigued, I replied, "what?"

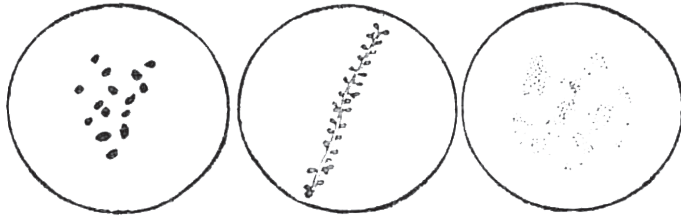
"Do you wanna rub weenies?"

"I guess. What do I do?"

"Come down here and I'll show you."

So I climbed down the ladder and got into bed with him. It seemed forbidden, but even at the time, I thought it was kinda dumb. I laid on top of him and we rubbed weenies. I don't think either of us even got hard, and in spite of the fact that he grew into an extremely, *extremely* handsome man, the whole rubbing weenies with him thing is kinda lost on me. I don't quite remember what happened next and I don't think we ever spoke about that again.

Even though I found this dream of bone dancing with my barber so embarrassing, I still felt compelled to tell some friends about it. Maybe I was looking for a way to get some affirmation, and truly this dream was my first sexual encounter in longer than I care to admit. I guess I was sort of proud I had finally gotten laid, even if it was just a dream. I was chatting with my friend Ben about it and he asked the requisite,



Microbes of Diseases Caught in Barber Shops, as Seen under the Microscope. The First Is the Dandruff Bacillus. In the Middle the Ring Worm Germ Which Attacks Children. On the Right the Microbe of Furunculosis, or Infectious Boils.

Fig. 3

"Did you fuck him?"

"No!" I replied, aghast.

"He fucked you?"

"No..."

"Wait... You're freaking out about this 'sex dream' in which there was no sex? Did you at least blow each other or something?"

"No," I said, laughing, "We weren't even naked in the dream now that I think about it. I think we were just hanging out and talking on my bed."

"Girl, that's not a sex dream. That shit is boring."

"Yeah."

So that was it. Even my dreamed sexual

encounters leave something to be desired, it seems. Paul still cuts my hair every few weeks, and though it seemed weird going in there the first time after the dream, we got right to the business of clipping and laughing about our various escapades since my last visit. It's nice. We have a routine now, and though my desired beard length changes with the seasons, he generally knows what I like. The older and more "set in my ways" I become, I appreciate this kind of occasional intimacy more than ever. If I do get around to going back to therapy, I'll probably discover the cause of my "sexual anorexia," that's what a well-meaning friend diagnosed me with last year. But, in the meantime, I love the safety of being cared for somewhat regularly by a human being I enjoy. I love the touch of the haircut and danger of the straight-razor shave. Most of all, I love paying fifty bucks plus tip and walking out the door—alone.

Until next time.



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