

**Letters from the New World**

**#3: "HAIR CUT"**

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**S**cared? No, not scared, not really. You can't be scared of a barber. Can you? True, this (South African) **Shavathon** was invented by sadists. True, going in wasn't easy, past streams of bald guys coming out, clutching their heads in shell-shocked daze.

But that's not "scared", surely, so much as rational. A lifetime of long hair gives a you identity, right? It instils a persona, a self-image, which has never been short hair, let alone no hair. Now you're about to make the brushcut guys look like hippies. For sure you aren't overjoyed....

But not "scared", please. "Lunatic", maybe. When they start to cut, red-alert clangs. This is the only mirrorless barber seat you ever met. Your head gets cold, in a way you never knew. Clumps of you slide down your shoulders, clumps not of plain untidy excess, but of what has been part of you since you were in nappies.

Your friends who did the easy option, the one-day green dye, are hosing themselves, pointing at you and high-fiving and slapping their sides like at Barry Hilton on the cuzzin routine.

There comes an instant that you can not believe this thing that you are doing. You feel central processing unit contacting your leg muscles with the instruction to bolt. But before the message downloads, the volunteer barber is shaking out the towel. They're speedy here, whipping off the entire woosack in 10% of the time that a real barber with mirrors takes to do a trim.

Rub the head, feel strange, be relieved by the touch of a film of stubble. It's short, but it's hair. Then the sadists guide you to the blades.

The blades. So far has been only Army-short. Kojak is yet to come. The blades are gonna abolish every wisp, everything but eyebrows.

You can choose to duck this, but a mad instinct says go the whole hog. Partly, there's testosterone and rank order. The Kojaks are main manne, army-cuts come second and green-dyes are but honorary members of the human race. The other part is duty. Companies pay money to the Cancer Association for every bald head. Plus the world record, 55 000 heads in a day, is up for challenge, and it's held by... Australia.

And hey, anyway, it's just this once.

So the shaver lady sprays the lather. This time, it does take time. A head is a bigger thing than you think. A head-shave covers the acreage of six or ten face-shaves, and is a bumpier ride.

The end is shock. A hand ascends to explore, and recoils in instant horror. This is no longer foreign hair on a familiar pate. This is horror-story, feeling not like a head at all, any head, let alone the personal private head you've known since youth. It's a lumpy sticky thing, foreign to the touch, as if a mother dinosaur plonked a reject misshapen egg on top of your neck.

A ou gets a skrik, but not as much as when the lady says: "there you are then. It nearly always grows back, even at your age. Just scrub the skin or it can grow inward."

Nearly always? Can grow inward? This night was poor in sleep; strong in images of traumatised dead hair refusing to re-start, of trapped stalactite strands clutching downward and strangling the brain. Furthermore, resting a newly bald head on a pillow is like rolling a brick on a croquet lawn. Hair is a lubricant; one of its less known virtues. Shining and slithery as the naked noggin appears, it glues to the pillow. Each toss and each turn is a sticky, jerky, jolt.

But nightmares end. The second day the dogs stopped barking. By the third I could enter my bathroom without startling at the ugly bald stranger. By the fourth I ceased to instinctively reach for the hairbrush

after the morning shower. Now my family are saying “quite nice, really”, and I’m relishing seeing the world from a short-hair vantage-point.

Sixty thousand bristly heads are walking around town feeling interconnected and a tiny bit smug. We were arm-twisted into it, yes, but whatever the motives, our haircuts brought packets into cancer support and brought us a flash of solidarity with a deeply real cause.

We give each other friendly recognising nods to say “we shared that scared moment, which we won’t admit to.” And the Aussies have come second at something.



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