

Deadheading

by Marc Nash

He depressed the rocker switch. The purring susurrations started up. The hair clippers weren't in his hand though. It was too soon for that.

Apprehension of the incipient thrum always set his mind a throb. So he was customarily compelled to leave them on the floor, while he modulated his own quickening pulse.

Yet the welter of tension was perennially italicised for him.

The metal tines were palpating the slip-on plastic ones of the number 1 cut. Like a humming bird's wings, the metal couldn't be seen moving. Only the clumsy lurches of the thicker prongs cresting them.

The electric cable was twitching with pent up flux.

The body of the clippers, where the electric motor was housed, was percussing the pile of the carpet like a bull pawing the ground before a charge. And in turn the carpet was revving up the undercarriage, bearing it atop the tips of its fibres, like worker ants.

The tipping point, when friction's stranglehold is overcome, sees the cable snake and flare like a cracked bullwhip and wrenches the clippers on to their side. The timbre of the tines changes, more like an angry hive now. He picks up the trimmed shears.

His breathing hastens. No matter how much he composes and prepares, he cannot override the electrical trigger in his brain. Something to do with the resonance of physical memory. It remembers amplitudes of current. Any electrical device serves for jump leads to accelerate his heart.

He crouches there, holding the clippers in the palm of his hand, unbuttressed by any curled over fingers. He has to stay as even as possible, until he brings down the stroke of his respiration once again. The clippers oscillating against the skin of his hand. Bench pressing his flesh. He's aligning for their periodicity, so he can fall in behind their metronomic beat. The problem being his touch centres

are calibrating one frequency, while his ears are secondary reporting with a fractional lag.

Finally he takes the plunge and brings the snapping piranha teeth to the sheath of his head. He has no need for a mirror, since his free hand pats down for the braille glyphs beneath. The sunken foundations of Inca temples buried beneath hair vines and knotted canopy.

The clippers carry on the deforestation apace. Threshing a bristly stubble over the entirety of his furrowed brow. Harvesting secrets.

The hand runs over the contours of his cranium. Phrenology of the self. His fingers came away smeared with the follicle cull.

Phase one complete, he extinguishes the clippers and rips the plastic gradation accessory from its prow. He rubs the tips of his fingers over the bared steel serrations. He stares at the flesh as it puffs itself back up to reclaim the pressure indentations from the blades. He rubs his thumb against the callused pad of the index finger. The blistered vesicle there never once yielded before the press of the steel. He exhales.

Laying the clippers back on the floor, once again he summons their power by tripping the seesaw switch. The surge came anew. The coiled current crescendoing, plucking at the cable like a piano hammer.

His hand hovering above the vibrato as if conducting it, he was transported back to Summer memories on the streets. With thimblerriggers, professional beggars and suitcases full of somersaulting toy dogs. Those that yapped and yapped as they built up the momentum towards a forward roll. He had always imagined it was cats that were supposed to land on their feet. That damn yapping, reverberating in his ears. Building the pressure up, tightening his pulses like a garrote. A fluffy candyfloss white Son of Sam, but a devil dog all the same. Until he took a carving knife to it, silencing it for once and for all. Heartening to report dogs don't possess nine lives. At his hearing - now there's an apt word - they conceded his argument that all human creativity stems from using objects in new ways, ways that they were not intended for originally.

But where he came a cropper, where they snagged him, was when he couldn't remember whether it was blood or hair stuffing that came out of the dog that he ran metal through. That was the bone of contention, how he couldn't quite place the interiority of another of God's creatures. So much so, apparently it made him a potential danger to all bodies.

He scooped up the clippers and began once again to range over his cropped head. With so little pappus to intercede between steel and flesh, the snarling blades bit time and again. He didn't flinch.

The livid veins were welted to the skin from their buffeting. Red and blue like a road map. But the terrain of his skull had been a scorched earth once before. Threaded with desiccated worm casts and that was the point.

The clippers had harrowed their acreage and he swiftly shut the current off to end phase two. His hand was still vibrating a full seventeen seconds after the power had died.

When his hands stopped shaking, he grabbed hold of the legs of the full-length mirror and dragged it through the pile of the carpet so as to face himself. He pressed his face right into the meniscus of the glass, and his bloodshot eyes started surveying the cuts and nicks. The scabs and the scars.

Some were freshly minted, most were older vestiges. The exterior of his skull resembled a brain scan signalling hot areas of neural activity. He was turned all inside out. Which *was* exactly the point.

He brought his fingers up to each of the clotted mounds. Distending the curdled skin at the foothills, trying to determine the precise aspect. The newer ones leached viscous blood onto his fingers. The older magma chambers threatened recrudescence under the seismic tremors of his manipulations.

But each blood red cameo was carved in relief. None offered the worm hole of intaglio, that which he was chasing after. Those nodes where they had affixed the electrodes. The inlets for the cabling, the electrical conduits, through which they had convulsed electric charge into his resistant brain. To drive away the stormy black clouds they claimed resided there, forecasting his gloomy outlook.

They had wanted to let the sunshine back in, even if it was an artificial source of illumination. A wan light which just leaves him numb and huddled around himself.

Of course, now they deny having ever done anything to him at all. No invasive treatment perpetrated. But he will keep sweeping the brush clear and he will pinpoint the evidence. Of the turned-in wound. Tell-tale concavity. The needle in the coagulated haystacks pockmarking his barren head.

He *will* bring them to account. He knows - and they must come to know - every time he flicks a switch, his whole nervous system resonates to the flow it engenders.

He moves to pick up the can of shaving foam and the triple bladed razor. At least they didn't have a pulse other than that conducted by his hand. Commencing phase three.

