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6. The Form of the Fibre is Shaped by the Follicle

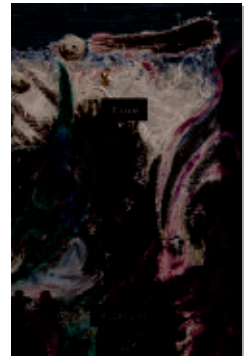
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6

The Form of the Fibre is Shaped by the Follicle

Jarred Thompson

Barber

I've been cutting his hair since he came home from the hospital so I know that when he shakes, there's a tic on the way.

I trust you. He holds his neck. The shaver buzzes through his crimp.

You've got all kinds of curl, I say. (Like the neurons in your head.)

No! He shakes. Yells.

I stop. Mr Tourrettes has his own ideas and wants to be heard.

Fuck shit bitch whore fuck shit bitch whore.

I tell him the relaxer is going to break the bonds, that we can't do this often because every follicle has a clock and you don't wanna fast forward into a bald scalp now, do you?

Deepest deader dead deader deader dead ... he bounces up and down.

I rearrange his hair. Make it point true north. Straight.

It doesn't do anything, he points. Hair webs around our feet.

Later, sweeping the curls into the bin, I finger the bald spot behind my earlobe and dab Amia oil on it with my pinkie.

Apartment

The Harry Potter dooblehhead stares at the bulb-less tree stump of a lamp. The T.V. an opaque window. The radio: a static mist. Outside: cold.

She has taught him how to moisturise from the roof. Start at the tip, comb down to the follicle, and stretch a decade into a grip (it slips between his fingers).

They take turns doing each other, sitting in between legs. The room is hotter than it's meant to be, thanks to the coals at their feet.

"Do you remember that time a woman found God in the veins of a tomato?" He wraps her hair around curling rods.

She likes the pull on her sculpt, the slight jolt running down her spine. "Yeah, they even consulted a food science department to preserve it."

Silence retains its shape, no matter what they say. Death lies on the windowsill outside, but at least they have this.

"Maybe it won't be so bad. Pushing reset, going back to scales—" He stops, surveys his handiwork.

"—crawling back into the ocean, amphibians refusing their legs." Her head drops.

For a moment he thinks she's breaking down.

"It feels so good. The pulling—" She doesn't finish her sentence, feels for her hair and laughs. "You're having fun making tornadoes, huh?"

Outside, water wrinkles the city into marsh.

Burial

The body is brought down through the narrow passage, pulled from the crawl space and negotiated through fissure, furthest from the cave mouth. It takes a day to get there, but they are two. One cradles the head, another cups the feet, and the *drip-dip-dip* on their shoulders.

They've trekked this passage before. When the light gives out they know to feel around for the hole beyond the archive of stalagmites, in the bedding plane of limestone.

Arrived, they nestle mother between kin and smear olive oil on her hardening skin. Her limbs swirl inward, toward her belly, the way a centipede might contract when touched by the tip of something it doesn't understand.

They sigh. Sound fills the throat, echoing in chambers above them. The sigh is a word they've made together. A word only spoken here. The word is their name for this death that life keeps packing together and forcing out of its follicle.

They go to work removing mother's hair with the jagged end of stone cores. Hair is the last tether. Then, they bear their fists against a crack in a column. The cavern rumbles, slightly.

When they surface it is night. A fire is made. A pel of hair is laid as a pillow. By morning, the dew has turned the pillow into a bowl. Constellations of berries lie in the mud. This is breakfast.

A campfire tree thaws in the sun and gives up its scent. The scent whistles in the nostril; the smell a prayer spoken with the palms. Another fire is made. The hair is drowned in it.

They eat by its heat.