

Adult Highly Commended

Nick Knibb

barber shop

I sat there on the padded corner seat comic in hand, watching as they came in;
each signalled by a doorbell overhead
one by one they took the black high-backed leather swivel chair
and one by one they told their tales within these walls of nicotined magnolia cream and dark oak
timber
of car journeys and wives and miscreants and mistakes
and drinking and money and handyman heartache;
white coated everyman offered in turn, laughter, sympathy and solution
all the while eyes front busy scissors shaping and shaving before open razor and final inspection.
'perfect' they'd all say at the end, 'just perfect'.
the transactions would conclude the same way – shoulders swept with soft, white haired brush,
'let me help you into this' jacket retrieved from the stand,
cash passed over, another pencil mark in the book and tissue pressed in hand
before a conspiratorial...
'something for the weekend, sir?'
a mumbled reply, hand shoot into jacket pocket and bell swing door close
then, given the nod,
I would pick up the broom and sweep up the hair from the floor before returning to my seat
and the stage was set again to repeat throughout the afternoon
story after story - life, death, birth and money, happy, sad
"just save the politics for the pub and the religion for church"
until the last one had finally gone.
a padded board was brought out and placed upon the arms of the swivel seat
and I climbed into position now adult head height and mirror level
I watched the concentration on the face in the reflection as the scissors hypnotically moved and cut,
moved and cut
and as the comb went through my hair
I slowly fell to sleep...

I woke to the sound of whistling and cash being counted and numbers tallied up from the book on the counter

the sign at the entrance had been turned and OPEN faced inwards

bolts at the top and bottom of the door firmly slid home.

no-one could get in - I was far from teachers and brothers and bullies and the rules that dragged me down.

looking up I saw in the mirror the gentle smile on the face I knew as well as my own

'its as close as I could get to Tony Curtis' he said

'its perfect' I replied

'just perfect - thanks dad'