

## The Barber

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It's an A1 fact - the doors of my barber shop will close today, and I'll serve information to the people in a new way: my already very popular online channel. It's good. It's so great. Closing my shop is a sacrifice I'm willing to make. My face is getting too well known in the outside world. Too easy to find. The media whores twist a fact just as much as a liquorice strap.

I'm about freedom. It's on my mind constantly, like a migraine drilling in. I don't think freedom is on *his* mind, this snowflake sitting in my barber's seat. He hasn't said fuck all, yet he's humming like a Disney princess while I shave the back of his neck. Come in for a haircut? I'm not so sure.

In the mirror: *notice him*. Texting government bosses or wifey. Enjoying a tampon up there. The top of this guy's hair doesn't even need a cut. I trim it anyway. With clippers, not scissors. I'm that good.

His shoes are a giveaway. Canvas or some such. Maybe wool? Expensive, and too clean. I bet he's a researcher. No, an infiltrator. The clippers dig into the back of his right ear, and his humming cuts off real sharp.

"All good, friend?"

His pig eyes get trapped in the mirror. Can he hold it? No! The snowflake nods and laser focuses on his phone. This termite should research how to infiltrate a people's movement and not stick out like dog's balls. His shoes look as washed clean as a nun's front bum - although I've had my run-ins with them, too.

Back in the day, those bitches crushed my little knuckles with their grimaces and the edges of their metre rulers. From their sneers I learned the word 'glee'.

You can tell from this snowflake's buffed fingernails he's only here for me. Did he realise my existence allowed him to wallow in his middle class sink of suds? Under the cape of my protection?

"Did you say it's your last day as a barber?"

"That's right."

"A big change?"

“You ask a lot of questions, friend.”

“Oh...I. Sorry.”

Why'd he come in today? Hmm? My final day? The very last cut? To get a read on me? Does he give me credit for being a success in this fading paradigm? I started from a few friends and nephews stopping by, to having waiting lists and regulars. I clocked this life more than the clown, my sperm donor, ever did. He was an A1 alcoholic, druggie, exemplar failure.

My shop's been here for years, *years!* I've existed for the old creased soldiers like Roger, Corporal, retired. He enjoys a yarn. He's a patriot who built bridges for the mugs over in good morning Vietnam. Two tours. *Two*, the poor bastard. He loves hot towels on his jowls and especially over his eyes, and he doesn't even want his beard shaved. Nothing. He craves the heat and the steam, and the dark.

Then there's the Māori, Harlan, the butcher's apprentice. He reckons he's *SaMāori* and likes his hair just so, with a frizz mullet. Samoan, Māori, they're all the same to me. But man he's huge, and a good guy. A real gentle giant. He's not like those other gorillas or even the dummy Islanders. He told me this joke yesterday.

“Hey Ethan, how would I introduce my wife, when I get one, eh? You know, cos I'm a butcher.”

“How?”

“Meet Pattie.”

Harlan's hair always squeaks when I comb it. Like, it's always primo clean. Countless heads of hair I've scalped: scabby, lice infected, skin cancered, oily, malodorous, boil covered, sunburned, freckled, flaked, dirty-disgusting and pristine.

Since I started live streaming a year ago, people make appointments just to shake my hand. Does this snowflake know that donations in my bank account have taken over the income from my barber shop? I'm flush. Over three grand - every week! Money from perfect strangers! And support for live streaming the truth is getting bigger and bigger.

We can't wait for Trump in New Zealand. Though I'm proud he's actually reached out to my channel. He has his own dynasty to organise. He's a father. I get that. I would kill to protect my kid, too. Hands down it's about the kids.

I've forgiven my filthy slit of a father. I admit it, I probably have dad issues. He's in me. They'll find out about him soon, but I don't give a rat's arse if they make his past public. I'm an open Wiki leak.

"Do you require a shave? Hot towel?"

"No thanks."

"Where do you live?"

"What?"

"What street?"

"Ah, Vivian, the flats."

What a fucking lie.

The snowflake paid with the shiniest credit card you've ever seen! Then he skipped out the door on his fake arse shoes. As he went out, a blobby guy with a camera came in. A female walked in too. This upright baby-oven carried a microphone. I recognised her straight away. She was on television each night. Mainstream.

In the mirror: *notice her*. Fear. She was skittery. Her radioactive green irises jerked around like a mutant jumping spider.

"Mr Pool?"

"I know you on tv, Mainstream."

"Yes, that's right. Would you like to comment on your nightly live stream that many feel is spouting dangerous mis-information and conspiracy theories?"

"I know your hack strategy. Why don't *you* start reporting the truth rather than attacking me? Protect our children?"

She didn't get a chance to answer when... *whaaaaat!?* The glass window at the front of the shop exploded inward, glass clattering onto the floor, scattering over the counter tops, and whacking me in the back. The camera guy grunted and went down on one knee, leaning hard on the camera to stay

upright. I dunno, something heroic made me grab her under my armpit. A rod of red and white and blue stripes rolled along the floor.

“What the fork!” hissed the reporter, and she actually said ‘fork’ - just like that. The shop was silent and still, except for falling pieces of glass raining off us. I scanned the street but there were only a few suits looking up like meerkats, gnawing on wooden sporks.

“Mr Pool? Somebody threw your barber shop pole through the window!”

“Yes, Mainstream. Obviously so.”

“Like who?”

“Find out who the liar is. Who is the lowest common denominator and you’ll find your criminal.”

“Who *is* the criminal, Mr Pool?”

What a moron. I lifted the pole to look at the scratches underneath. The piece was a rare Marvy. A true stature of American history. I made sure to show a bit of bicep. The camera followed. I moved to the right. The camera followed. This was too good to be true. I remembered. Amy.

“Amy, do you know that the red stripes mean blood? Arteries?”

“No, I didn’t know that.”

“Yeah. In the day, barbers weren’t just hair cutters. They pulled teeth and stuck leeches, amputated limbs, burned demons away by cupping. The colours signify blood-letting. Did you know that, Mainstream? Like magic. Me, the Barber, encourages the blood flow just as I encourage the flow of information. The white stripes are bandages. The blue for veins.”

“Mr Pool, what do you have to say to the people who think you’re bonkers?”

“I’m doing it for the people. They’ll thank me one day.”

Blobby guy fixed the camera on my face. Oh yes please. My chance to manifest a singular laser focus into the lens.

“I’m going to destroy your narrative, Mainstream.”

“Mr Pool, what narrative?”

“Your narrative. People want to and *will* drink from a new source.”

“Do you believe in science?”

“There’s science and then there’s science truth.”

“What about facts?”

“There’s your story, my story, then there are the facts. Time to leave, Mainstream.”

In the mirror: *notice me*. My body definition is A1. I don’t even glance at the media puppet and her lap-dog walking out.

“Dad? Jesus, what happened?” Behind me, my boy, crunching over glass. School shirt untucked. Hair tied back.

“Don’t blaspheme. No need for it, boy.”

“You okay?”

“Just a low-life. But I’m always winning, bud.”

“Are you online tonight?” He said, kicking the shards.

“Course. Always.”

“Can you...maybe, not mention me?”

“Why? Has someone said something?” Those a-holes. Basement dwellers. I look up and down the street.

“My teacher asked about your new channel.”

“What’d he say?”

“She.”

“Toxic feminist?”

“No, no Dad. She’s okay. Don’t worry about it. Alright?”

“I’m doing this for you, mate.”

“I know. Please, Dad.

See you at home. Love you.”

“Love you, too.” So much.

My barber doors are closing but the world is ready to burst wide open. The red, the white, the blue. The information bloodletting has begun. Listen to my live stream and let the truth sever the liars and the lies. They are the disease and we are the A1 cure.