The shave had finished now, the barber was cutting the man’s hair. It was glossy black hair and small curls of it fell on the floor. I could see the man in the mirror. He was a well-made man in his thirties with a swarthy skin and bright long black eyes like a gypsy’s. The lashes were long and the lids when he blinked were pale. Now he was shaved there was a glister to his skin like a Hindu’s and as the young barber clipped away and grunted his breaths, the dark man sat engrossed in his reflection, half smiling at himself and very deeply pleased. He was wearing bright violet socks. He was a careful man, the barber, slow and studious in his 30s too but nonchalant and He was a young man with fair, receding hair in his movements and detached. Sometimes he stepped back and looked at his customer in the mirror as a painter might look at a picture in a frame. And He went on from rattling his brush in the jar, wiping his razor, one job to the next silently. Now he was pushing the chair forward to the basin. Now he gently pushed the man’s head down, now he ran the taps and was soaping the head and rubbing it. He looked down at the soaped head. A peculiar look of distant affection was on his face as he looked

“How long are you going to be?” I said. “I’ve
He looked at the clock. He knew the trains.

“Couple of minutes”, he said. He walked away and wheeled an extraordinary machine on a tripod to the back of the man. A curved black thing like a helmet enclosed the head. The machine was plugged to the wall. There were phials with coloured liquids on it and soon steam was rushing out under the helmet. It looked like a machine you see in a Fun Fair. I don’t know what happened to the man or what the barber did. Shave, hot towel, haircut, shampoo, this machine and then yellow liquid like treacle out of a bottle – that customer had everything.

I wondered how much he would have to pay.

And then, after many powderings, wipings, squirtings of scent over that swarthy face, whose eyes closed into long slits with satisfaction like a cat’s, and the final offering of a clean towel from a drawer, the job was over.

The clippers had been over the back of his neck and he looked like a guardsman. The dark man got up. He was dressed in a square shouldered grey suit, very dandyish for this town and he had a silk handkerchief sticking out of his breast pocket. He wore a violet and silver tie. He patted it as the barber brushed his coat, he smiled slightly at himself in the mirror and then, with the idle luxurious step of...
a cat, he went to the door.

F smiled faintly. The look of dandified derision
Cheero Albert upright

“So long”, he said with a wide smile. was unmistakable

“So long”, said the barber and his lips closed to

a small, hardly perceptible smile too. Thoughtfully, he

watched him go out of the door and go down the stairs,

until he was out of sight. The man hadn’t paid.

They were youngish men, both of them, the fair and

the dark, much the same age.

I sat in the chair. It was warm, too warm, where

the man had sat. The barber put the sheet round me.

The barber was smiling to himself like a man remembering a
tune. He was not thinking about me. The small sardonic

smile like the abstracted smile of a man who remembers
a story he has been told and is getting another unsuspected
flavour from it.

“What’s that machine for?” I asked. I had to repeat the

question. He told me. I think he said it made steam open

the pores. Some people liked it, some people didn’t.

Some people want everything, some like nothing. You had to have a machine

like that

“He”, said the barber dryly, nodding to the door,

“That customer – likes everything”.

He tucked in the cotton wool. He got out the

comb and scissors. His fingers gently depressed my head.

I could see him in the mirror bending to the back of my

head. He was clipping away. He was a dull young man
with pale blue eyes and a look of stubbornness in him. The
small smile was still like claw marks at the corners of his lips.
Insignificant as he was he seemed to carry in his usual
movements an ironical sense of reliability. I sank
into drowsiness in the warmth of the chair, into a
dreamy state. And it seemed to me that the barber was
in that state too, as if he were still with that man
who had just gone out of the door.

“It works out expensive?” I said.

“He has it every week”. He spoke into the back of my neck
and nodded to the door. “Some won’t have anything else”. He has it every week. He nodded to the door.

“Every Friday”, he said. “Every Friday, I suppose, for six or seven years”. He clipped away.

“His hair’s coming out. That’s why he has it. Going bald. You can’t stop it. You can delay it but you
can’t stop it. That’s what I tell him. If you’re going bald you’re going bald. That’s all there is to it.

Nothing to be done. Can’t always be young. A.D.? He thinks you can”. He smiled with dry affection.

“A.D.?”

“Anno Domini. You get old, your hair comes out”.

“But he wasn’t so old”.

The barber stood up. The smile became stronger and more sardonic. He mused to himself with growing satisfaction. He worked away
in long silence as if turning trying every possible
flavour of my remark. The result
He spoke with a dry musing satisfaction. There of this meditation was to make him change his scissors for a finer pair. had been this look of satisfaction and yet detachment too when “He ought to be dead”, he said. As if to say from a 100 the swarthy man had been in the room. moral point of view it was a scandal that the man was alive. “T.B.”, he said with a kind of quiet scorn. “It didn’t look like T.B.” He looked at me in the mirror.

“It’s wonderful”, he said. As if to say it was nothing of the sort. doctors can

105 “It’s wonderful what the right treatment can do”, I said. said

“I don’t mean doctors”, he muttered drily. Tuh!

“Consumptives! Cor! They’re wonderful”. As if to say Lord Potts who started life as an errand boy and got away with it. Wonderful? I don’t think.

He went on cutting. There was a glint in his pale amusedly belue eyes. He snipped away patiently as if he were attending to every individual hair at the back of my head, may be wonderful but you the sort of fellow who knows you cant get away with anything to you may be wonderful but you cant have everything.

110 you try and see.

“You see his throat?” he said. suddenly. “What about his throat?” I asked.

“Well”, he said, “Did you notice anything? Didn’t He stood up & looked at me in the mirror.

see a mark, a bit at the side? ^ “He cut his throat once”. “No”, I said. He bent down to the back of my neck again. “He cut his throat once”, he said quietly. he said. “Not satisfied with T.B.” he said with a It was a small firm H was a friendly grin. “So long, Fred. Cheero, Albert.”

120 ^“Had to commit suicide”.

“Wanted everything”, I said. “That’s it”, he said. You may be wonderful but you cant have everything.

“Yes, he did. Five years ago that chap cut his own
throat with a razor. "That's why he comes in here. Wont shave himself now. Put the wind up him. I go over to his house every day and shave him and he comes here on Fridays. Every day for five years. No, six, seven years it is. Afraid to shave himself".

The barber was silent. He was leaving the story there.

"What happened" I asked.

"Usual story", said he. did not answer.

"Money?" I said. "Horses?"

"No", he said. "He had all the money and horses he wanted. Cor! No, a girl. "He fell in love with a girl".

He clipped away. absently.

"That's an item", said the barber with a grim sort of pleasure.

He fell in love with a girl. Took pity on him when he was in bed. A local girl. Took pity on him when he was in bed. "What happened? Did she jilt him? No. A local girl. Took pity on him when he was ill, when he was in bed. Nursed him. Usual story. Took pity on him but wasn't interested in him in that way.

"A very attractive girl", said the barber. "And he got it badly?"

"They get it badly, consumptives. Takes them worse than you and me".

"You can't blame her if he had T.B."

"Matter of fact", said the barber stepping over for the clippers and shooting a hard sideways stare at me.
on top. “It was my wife”.

His small pale eyes glared a little but the dry smile was still on his lips.

“Before she was my wife”, he said.

“That’s funny isn’t it?” he said. There was a touch of quiet self-importance in him.

Cor, he said, he’d known that chap since he was a kid. Went to school with him. Always a lad. Regular nut. Had a milk business, was his own guv’nor till he got ill. Doing well. “She knew him before she knew me. But she went away for a couple of years to look after a lady and when she got fed up she came back. Then I took up with her”.

“He knew I was courting her”, he said with something that was nearly a chuckle. “That didn’t stop him”.

“What did you do?”

“What did you do?” I asked.

“I lay low”, he said.

She get a job in the shop opposite. If you passed that shop you couldn’t help noticing her in the cash desk near the door. ^ “The prettiest girl in the town”, he said.

“Still is”, he mused, in after thought.

“He used to slip across to talk to her”, the barber said in the same tone of amused scorn. “I used to see him. I didn’t mind. She knew her mind and I knew mine. You’ve see the river?” he said. “Well he used to take her
I didn’t mind. I knew my mind. She knew hers.
on the river when I was busy. I was glad someone
was looking after her. I knew it was all right”, he
said.

“I knew him”, he grinned. “But I knew her. Take Let
him take you
her on the river if you like”, I said.”

I saw his forehead and his dull blue eyes looking
up for a moment over my head in the mirror.

He said reflectively.

“Damp river.” Damp mists, I mean, on the river.
Very flat, low lying, unhealthy”, he said. “Didn’t do him
any good”. taking her on the river”

“Double pneumonia once”, he said. “Sixty cigarettes
a day, burning the candle at both ends”.

He grunted.

“Going out with her on that river made him ill”, he
Knocked him out

“He couldn’t get away with it.” he said. He was smiling at the past.

Before he got ill, the girl
She, that was, his girl, used to go and look after him
in the afternoons.

the dark fellow who was ill. She used to go and read to
him.

“Interesting man, really”, he said. “Proper lad,” he smiled up

“Both of us used to go. “I used to turn in in the
evenings when we’d closed”.

He came round to the front and took the brushes lazily.
He glanced sardonically at the door as if the man were
standing there. There was something stubborn,

incredulous,

that quiet amusement seemed to warm up
ironical in the barber, but there was no indignation.
as he did.

he said sharply & suddenly and smiled
“Know what he used to say to her?” — ‘Here Jenny’, when I was startled.

he used to say, ‘Tell Fred to go home and you pop into bed with me. I’m lonely’”. He gave a short laugh.

The young barber stared me hard in the face. Of course Of course I’ve known him for years.”.

“In front of me”, he said. He grinned with quiet assurance. “What did you say?”

“I told him to keep quiet or he’d

“Keep quiet”, I said. “Or you’ll be a corpse”

“And so he would if he didn’t keep quiet”, he said, relaxing his stare.

Consumptives want it, they want it worse than others, but it kills them”, he said.

“I thought you meant you’d kill him”, I said.

The young barber gave a short, dry laugh. He chuckled looked at me scornfully.

“Kill him?” he said. “Me kill him?” He smiled. scornfully I was an outsider in this.

“He tried to kill me”, he said with a chuckle.

He seemed to look/ back on that episode with artistic a lazy affection. “He wanted her. It takes them that way.

She wasn’t his. Someone else had got her. See? He

He wanted everything”.

He went to the shelf and brought a long mirror.

“Back O.K.? he said. holding up a mirror

“Yeah”, he said, putting back the mirror and wiping his hands on a towel. “Tried to poison me. Whisky.

It didn’t work. I dont drink”.

“I was his best friend

“I went to his room”, he said. There he was
lying on the bed. Thin! All bones and blue veins and red patches as if he’d been scalded and eyes as bright as that bottle of those bath salts. Not like he is now. There was a bottle of whisky and a glass by the side of the bed. He wanted me to have a drop. He knew I didn’t drink.

“No thanks”, I said.

“Go on, have one”, he said. “Do you good”.

“I don’t want one”, I said. “Yes, you do”, he said.

“You know I never touch it’, I said. ‘Well, touch it now’, he said. ‘I tell you what’, he said. ‘You’re afraid’.

‘Afraid of what’ I said. ‘Afraid of catching what I’ve got. Touch your lips to it if you’re not afraid. You needn’t drink it, just touch your lips to the glass’. You’re afraid, he said.

“I told him not to be a fool. I took the bottle from him. He had no right to have whisky in his state.

God, he was wild when I took it. ‘It’ll do some people a bit of good’, I said. ‘but it’s poison to you’’.

‘”It is poison”, he said.’

“Of course I didn’t take any notice. I took the bottle away. I gave it to a chap in the town. It nearly finished him. We found out it was poison. He’d put something in it”.

“Singe?” said the barber. “Seal up the ends?”

The barber I said I’d have a singe. He lit the taper. I
“Seals up the ends” the barber said.

felt the flame warm against my head. ▲ He lifted up the

hair with the comb and ran the flame along the ends. His

lips were pursed in an interested way.

“What did you do?”

“Nothing”, he said.

“I rumbled him”, he said. “See his idea. “I didn’t
say anything. ▲ I just married my girl that week”, he

said.

“When we told him we were going to get married he said,

‘I’ll give you something Fred can’t give you’. We

wondered what it would be. ‘Something big’, he said.

‘Best man’s present’ he said. He winked at her. He was a lad.” All I’ve got. I’m the best man.”

‘Dont spend too much’, I said. ‘You want all you’ve got’.

He laughed. ‘You wont get anything as big’, he said.

‘I’ll spend everything’. That night he cut his throat”.

“How did they find him?” in time” The barber made a grimace

in the mirror, passed the scissors over his throat & gave a grin.

“They didn’t” said the barber. Then “He opened the

window and called out to a kid in the street to fetch me.

I found him”. “He was a lad”. The barber said

That was his present

The barber smiled. tolerantly. “Just as well”, he said

“Funny present”.^ bloody/

“Got the wind up”, he said. “Couldn’t pull it off.”

“He loved her then”, I said. “Oh, he loved her all right”, he said.

“What’ll you have on?” he asked. He combed, he patted, he brushed. He pulled the wool out of the

back of my neck. He went round it with the soft brush.

Coming round to the front he adroitly drew off the sheet.

I stood up.

“He got over it”, he said. “They do, you know.

He’s settled down.

Comes in every Friday, gets himself up. ▲ See him with a
Comes round and different one every week at the Pictures. Plays with my now kids on Sundays”. The only thing is he don’t like shaving himself. I have to go over every morning and do it for him.

“I never charge him”, he said.

He brushed my coat, he brought my hat. Business.

He stood with his small grin, his steady eyes, resolute amused and resolute.

“Never has been much in this place”, he said. “No industry. Just the town. A quiet place”, he said.

“You make your own life”, he said.

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It’s a quiet dead place, this, all right in the summer on the river. You just have to make your own life.”

He stood with his small grin, his steady eyes amused & resolute.

“He’ll never settle down”, he said. “They don’t. They want everything”.

He brushed my coat, he brought my hat.

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