



The Infinite Haircut

It all began at Joe Fort's barber shop,
Main Street, Ronan, Montana.
Infinity, that is, and all immensity else
before and beyond the Big Bang,
on a summer day when I was seven
and Joe's blue-eyed blue lab Blue
slept in the sun, on display
on the bench of the Main Street window,

and that sun lighting radiant bottles
—emerald, sapphire, ruby, deep amber—
of Bay Rum, Wildroot, Osage Rub and Vitalis.
Tonics for grown-ups,
bright like the many-colored bottles
on the shelves along the mirror of Peschel's Bar.

Joe's wife Margaret kept a beauty shop in the back
and for lack of a client that morning,
her own wet hair pinned tight,
sat under the polished tin hair dryer,
the comical conical headdress
of a Martian or a time traveler,
reading a copy of Joe's Field and Stream.
Time Traveling Margaret,
an easy cosmic wind warming her head.
Helmeted like an alien
Or the aging Dale Arden
who flew with Flash Gordon.

It began when slim Joe with scissors and comb
snipping his way around the mighty chair
all leather, ornate cast iron and nickel trim.
Joe with his trim nickel hair
wavy as the swells and stacks
of deep river rapids rising and diving.
Joe with a Lucky bobbing like a douser's stick
even as he talked of shooting geese,
and fishing for lake salmon,
and was I catching rainbows in Spring Creek?
Smoke curling up
weaving into his gray locks.

It really began from my barber-chair perch,
quite idly and absently musing on nothing,
studying the mirror on the west wall,
watching an old barber and a blond boy
and seeing, then, the reflection there
of the east wall mirror
reflecting our backs as Joe snipped and smoked,
and that mirror carrying the smaller reflection
of the west wall mirror
then peering down a tunnel of mirrors—
mirrors within mirrors within mirrors,
forever shrinking, forever retreating.
And where do we end? I ask myself (I reflected),
all of those Joe's with all of the Luckys and clippers
and all of the mes sitting high on the chair,
the hair and smoke flying north and south?

Does it end in the final blink of the final atom
of silver in one of those mirrors?
And what is to become of the blink
so bombarded with infinite haircuts?
I remember summer nights we'd sleep outside,
like cowboys, my brother and me.
Wrapped in quilts on the lawn,
counting shooting stars
under a sparkling black sky.
And what, I asked, is beyond those stars?
Where does the sky end?
And if you know where it ends,
then what is beyond the edge?
And, I asked of time, when did it all begin?
And if you knew when it began
then what came before that,
And does time have an end?
How did we ever sleep!
And what of Joe Fort and me,
reflected so many billions of times,
forever growing smaller?
Will it end where it all began
with the Big Bang itself,
come to shatter the mirrors to billions of stars
all aglow with this twinkling of Joe, his Margaret,
Blue the dog
and little me
in a barber shop
in Ronan, Montana?

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