

Yarn

While reading the Business section of the Monday paper and letting his tea cool to drinking temperature, his palm began to tingle. It was negligible at first, a pore preparing to sweat, but soon became difficult to ignore. Folding the broadsheet across his lap, he scratched at his palm and stared off into the middle distance. Broadsheets annoyed him greatly, but he could not live without them. His shoulders ached from holding the paper above his head and no matter how he contorted himself, the paper refused to cooperate. Yet his mornings were not complete unless he had read it from front to back, these the little victories by which he measured retired life. It was unreasonable to expect a man to eat toast, drink tea and read the monstrous document all at the same table. Though he had no solution to this problem, he was certain that the paper was too big and that something should be done about it.

The tingle in his palm was a pulse now, leaving him no choice but to inspect it more closely. Raising his hand to catch the morning light that fell through the open window behind him, he saw the hair. A single hair, no more than a few of millimetres long, sprouting from the middle of his palm. It reminded him of jokes he had overheard as a boy. Crude jokes whispered at his expense that he would not understand until much later in his life. He had not found them funny then and did not find them funny now.

He returned his attention to the downy splinter, tilting his hand at the wrist for more light. There was that age all men reached when hairs began to sprout where they should not. He had long since surrendered his ears to this truth, but now palms? Was his

morning routine now to consist of palm trimming too? The hair stared back at him, a silent ant before God.

He knew about ants. Where there was one, there were a thousand. The armies would send scouts to leave trails for others to follow. If you wanted to stop the army, you needed to stop the scout. He looked down at the black bud and delivered his judgement. Death. Pinching the hair between his forefinger and thumb, he pulled upwards. To his surprise, this outward thrust did not successfully remove the hair. On the contrary, the once short follicle now protruded three centimetres from his palm. By pulling on it he had only increased its length. In anger and alarm he tore again and again at the hair, but each time he did, it grew in length, never breaking from his skin. Ten centimetres. Thirty. Fifty. He wound the hair around his free hand and yanked again. A metre. Two metres. Three. He stopped himself and stared at the thin black tendril coiling at his feet on the floor. He felt dizzy, the panicked burst of energy having suddenly exhausted him. He slumped back in his chair and drew a deep breath. Surely the hair could not go on forever. All things have an end. Impossibility pressed hard against him, yet he could not find the strength to press back.

He was thirsty but he was too tired to reach out across the table for his tea. It would probably be the perfect temperature now. The hair rested lightly in his hand. Smooth and thin, it felt good to hold. Very gently and almost without thought, as though he were letting out a line behind a boat at sea, he drew the hair from his palm once more. Five metres. Ten metres. Fifty metres. The hair piled around his feet, his knees and then his shoulders, until thin black lines were all he could see.

In the semi-dark he no longer knew if he was pulling the hair from himself or if he was being pulled from the hair. Somewhere above him the wind blew gently through the open window, catching him in its breath and pushing him further from the hair. On and on he unravelled, all the while drifting towards that vanishing point – that place where all things end.