

Lone Star Stories

Speculative Fiction and Poetry

A Good Hair Day in Anarchy

by Ken Scholes

Ed the Barber looked up from his newspaper when the kid walked in, and as usual, he noticed the hair first. It was long, blond and tied back with a leather thong, underneath a white stetson. Good hair -- the best he'd seen since the last transport from Houston Prime three months ago.

The second thing he noticed was the gun-belt and the fifteen notches burned into the leather.

"Heya, Pops. What about a haircut?"

Ed stood, still eyeing the belt. Pearl handles jutted out of holsters on each hip. He waved to the single chair.

"Hop in." The kid tossed his hat onto the low, magazine-strewn table, and climbed into the seat. "Sure those won't get tangled up?" Ed nodded to the pistols.

The kid patted a handle, grinning. "They're fine. I always keep 'em close." Winking: "You can't be too careful in these parts."

Ed nodded, draping the sheet around his first customer of the day. Anarchy was a small mining town, an island of life in an otherwise desolate waste, home to both bandit and beast. "What'll it be, fella?" He spun the chair so the kid could see himself in the mirror.

"Take it down real short," he said.

"You sure?" It took a good two years to get hair like this; best to be safe now rather than sorry later. Still, his fingers itched for the scissors, hoping he'd heard right.

"Yep. Real short."

Ed shrugged and untied the thong, letting the hair cascade down over the white-sheeted shoulders. Then, he took up the shears and set them to snickering over the thick golden strands. Now it was time for the other part of his job -- the small talk. "So, you new in town?" Of course he was, but Ed asked anyway.

"Passing through, tending to business."

"Oh? What do you do?"

The kid stared blankly into the mirror, locking eyes with the barber's reflection. "You don't know?"

Ed shook his head. "Nope. Sorry."

"I'm a hunter." Ed dropped the scissors, then stooped to recover them with shaking hands while he mumbled an apology. The kid grinned, then chuckled. "Don't be scared, old man. Just do a good job on my head, see?" Again, he winked.

Hunters were the last line of justice in the Frontier System -- an easy job to get but a hard one to lose. New Texas, just as it was

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