

Cutting away

by [Patrick Cabello Hansel](#) in the [October 25, 2017](#) issue

It was a small shop: one barber chair,
one barber, three magazines in front
of the plate glass windows—True,
Field & Stream, America. The middle
son washed the windows every week.
The men who sat worked at the plant,
drove truck, drilled a few teeth,
sold quality suits, used cars and cuts
of meat, painted houses, stole.
You can learn a lot by holding
a man's head in one hand
and a razor in another. The sins
dripped out of the stories they told
like honey. Most were used to a kind
of confession in darkness—a voice
a foot away, words of repentance
as far away as the setting sun is
from its rising. Transgressions
were not erased as much as shaved
down by prayers mumbled in the back
pew. But here, at Walt's Barber Shop,
each hair and the trespasses it pulled at
fell like pigeon feathers to the floor,
like rain, like wafers sprinkled in
coriander. No bloodletting in this
20th of centuries, no guarding of anger
forever. The hairs—like our sins—
were not held against us but swept
away at the end of the day, the brown
and red and gold alike. We were not
saved by the pain of our cutting, but

by its graceful release. All that was needed was faith—simple, humble, kind—like the seed of the mustard, or the gel that made the front of a crew cut stand up straight: a blessing that drew the eye only towards the newly made face.