

## The Sculpture

He'd hustled me in but then vanished into bashment, tidying and sorting: conditioner, handwash, oils for the shears.

Another chap was getting his done – very sheer. The guy laboured tenderly with the clippers – just so. How they could hear each other over the din, I couldn't think. Into a pool of clickbait, I disappeared for a bit.

Five articles in I checked up. My guy was Hoovering. The other was working away – flitting and gliding, barely touching. They were agreeing with their faces.

A chalk white head appeared in the doorway, straddled by black locks of matted rope. Vivid eyes squinted, investigating. The artist worked on, oblivious. This phantom clawed in, black overcoat billowing like a cape, head peering, beady. He held the shears up and inspected the teeth. Clamping it into a fist, he raked a juddering swathe from his forehead backwards; tangle of cable lay sooty on the floor. Still, the sculptor beside him worked.

Hither and yon the phantom yanked - guttering and growling, shredding, crunching - until at last he was done. He lowered across the vacant chair at his raw, stalky ball. He'd done a good job. To his left, disposable blade was being fixed to modern cutthroat. Neither Artist nor sitter noticed the phantom prowls out.

Suddenly my guy was beaming invitation, portly and cheerful, ushering me sit. Fitting me with paper collar like a lady's choker, black cape and white towel, he inspected his tools and frowned. Next to me, pink tissue was being fixed in the statue's ears. My guy asked what I wanted.

Diagonally, in the reflection of my neighbour's mirror, I could see the street. Feral pigeons fluttered and perched. A mobility ambulance's back doors opened. A woman looked out into traffic. Across the road was a DIY shop, and behind it, six storey car park. On to the top level the phantom suddenly arrived, nimbly checking himself a pace before the edge. Looking left and right like the lady had – as if to check nothing was coming - the phantom slung his cape out of sight, stooped slightly, and leapt.

A car stopped and another beeped. There were no gasps or cries. The artist beside me was holding a mirror behind his entirely bald creation, whose head bobbed, bowing profound approval.

"What are we doing today, then, my friend?" beamed my guy.

"Just a nought all over, please".