

Dillon Hamilton



TRIM

## Trim

by Dillon Hamilton

Orthopedics filled the footrests. There was more salt than pepper on the floor. Glen went about his work tirelessly and was tickled by the conversation that came between puffs of Cuban and Presbyterian smoke. Sunlight bore through the evergreen window paint that spelled out *Glen's*. Their world on most mornings was this playful, pale gold and green and always old and mean.

A pony-tailed journalist, who all the barbershop regulars knew but pretended not to remember his name, walked by the pristine shop windows. His rolled jeans swayed around his scrawny calves. Wilfried Stintz recoiled each time the man's sandals clapped against his heels.

"Let's talk about common decency and where it ran off to," Wilfried said.

Glen looked up and down the row of seats. "I'd say it's alive and well, here," he said.

"But it ain't out there. That's somebody's grandson!"

All silver, gray, and bare heads nodded, throwing flashes of light on the copper tile ceiling like spinner baits.

Saint, whose birthname was Pete, caught a glimpse of twined material wrapped around the journalist's exposed ankle, before he twinkled across the street. "I'll be damned!"

"We were just talking about decency, Saint," Glen warned. He wasn't afraid to chuck a friend for cursing.

Saint pointed a knobbed finger at the journalist. "He's got an ankle bracelet. Even my granddaughters squirm at the mention of them."

Glen's eyes bulged. He leaned over Garry's half-shaved face with the straight razor edging toward the wrinkled throat. "Son of a..."

“Do you know how to dress a slit throat?” Garry mumbled through the shaving cream that dangled over his lips.

“Sorry, Garry,” Glen wiped the cream back with short strokes of the razor, “Somebody’s grandson.”

“If he ever comes in here—” Saint started.

“He’ll never come in here. He’ll avoid places like this until he realizes he needs one. But by that time, they’ll all be gone,” Wilfried said.

Glen chuckled. “Don’t say that. *Glen’s* is going to last tens and hundreds of generations.”

“Where are your grandkids?” Saint asked. His right eye twitched, as it always did when he felt a fight coming or was trying to start one.

Garry answered for Glen, “They’re up at the trade school. Tom the Tinker and Stevie the...what is Stevie going for, again?”

“Horticulture,” Glen smiled and stopped shaving Garry, “She’s gonna be making all your wives fill your homes with all sorts of growing things.”

“I’ll be da—”

Glen pointed the end of his straight razor at Saint. “What did we just talk about?”

Saint huffed, crossed his arms, and shoved the bit of his Dublin pipe between his teeth. Glen finished the last strokes of Garry’s shave and wiped away left over paste. “Give me the towel, Glen. I’m beginning to forget what this brandy tastes like.”

“Can’t believe you know what it tastes like at all,” Wilfried said.

Glen wrapped Garry’s face with a warm towel. A muffled, “And what makes you say that, Wil?” came from towel-covered cave.

“You’re Baptist,” Wilfried huffed and opened a magazine that catered to hikers who enjoyed their cannabis. He pretended to read.

Garry retorted from what sounded like afar. “I’m a Congregationalist who just so happens to be married to a fun-sucking Baptist.”

Wilfried raised an eyebrow, still pretending to read. “And in this home of yours, is brandy allowed?”

Other conversation in the shop stopped. The creaking of plastic-covered chair arms bearing weight could be heard over the sport’s talk radio coming from the office. Dull muttering came from beneath the towel.

Wilfried turned a page. “What was that, Garry?”

Garry pulled the towel from his face and dropped it in a pile of his own hair. “No,” he said.

Wilfried smiled a wry smile. “Your household is a fun-sucking Baptist.”

A chorus of aged cackling rose and died. Garry sat up. His snarled face was colored pale gold and green. He gulped half a mouthful of brandy down and winced.

Wilfried laughed. “You guzzle like a Lutheran.”

“Speaking of Lutherans, whatever happened to the Trinity Lutheran over on Briar? I heard they’ve flipped it for studio apartments. Is that true?” Glen asked.

“Don’t even get me started,” Saint said.

“Okay. We won’t,” Joe Carterby said, who had been quietly listening up to this point.

Saint rolled eyes that were the color of a muddy river. “Nice of you to join us, Joe.”

Joe puffed and chewed his Robusto cigar. “I appreciate your welcome.” His voice was cavernous, slow, and playfully stereotypical. “I appreciate all your welcomes in this land that was ‘gifted’ to my people.”

“Here we go, again,” Garry groaned.

“How ‘bout you smokers keep your arguments on that side of the shop today?” Glen begged.

“Oh, I see now. Let the Choctaw arguments be heard in only one third of the shop. Very generous of you, Glen.” Joe gave his rhetorical cake a double lathering of historical injustices.

“Pipe it down, Joe. I’m more Chickasaw than you are Choctaw,” Garry said.

“Garry don’t—” Glen started but was distracted by a new head of wispy long locks, unaccompanied by a womanly figure. The man’s step was almost as slovenly as his stare and hard as steel-toed boots. He wore a tucked gray shirt that said McKinney Tires on the front. On the back was a logo of a leprechaun inside of a rolling tractor tire. A matted and mangled beard hung to his mid-chest.

Wilfried dropped the hiking magazine in his lap and folded his hands. Garry swirled his brandy and snarled, again. Joe and Saint took quick puffs of their respective tobaccos. “Still don’t believe in Bigfoot?” Joe asked the shop.

The man walked down the sidewalk in front of the shop, casting a burly shadow upon them all. He reached for the shop door, pulled, and jingled the bells at the top of the frame.

Saint started to say, “I’ll be da—”

Glen interrupted him. “What’s your name and what can we do for you?”

“Trim,” the man said.

“Is that your name? Or is that what you want?”

The man smiled, or at least they thought he smiled. They couldn't see his lips past his mustache.

"Both," Trim said.

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The brandy was finished, pipe bowl emptied, and cigar forgotten before anyone but Trim spoke. He walked past them toward a bare seat as an equal, peer—no, somehow, he felt older than all present. He plopped his burly frame in the seat, splitting the duct tape fix Glen had done a few months before on the seat cover. Seeing his mistake, he looked to Glen apologetically.

"Sorry, Mr...?"

Glen flashed a pair of scissors at the green window paint.

"Sorry, Glen. They just don't make duct tape like they used to," Trim said. He pressed his boots into the footrest and settled himself into the seat.

Saint bit first. "'Like they used to?' What do you know about the era of Used To? You can't be much older than thirty."

Trim pulled his untamed mane back and snorted. "You're right. Twenty-five, actually. My family had a stockpile of older products. We always thought Grandpa was crazy for keeping a shed full of ancient things, but he was right. He called it 'American Made.'"

"Most geniuses are thought to be nutcases until time proves otherwise," Garry said. His tongue and face had been smoothed by the brandy, a velvet word and fleece expression. It was his time of the morning when he argued himself into agreement with almost anyone or anything.

Wilfried sneered at Garry. "What do you know about geniuses? Have you ever met one?"

"I'd like to think so. You all remember that carpenter who would sit on the stump on the sidewalk in front of his shop and carve stumps when he was frustrated?" Garry asked.

“Xander Tibbs!” Saint almost shouted.

“That’s the one! Did you ever see what he made out of those stumps?” Garry asked.

Wilfried picked up the hiking magazine, again. “Xander couldn’t spell his name.”

“And you can’t carve or whittle,” Garry retorted, “He was a genius, all right. He should have been carving things for kings and queens, if you ask me.”

“He carved a lot like the Choctaws used to,” Joe said and paused, “I bet he stole it from us.”

“Give it a rest, Joe,” Saint said as he repacked his bowl with sweet smelling tobacco.

Glen enjoyed the exchange behind the talking heads. He smiled and turned his attention toward Trim. “Just a trim, you say?”

“Yessir. And would you mind shaping up my beard? I have a date with the wife, tonight,” Trim said in a boyish tone.

The talk of the shop hushed. They all turned to face Trim. Saint was speechless this time so Glen bit for him. “You mean to tell us that some poor girl went off and married you looking like that?”

Trim chuckled. “She’s the reason it ain’t all gone.”

“No wonder all these ‘young men’ are growing their hair out,” Saint said, as if he had come to the conclusion all alone.

“What line of work allows that amount of nonsense?” Garry asked.

Joe huffed. “I have a nephew with braided hair twice as long as that. He’s not married though.”

“Probably why he’s not married,” Garry mumbled.

“Forestry laborer,” Trim said flatly. He leaned back in the barber chair, closed his eyes, and tilted his head. He breathed in deeply, and again, before exhaling. “Smells like a fresh cut high-yield in here.”

“It’s a diffuser. The wife has booby trapped the place with them,” Glen complained.

“What’s a forestry laborer?” Saint asked and sucked bits of leftover breakfast through his stained teeth.

“Lumberjack,” The Glen’s Faithful said in unison.

It was the time of day when the coffee cooled and the crystalline in the concrete threw tiny kaleidoscopic reflections into the shop. Glen had moved from Garry to Joe and now to Wilfried. Trim waited, eyes closed and head back. Glen’s normal practice would have been to skip his vagabond friends and tend to the walk-in, but he decided to clip his friends before trimming this stranger. He secretly hoped Trim would grow impatient or need to leave before he had to toy with the overgrowth. He forgot. Saint noticed and pointed out the smallest inconsistencies at the loudest volumes he could muster.

“Don’t you usually help the walk-ins before us, and he only wants a trim!” Saint blasted.

“I’ve already started on Wilfried. I’ll get to him in a second,” Glen protested.

Trim finally spoke, low and slow like a distant horn. “I’ve got all day. Pretend I’m not even here.” He folded his hands behind his head and pushed his hair into a bulge over his forehead.

Saint pulled the left corner of his mouth back toward his ear and shook his head. “He’s more patient than me. I’d have left your lazy a—”

“Saint!”

“Sorry, Glen.”



Wilfried dropped his magazine in his lap. “What’s a lumberjack doing in this country?”

“Or better yet, what’s his wife doing here when he is playing Paul Bunyan elsewhere?”

Joe said.

“It’s too expensive to live in logging country and too expensive to work here,” Trim admitted.

“Don’t you miss each other?” Saint asked.

Trim sat forward and brushed long locks aside. “Of course, we miss each other. I’ve searched for work here, or at least closer to home than I am now, but it’s no use if you don’t have a skill beyond chainsaw maintenance.”

Wilfried hacked up derision. “Should have went to college.”

“I did. Double majored in Spanish and journalism.”

The shop looked at Trim sideways in curiosity rather than malice. He knew he must answer the unspoken questions. “There’s not much space in that world for a bumpkin without experience.”

“Were you any good at it?” Joe asked.

“Which one?”

“The reporting.”

Trim settled deeper in the chair than before. “I was okay. I wrote better than I asked questions.”

“Why don’t you have experience?” Garry asked.

“I was too busy working on labor jobs to pay off school. There weren’t many paid internships. And if there were, rest assured I was not going to be picked for one.”

Saint squirmed in his seat. “Now doesn’t that just chap your—”

“Not really,” Trim interjected, catching on to the trend of saving Saint from himself, “I don’t belong in that world. I’m slower and unimpulsive.”

“What world do you belong in?” Glen asked.

Trim chuckled. “Helluva question. Where I’m at now, I suppose. Who am I to shake a fist at what I’ve been given? Although, I’d like to build a skill much like your own, Glen. Though I’m sure you wouldn’t want to, you could take this charming operation to a Caribbean beach, the cold North, or any place with hair. You’ve got a real movable trade. I envy you.”

Glen knew Trim didn’t mean to flatter, but he did feel a significant boost in his pride. “You’re too kind,” Glen said softly.

“You don’t consider lumberjacking a skill that can move wherever there are trees?” Wilfried asked.

Trim frowned thoughtfully. “I suppose so. Trees are restrictive. Glen can lower ears here, in the Pacific, or even in space, so I’ve heard, and I’ll have found no trees in those places. Glen can carry gear, knowledge, and skill with him wherever he wishes to roam.”

Glen stopped trimming Wilfried’s hair and asked, “Do you believe your schooling to be a waste?”

“Not in the least. I carry it with me as you do your clippers. Most of my fellow lumberjacks are Mexican or Central American. I use Spanish on the job far more than English.”

“What about the journalism?” Saint asked.

Joe snickered to himself before joking, “He’s got a journal full of...timber!”

Eyes rolled around the shop.

“Like I said, I’m slow. Mountainsides, valleys, and clear-cuts drag along like a heatwave or blizzard and I enjoy them that way. It may be the reason I could never be a barber or

journalist. I like to watch every tree in the valley fall before I form what I think of that valley. Individual hairs are of consequence to me, but I love to see them all together.”

The old men exchanged knowing looks. They had a kindred philosopher in their midst. Garry poured more brandy to prepare. Saint filled and packed his pipe. Joe pulled a fresh cigar from his pocket. Wilfried lifted his weed magazine. Glen strutted over behind Trim, frowning at his long hair at every angle.

“Have you seen enough trees fall in our time to form how you think of our country’s present moment?” Saint asked Trim.

Trim peaked at the barbershop faithful out of his left eye. They all stared down the row attentively. Trim shut his eye and shifted his hips into a more comfortable position. “No, but I know which direction most of the trunks are falling.”

“And which way is that?” Garry asked.

“To Hell in a handbasket,” Saint blurted.

“All right. Put a quarter in the swear jar,” Glen said hoarsely. “If you can’t behave, you’ll pay for it.”

“Hell’s a real place!” Saint retorted.

Glen laughed off Saint’s defense and shook his head.

Garry coughed through a stinging swig of brandy. “I’d say we’re in prime position to move forward, advance. Common folk feel backed into a corner and outnumbered, but we can use new technology as the shield in our phalanx.”

“Garry considers himself a student of war,” Glen muttered.

Garry set his brandy glass down on a small table to his right. He leaned over the chair arm. A stiff shoot of hair dangled in the middle of his forehead—a clear sign the pomade had not

had enough time to set. He pushed back the hair, but it sprung back and dangled, again. “What Glen meant to say is that I *am* a student of the Greco-Persian Wars. It was fifty years of fun.”

“Garry fancies himself as reincarnate member of the Peloponnesian league!” Saint piped.

Garry rolled his eyes. “Ill-informed on many accounts—no, every account. The Greco-Persian Wars occurred two decades beforehand.”

“Score,” Joe said.

Saint blew off his error. “They’re all the same.”

“What, Joe?” Garry asked.

“You English have a word for ‘two decades.’ It’s *score*,” Joe said.

Glen began clipping dead ends from Trim’s hair. “I’m less English than you, Joe.”

Wilfried hushed the wily lot. “Where do you see this experiment going? What will happen to our grandkids’ generation?” Wilfried asked Trim.

His question was answered by a young snore and Conway Twitty’s *I May Never Get to Heaven* playing at the top of the hour.

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“South America!”

Trim’s outburst woke and rustled the afternoon crowd at the barbershop, which was the same as the morning crowd with an added grogginess to it.

“What?” Wilfried asked.

Garry blinked away his brandy nap and gripped the chair arms like they were the forward pulpit on a ship before a giant wave. Joe didn’t jump, jolt, or acknowledge the outburst, but the chewing of his cigar increased to a rapid pace. Saint stared down the bench as he had the entire

nap time and picked up where Trim had left off. “Why would our grandkids want to go to South America?” Saint asked.

Trim felt at his beard and long hair. The beard was well-shaped, and the hair trimmed a tad shorter than he had wanted it, but it all pleased him. He sat thoughtfully for a few moments and answered. “I honestly don’t know. Something tells me the next generation will need to go to South America or want to or both.”

“The world won’t last that long,” Wilfried muttered from the side of his mouth. “Have you seen the news?”

Joe plucked his cigar from his mouth and spoke loudly. “There’s no way we know how long we’ve all got based on the news. The only thing we do know is that it won’t be any better for the next generation wherever they go.”

Garry rubbed his face with a dry palm. “Oh, it’ll get better all right. History is cyclical, but we’ve seen an uptrend since the days of Christ.”

“I would have much preferred those times to now,” Saint said.

Wilfried laughed. “Nero would have had some fun with you, Saint.”

“Garry is our resident bar-brawling optimist,” Glen said.

“With the exception of his home. He won’t fight for brandy. I’d come over more often, if I could have a nip every now and then,” Wilfried jabbed at Garry.

Garry picked up his glass and cuddled it. “You wouldn’t get any, even if it were allowed.”

Wilfried grunted and snapped open his worked-over magazine. Garry smirked his triumph, Joe bit at his cigar calmly, and Saint stared at the dusty, hair-covered tile floor in despair.

“Who do you agree with more?” Glen asked Trim. “Are you with the Optimist Garry, the Conscientious Abstaining Joe, Apocalyptic Saint, or...what would you call your position, Wil?”

Wilfried dropped the magazine and rubbed the scruff on his pointed chin. “I’m a Pan-prophet,” he said.

“What in the h—” Saint started.

“Explain yourself,” Glen interrupted.

“I prophesy that it’s all gonna pan out,” Wilfried said bluntly

The collective eyeroll drew the first visible amusement from Wilfried on the day.

“There they are. Which will you be?” Glen asked.

The Glen’s Faithful pretended not to pay mind or ear to the young lumberjack’s answer, but not a movement was made, nor word uttered until Trim answered. They dare not look in his direction or else admit the joy of their day hinged upon a youthful and unexperienced man’s opinion.

Trim snorted and chewed on one end of his long mustache. At that very moment the reporter from the morning walked by the shop windows. No doubt returning from an interview over a tin table with two or three chai lattes to stimulate conversation over proto-feminist literature. All this for the sake of a line or two in his opinion column that in the Glen’s Faithful’s opinion met its prime use as a puppy pad or kindling. The faithful looked down the shop at Trim to see his reaction.

Trim shook his head and frowned a pitiful frown. “Can you believe that guy used to like playing baseball?” He sighed out the solemn rhetorical question.

Saint answered anyway. “Nope. There’s no way those forearms could support a swing with a regulation bat.”

The faithful prepared to let Trim lament for a while over a friend lost to this present world, but he lifted himself from the barber chair with a good number of grunts and joints popping. “When you conscientiously abstain, you’re making a move less physical, but just as moral as the rest of us. Saint, start reading the actual apocalypse instead of watching Hal Lindsey.” He tied his hair behind his head into a tight bun, cinched with a wool cloth. His boots thudded through a thin mattress of trimmed gray. “Wilfried, quit fence-sitting,” he said as he strolled past Saint. He reached the door, dropped a few bills next to the battered register, turned, and said, “There’s a popular optimism that views this current place and time as something to be saved by argument, law, reason, or the proper use of a well-practiced phalanx. Then, there’s another optimism that learns Spanish, and I already know Spanish.”

He left to the jingle of Glen’s bell, hot prairie wind on a scorching street, and a normal Saint salutation. “I’ll be damned.”

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