Just Lather, That’s All - Hernando Tellez

He said nothing when he entered. I was passing the best of my razors back and forth on a strop. When I recognized him I started to tremble. But he didn't notice. Hoping to conceal my emotion, I continued sharpening the razor. I tested it on the meat of my thumb, and then held it up to the light. At that moment he took off the bullet-studded belt that his gun holster dangled from. He hung it up on a wall hook and placed his military cap over it. Then he turned to me, loosening the knot of his tie, and said, "It's hot as hell. Give me a shave." He sat in the chair.

I estimated he had a four-day beard. The four days taken up by the latest expedition in search of our troops. His face seemed reddened, burned by the sun. Carefully, I began to prepare the soap. I cut off a few slices, dropped them into the cup, mixed in a bit of warm water, and began to stir with the brush. Immediately the foam began to rise. "The other boys in the group should have this much beard, too." I continued stirring the lather.

"But we did all right, you know. We got the main ones. We brought back some dead, and we've got some others still alive. But pretty soon they'll all be dead."

"How many did you catch?" I asked.

"Fourteen. We had to go pretty deep into the woods to find them. But we'll get even. Not one of them comes out of this alive, not one."

Setting

Physical - barber shop, small town.

http://backalleybarbershop.ca/

Emotional - tense, suspenseful,

Exposition: Through the military imagery, it is suggested that there is some sort of violence occurring, and as such, this introduces the setting of the short story.

Foreshadowing Signs:

- The title “Just Lather, That’s All” can be depicted as foreshadowing as it implies a choice was given in the story.
He leaned back on the chair when he saw me with the lather-covered brush in my hand. I still had to put the sheet on him. No doubt about it, I was upset. I took a sheet out of a drawer and knotted it around my customer's neck. He wouldn't stop talking. He probably thought I was in sympathy with his party.

"The town must have learned a lesson from what we did the other day," he said.

"Yes," I replied, securing the knot at the base of his dark, sweaty neck.

"That was a fine show, eh?"

"Very good," I answered, turning back for the brush. The man closed his eyes with a gesture of fatigue and sat waiting for the cool caress of the soap. I had never had him so close to me. The day he ordered the whole town to file into the patio of the school to see the four rebels hanging there, I came face to face with him for an instant. But the sight of the mutilated bodies kept me from noticing the face of the man who had directed it all, the face I was now about to take into my hands. It was not an unpleasant face, certainly. And the beard, which made him seem a bit older than he was, didn't suit him badly at all. His name was Torres. Captain Torres. A man of imagination, because who else would have thought of hanging the naked rebels and then holding target practice on certain parts of their bodies? I began to apply the first layer of soap. With his eyes closed, he continued. "Without any effort I could go straight to sleep," he said, "but there's plenty to do this afternoon." I stopped the lathering and asked with a feigned lack of interest: "A firing squad?" "Something like that, but a little slower." I got on with the job of lathering his beard. My hands started trembling again. The man could not possibly realize it, and this was in my favor. But I would have preferred that he hadn't come. It was likely that many of our faction had seen him enter. And an enemy under one's roof imposes certain conditions. I would be obliged to shave that beard like any other one, carefully, gently, like that of any customer, taking pains to see that no single pore emitted a drop of blood. Being careful to

Foreshadowing
- Knowing that Captain Torres enters the shop, and the barber being a rebel, the future situation would not be pleasant.
see that the little tufts of hair did not lead the blade astray. Seeing that his skin ended up clean, soft, and healthy, so that passing the back of my hand over it I couldn't feel a hair. Yes, I was secretly a rebel, but I was also a conscientious barber, and proud of the preciseness of my profession. And this four-days' growth of beard was a fitting challenge.

I took the razor, opened up the two protective arms, exposed the blade and began the job, from one of the sideburns downward. The razor responded beautifully. His beard was inflexible and hard, not too long, but thick. Bit by bit the skin emerged. The razor rasped along, making its customary sound as fluffs of lather mixed with bits of hair gathered along the blade. I paused a moment to clean it, then took up the strop again to sharpen the razor, because I'm a barber who does things properly. The man, who had kept his eyes closed, opened them now, removed one of his hands from under the sheet, felt the spot on his face where the soap had been cleared off, and said, "Come to the school today at six o'clock." "The same thing as the other day?" I asked horrified. "It could be better," he replied. "What do you plan to do?" "I don't know yet. But we'll amuse ourselves." Once more he leaned back and closed his eyes. I approached him with the razor poised. "Do you plan to punish them all?" I ventured timidly. "All." The soap was drying on his face. I had to hurry. In the mirror I looked toward the street. It was the same as ever: the grocery store with two or three customers in it. Then I glanced at the clock: two-twenty in the afternoon. The razor continued on its downward stroke. Now from the other sideburn down. A thick, blue beard. He should have let it grow like some poets or priests do. It would suit him well. A lot of people wouldn't recognize him. Much to his benefit, I thought, as I attempted to cover the neck area smoothly. There, for sure, the razor had to be handled masterfully, since the hair, although softer, grew into little swirls. A curly beard.

One of the tiny pores could be opened up and issue forth its pearl of blood. A good barber such as I prides himself on never allowing this to happen to a client.

Conflict Highlighted:

- There is no other forms of conflict in the story such as Person vs Person or Person vs Environment.
- The barber faces a dilemma as he has to choose whether to kill Captain Torres or not. As it is an internal struggle, it is considered Person vs Self.
- If he does, he will be considered a hero to the revolutionaries but branded a murderer by the police. If he does not, he will be known as a coward for not taking the opportunity to kill.

Rising Action 1: The imagery of the blood demonstrates the level of control which the barber has over Torres in the situation. Given that the barber is a rebel, it is foreshadowed that the conflict will continue to develop.
And this was a first-class client. How many of us had he ordered shot? How many of us had he ordered mutilated? It was better not to think about it. Torres did not know that I was his enemy. He did not know it nor did the rest. It was a secret shared by very few, precisely so that I could inform the revolutionaries of what Torres was doing in the town and of what he was planning each time he undertook a rebel-hunting excursion. So it was going to be very difficult to explain that I had him right in my hands and let him go peacefully -alive and shaved.

The beard was now almost completely gone. He seemed younger, less burdened by years than when he had arrived. I suppose this always happens with men who visit barber shops. Under the stroke of my razor Torres was being rejuvenated - rejuvenated because I am a good barber, the best in the town, if I may say so. A little more lather here, under his chin, on his Adam's apple, on this big vein. How hot it is getting! Torres must be sweating as much as I. But he is not afraid. He is a calm man, who is not even thinking about what he is going to do with the prisoners this afternoon. On the other hand I, with this razor in my hands, stroking and re-stroking his skin, trying to keep blood from oozing from these pores, can't even think clearly. Damn him for coming, because I'm a revolutionary and not a murderer. And how easy it would be to kill him. And he deserves it. Does he? No! What the devil! No one deserves to have someone else make the sacrifice of becoming a murderer. What do you gain by it? Nothing. Others come along and still others, and the first ones kill the second ones and they the next ones and it goes on like this until everything is a sea of blood. I could cut this throat just so, zip! zip! I wouldn't give him time to complain and since he has his eyes closed he wouldn't see the glistening knife blade or my glistening eyes. But I'm trembling like a real murderer. Out of his neck a gush of blood would spout onto the sheet, on the chair, on my hands, on the floor. I would have to close the door. And the blood would keep inching along the floor, warm, ineradicable, uncontrollable, until it reached the street, like a little scarlet stream. I'm sure that

Rising Action 2: The imagery is developed further, this time with the image of the jugular vein. Tellez’s precise detail of the neck illustrates its vulnerability. Once again, this thought through the barber’s mind indicates the presence of the conflict developing within him on whether or not the captain should be killed.

Climax: This is the climax of the story, as the barber in this instance is the closest in his considerations to murdering Captain Torres. He blatantly mentions slicing his throat, and even considers what would happen after the action. As such, this is the peak of the conflict within the short story.
one solid stroke, one deep incision, would prevent any pain. He wouldn't suffer. But what would I do with the body? Where would I hide it? I would have to flee, leaving all I have behind, and take refuge far away, far, far away. But they would follow until they found me. "Captain Torres' murderer. He slit his throat while he was shaving him a coward." And then on the other side. "The avenger of us all. A name to remember. (And here they would mention my name.) He was the town barber. No one knew he was defending our cause."

And what of all this? Murderer or hero? My destiny depends on the edge of this blade. I can turn my hand a bit more, press a little harder on the razor, and sink it in. The skin would give way like silk, like rubber, like the strop. There is nothing more tender than human skin and the blood is always there, ready to pour forth. A blade like this doesn't fail. It is my best. But I don't want to be a murderer, no sir. You came to me for a shave. And I perform my work honorably. . . . I don't want blood on my hands. Just lather, that's all. You are an executioner and I am only a barber. Each person has his own place in the scheme of things. That's right. His own place.

Now his chin had been stroked clean and smooth. The man sat up and looked into the mirror. He rubbed his hands over his skin and felt it fresh, like new. "Thanks," he said. He went to the hanger for his belt, pistol and cap. I must have been very pale; my shirt felt soaked. Torres finished adjusting the buckle, straightened his pistol in the holster and after automatically smoothing down his hair, he put on the cap. From his pants pocket he took out several coins to pay me for my services. And he began to bead toward the door. In the doorway he paused for a moment, and turning to me he said: "They told me that you'd kill me. I came to find out. But killing isn't easy. You can take my word for it." And he headed on down the street.  

Falling Action: The conflict begins to reach resolution as the barber notes that he did not want to be a murderer. His choice of his ethics over his party loyalty indicates the end of the internal conflict.

Denouement: Following the barber's decision to allow Torres to live, Torres reveals that he had known the barber to be a rebel sympathizer the entire time, and as thus, the short story can be understood to be a twist ending.

Foreshadowing

- "They told me that you'd kill me. I came to find out. But killing isn't easy. You can take my word for it."
Character Profiles:
- **The Barber**
  - Character Type: Static because he stays conflicted and his personality doesn’t change during the story. He is also round because he has multiple aspects to his personality. He has a part of him that believes that he should murder Captain Torres and end a part of the civil war. The other side of him knows that if he murders the captain, he will be hunted as a criminal. He wants to murder the captain to save his people, but is also too cowardly to do so as he is afraid of being hunted.
  - Development: The barber does not really grow as a character, though he learns of the difficulties involved with murder. He finds out how murder can eventually turn a man like himself into someone like Captain Torres.
  - Characterization
    - Direct:
      - “I was a rebel”
      - “I am a good barber”
      - “I’m a revolutionary and not a murderer”
    - Indirect:
      - “When I recognized him, I started to tremble”
      - He is afraid of and intimidated by Captain Torres.
      - “On the other hand… I can’t even think clearly”
      - Pressure is getting to him, can’t focus because he is debating in his head.
- **Captain Torres**
  - Character Type: Static because he stays the same calm and calculated person throughout the story. He is also revealed to be a round character towards the end when he states “But killing isn't easy. You can take my word for it.” He is shown to have a different attitude towards killing than what the reader first thought.
  - Development: Captain Torres remains the same up until the end of the story when he reveals his reservations towards killing. He has more aspects to his personality than what we first saw.
  - Characterization
    - Direct
      - “A man of imagination”
      - “he had a four-day beard”
      - “his dark, sweaty neck”
      - “His beard was inflexible and hard, not too long, but thick.”
      - “He is a calm man”
    - Indirect
      - “Not one of them comes out of this alive, not one.”
      - Torres will not stop in his hunt for the rebels, he is driven by a deep commitment to his work or a personal grudge
      - “That was a fine show, eh?”
      - Portrays Torres as sadistic, someone who takes pleasure in the torture and mutilation of others
Character Types
- Static
  - A character that does not change during the story, both the barber and Captain Torres are static characters as their personalities don’t change over the course of the story.
- Round
  - A character who has multiple aspects to his personality, and as thus, is a believable character. Both the characters in the story are round because they have conflicting ideas and are more than just a single opinion and personality.

Four Thematic Statements:
- Humanity is often placed into situations which forces the individual to identify with, and act accordingly to a group, despite potential reservations.
  The short story presents the individual with either identifying with the rebels or with the authorities. This identification the forces the individual to act accordingly. This can be seen in modern day politics.
- Each individual has their own determined purpose in society and life. The barber’s decision not to kill Torres exhibits this, as he reveals his role to be that of simply a barber.
- An individual may be forced to use violence as a necessary means to maintain order.
  In a society where violence and force is prevalent, those who maintain order are demonstrated to equally be pressured to use force in order to maintain order. This can be examined not only in the short story, but also in history. Therefore, blame can not be placed on any single group or individual.
- Humanity is retained even during periods of violence. Tellez is hopeful for humanity, as he illustrates how both Captain Torres and the barber are able to interact with relative respect.

Ironic:
- Dramatic Irony: As the audience, we know that the barber is a rebel, and we thought that Captain Torres was unaware, this was not the case, as at the end of the story it was revealed Torres knew all along.
- Situational Irony: The barber contemplates to kill, but ends up not going through.
- Verbal Irony: The barber claims that he was not a murderer but a revolutionary. This may be true in their belief but in reality they both have blood on their hands.
Legend: Vocabulary Words, Setting, Foreshadowing, Plot Points, Irony, Literary Devices, Characterization

**Vocabulary**

1) **Word**: expedition  
   **Link**: www.dictionary.com/browse/expedition  
   **Explanation**: an excursion, or journey during war/ or for exploration

2) **Word**: feigned  
   **Link**: www.dictionary.com/browse/feigned  
   **Explanation**: to be insincere/ pretend

3) **Word**: firing squad  
   **Link**: wikipedia.org/wiki/Execution_by_firing_squad  
   **Explanation**: a group of soldiers detailed to shoot a condemned person.

4) **Word**: Mutilated  
   **Link**: www.dictionary.com/mutilate  
   **Explanation**: to inflict a violent and disfiguring injury on a person/ thing

5) **Word**: Faction  
   **Link**: www.dictionary.com/browse/faction  
   **Explanation**: a group or clique within a larger group, party, or government,

6) **Word**: Ineradicable  
   **Link**: www.dictionary.com/ineradicable  
   **Explanation**: unable to be destroyed or removed.

7) **Word**: excursion  
   **Link**: www.dictionary.com/browse/excursion  
   **Explanation**: a short journey or trip, especially one engaged in as a leisure activity.

**Literary devices**

1. **Flashback** - press a little harder on the razor, and sink it in. The skin would give way like silk, like rubber, like the strop. There is nothing more tender than human skin and the blood is always there, ready to pour forth

2. **Imagery** - is face seemed reddened, burned by the sun. Carefully

3. **Paradox** - I'm a revolutionary and not a murderer.

4. **Hyperbole** - It's hot as hell.

5. **Metaphor** - sea of blood