

# Mayfield's Mayfield

Eli Hiebert | Short Story

Mayfield fluffed the pillow that had for twelve years cradled the sleeping head of his wife. A soft orange lit up the room, flickering as the bulb struggled to sustain its dying light. In the near darkness he ran a steady hand over the left side of the quilt, smoothing out a place to lie what remained of Natalie who three nights ago left her ring on the bedside table.

From the closet he selected what had been his favorite of her undergarments and laid them on the bed. Next he found a simple lavender dress, which he laid flat on top of the lingerie.

On the pillow he arranged an assortment of multicolored barrettes, poking small holes into the off-white linen to keep them in place. From the shower and bathroom sink, and from several of Natalie's old hairbrushes, Mayfield gathered handfuls of her hair, which he then detangled while sitting on the toilet seat. Now he carefully placed these smoothed locks on the pillowcase, clasping them with the barrettes to keep them in place.

From the bedside table he picked up a necklace, a pair of earrings, and an imitation gold wedding ring. With due care he placed each piece of jewelry in the appropriate spot.

He walked into the bathroom and came out with a handful of make-up supplies. With the mascara he drew precise eyelash lines on the pillowcase. Next he applied a light smear of blue eye shadow just above the lashes, followed by a lipstick mouth. After finishing her off with a light dusting of face powder he stepped back to admire his wife's delicate beauty. They stared at each other for a few minutes until the light bulb finally gave up. In the darkness they made love.

Earlier that morning Mayfield was sitting at the kitchen table eating toast and going through his mail. He ignored his half eaten breakfast as he stared unblinking at the pages of an UltraMan catalogue, a clinic that had recently opened in town. The slogan written on the front of the catalogue had caught his attention. *It's Time to Improve Yourself.*

He turned the page and his eyes became full circles. "Ah!" he threw his head back and shouted. "Hair! My god, they sell hair! What an age to be alive in!" He stood up and started walking in circles, his wrists trembling as he mumbled to himself, "What an day, where a man can go out and simply buy back his hair!"

He stopped pacing and stood before a photograph hanging on the wall. "Natalie once loved my hair, you know," he said to the cat in the photo. "She used to feel it against her face." He scratched his scalp, eyes going

blank. "One time she ran her hand through it and came away with a handful all tangled around her fingers," he snorted softly. "She never touched it again."

He broke away from the cat and returned to the table, continuing to ignore his toast as he studied the catalogue. He noted the cost of a hair transplant and flipped the page.

He squinted as he tried to make sense of the next headline. *What's good about the skin you're in?* His lip curled as he scanned the selection. There were durable skins, thick skins, smooth skins, and even feel-proof skins. He straightened up and analyzed his hands. He felt the flesh, scratched it, pinched it, flicked it, smelt it, rubbed it against his cheek.

"Dreadful," he said to nobody, and then continued reading.

Under the *Eyes* heading Mayfield squinted to make sense of the pictures, abandoning his toast altogether. He pushed the plate to the side and brought the catalogue closer towards him. There were eyes that changed color "according to one's mood." Some had variable aperture settings, which could be set to let in less light in bright situations and more light in the dark. At the bottom of the page he saw an especially interesting set of eyes. "Retina scanners," it read. "Compatible with any UltraMan memory card. Simply look, scan, and encode. Read books as fast as you can turn the pages." The sight of these eyes dropped bombs in his imagination. He flipped vigorously through the catalogue, searching for memory cards. He found them at the Cognitive Enhancements section, a section that elicited from Mayfield further wonder and appreciation for modern technology. "What a time to be alive," he said. "My, what an age!"

From a drawer Mayfield gathered a pen, a calculator, and a scrap of paper. He wrote down the improvements that he wanted to buy, and beside each one he wrote the price. He punched the numbers into the calculator and then turned red. A few seconds of silence came next, followed by a sudden outburst of loud cursing, shattering ceramic, and flying toast.

Mayfield walked along a sidewalk that led into town. After picking up the pieces of his breakfast plate and his composure, he had decided to go to the UltraMan clinic after all. With his employment insurance check folded up in his pocket, combined with the majority of his savings, he could afford only the hair transplant. He had hoped that the improvement would give him the confidence and mental strength he needed to win his 4 wife back, or at least to get a job. With a job he would be able to pay for the other improvements, which, he was sure, would win Natalie back if the hair alone were to fail.

When he arrived at the UltraMan clinic Mayfield found himself standing in a three-dimensional catalogue. Large posters displaying a variety of improvements covered the walls of the waiting room. Slogans like “Invest in Yourself” and “Create the *You* You’ve Always Wanted” were scattered around here and there. He took in the room, swallowed, and got in line. Dangling his wrists from his forearms he licked his lips as he approached the counter.

“Next in line,” the smooth voice of a well-built man penetrated Mayfield’s ears and interrupted his wondering. He stepped forward and, mumbling to himself, held out the catalogue.

“How can I help you,” asked the man at the desk. His t-shirt strained itself to cover the breadth of his chest and shoulders, and threatened to burst at the seams.

“I, uh —,” Mayfield stuttered.

“You saw an improvement in the catalogue that you’d like to get installed?”

“Um, well yes, actually,” he looked down at the counter. “Several. But, uh, due to costs, I’m only here for— I guess I’ll just get the hair.” He looked up and showed the man his teeth.

“Do you know about our financing program?”

“Eh, financing?”

“Would you like a sit-down?”

“Ok.”

“You’re number fifty-three, please have a seat.”

Mayfield took his number and slouched uncomfortably in one of the waiting room’s ergonomically designed chairs. While he waited he glanced around at his fellow inadequates, smiling to himself. From the table in front of him he picked up a copy of the UltraMan catalogue and browsed. He pretended he had retina scanners in his eyes and took photo-memories of each page. Then he pretended that he remembered exactly what was on each page, quietly reciting everything back to himself. He ran a finger through his lush, seductive hair. He saw Natalie and winked at her.

“Next up, fifty-three. Who’s the lucky number fifty-three?” An unshaven man wearing a suit and holding a ceramic mug came into the waiting room, eyes peeled for his fifty-third customer of the day.

Number fifty-three stood up and the man with the suit stretched his smile even wider, for Mayfield carried the stench of steep profits.

“Hello good man,” the suit extended his hand. “My name is Andreas and I am so thrilled to meet you.”

They shook hands. “Please follow me, the new and improved you is literally waiting around the corner.”

Mayfield followed Andreas into an office with four bare silver walls. The salesman sat at his desk and Mayfield across from him.

“So you’re interested in our financing options,” said Andreas.

“Yes,” said Mayfield. “I want some things that cost some money that I don’t have.”

“Nothing wrong with that. Are you employed?”

“Yes,” said Mayfield. “But not currently. I’m... working on a few things.”

“Sounds like you got a lot on your plate. What I can offer you is a financing program where you put zero down. Does that sound feasible?”

Mayfield’s eyes watered and his lip quivered into a smile.

“Excellent,” said Andreas. “The longest term I can offer you is ninety-six months. The interest on this term is six point nine percent, but you make no payments for the first two months. These are our most affordable options.”

Mayfield’s face became vacant as he did calculations in his head.

After a few seconds Andreas clarified, “That means you can leave here today with all the improvements you want and not pay a thing until two months from now. Does that sound alright?”

Mayfield abandoned his calculations and flashed a smile. “Okay let’s do it.”

“Terrific,” said Andreas, getting to his feat. “If you’ll follow me to the drafting room.”

In the drafting room Mayfield sat at a desk across from the drafter, a man with sunken eyes and almost no lips. The two could hardly see each other over the several computer monitors between them. “I understand you are interested in a hair transplant,” said the drafter.

“Yes,” Mayfield responded.

“You’ve also indicated an interest in thick skin, retina scanners, and a memory chip. Is this correct?”

“Yes.”

“Why don’t we get you set up with the full cognitive enhancement package? Are you familiar with this?”

“No.”

“It’s basically just a discounted bundle of the retina scanners and the memory chip, along with a few

other tweaks. You'll love it, I'm sure. All of our clients love it. I'll go ahead and add it to your file."

"Uh, what are the other tweaks?" asked Mayfield.

"Oh, nothing serious," replied the drafter, keeping his eyes on the monitors. "We throw in a couple extra adrenaline glands that make norepinephrine, a natural hormone that helps with awareness and quick thinking. This will keep your senses heightened and your wits sharp. You'll be able to recall and process information faster. We also add an artificial energy source, something like a rechargeable battery, which periodically stimulates the brain with an electric current. This gives your cognition more stamina and allows you to function on less sleep and low food intake. Trust me when I say that everyone loves this enhancement package. I'll even give it to you at half price. Should we begin? Do you have any questions? Are you ready to become a superior human?"

Mayfield was a few seconds in answering and when he did all he could do was nod.

"Great. I'll just print out the contract and the waiver and we'll get started right away."

Mayfield signed his name six times and then followed the drafter down a hallway with flesh-colored walls and a bone-white floor. At the end of the hallway the word SUPERSURGERY was printed above a doorway. "Right this way," said the drafter. "Please put your clothing in this bin here and have a seat. Your surgeons will be with you shortly." He walked away and closed the door behind him.

Mayfield took off his clothes and approached a chair in the center of the room. The chair was made of red leather and had many joints where it could bend. Behind it was a set of buttons and levers. He sat down and shivered, imagining Natalie's look of approval.

A hissing noise filled the room, accompanied by a thick white fog that descended from the ceiling directly above him. Mayfield panicked and bit his tongue, drawing blood. After a moment he lost consciousness and closed his eyes for the last time.

The hissing ceased and three men wearing white coats walked into the room. One of them held an electric razor and started shaving the remainders of Mayfield's hair. When he finished he swept it into an aluminum pale. A second surgeon carried a small spoon and scalpel and, after waiting for the shaving to conclude, made a few cuts and scooped out Mayfield's eyes. They came out in shapeless globs colored a cloudy white, tinted yellow and speckled red. They fell into the pale and mixed with his hair.

A third white coat walked toward the operating chair twirling an x-acto knife around his fingers. He cleared his throat and the two others turned Mayfield onto his front. The surgeon's eyes narrowed as he inserted

his knife into an opening in Mayfield's flesh and slide the blade up the length of his back. His thin skin joined his eyes and hair in the pale.

The surgeons then commenced to fix his problems.

Mayfield walked along a sidewalk that led him home, beaming with every step. His mind was clear and his vision was sharp. He looked upon his surroundings through a lens he had never known before, rediscovering his own neighborhood. The wind breathed fresh life through his hair and empowered him with every gust.

When he got home he took off his shoes in the hall and stepped into the kitchen. He took a moment to realize his joy, breathing deeply while his smile filled half of his face. He felt a soft vibration between his legs and looked down to see his cat purring against his calf.

"Hello darling," he reached down to pet the cat. "And how are you on this fine day we are having?" He picked it up and kissed its face while it pawed at him playfully. Setting it down on the table, he took off his jacket and walked into the bedroom.

"Hello my dear," said Natalie. She was lying on the bed with one hand behind her neck and the other resting on her chest. She wore a simple lavender dress and barrettes in her hair. Her make up was done to perfection and her wedding ring glistened in the soft light of the lamp. "I've missed you."

Mayfield stared at her painted lips as she spoke. "I've... missed you too," he replied in a far away voice, bewitched by the black lashes dancing above her eyes. In the near darkness Natalie ran her hand over the right side of the quilt, then patted the bed beside her.

"Come to bed," she said. Feeling the blood speed through his veins, Mayfield got onto the bed and crawled towards his wife. She lifted her head and he took the pillow from beneath it, fluffed it a few times, and tenderly laid it back. Leaning in, he put a hand on her thigh and the other he placed against the soft flesh of her cheek. He pushed her hair gently to the side and looked into her eyes. They kissed as the bedroom light went out.