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Astor Place Barber

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Astor Place Barber

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“What I’m saying now is a lie,” professor R wrote on the board with a thick black dry-erase marker whose ink perpetually got under his fingernails and would probably seep into the cheese sandwich he packed for lunch.

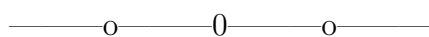
He longed for the chalkboards of old. The chalk that gave him calluses in his middle finger that would only go away during the summer months but kept his fingernails clean.

An eager student in the front row raised her hand. “Paradox!” she exclaimed.

“Excellent,” said the professor. “Can you explain why?”

“Well . . . when it’s true, it’s false and when it’s false, it’s true. Hence it’s a paradox!”

The professor smiled and scratched his chin. He could use a shave, he thought to himself.



There was a barbershop R frequented on Astor Place just east of Broadway. Since 1947, it had been owned and operated by the Vezza family; he had learned this from the barber one day.

He was immersed in his iPhone during a cut and momentarily caught a glimpse of the barber, with wrinkles that formed patterns like webbing, and was overcome with guilt for ignoring the old man servicing him; he likely had much more to offer him in life experience than the traffic jam game he was playing. (You had to move cars in such a way to get the red car to the exit in the fewest number of moves.)

R put his phone down and asked the barber about the shop and Soho in the 60s. The barber’s face lit up as he told him tales of Andy Warhol who would come in with his friends, for a haircut but never a shave.

“Andy would shave himself,” the barber said. Noting of course, that the barber would shave all and only those men who don’t shave themselves.

He smirked and R was silent.

“Aren’t you going to ask?” he gestured with his shears.

“Ask what?” the professor probed.

“Who shaves the barber?”

Postscript: There is indeed a barber shop in Astor Place (see <https://www.astorplacehairnyc.com>), and it was owned and run for many years by the Vezza family. The professor in the story is fictional.