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Hair Pooling

As I talked to Kathy, the hair dresser, today about an appointment for a permanent wave, I remembered the simpler days when I was a little girl and wore my straight, dark brown hair in a Dutch bob, not unlike that of every other little girl with straight hair.



Periodically, about once a month as I recall, Mother took Martha and me to the barber shop. I was the older, so I almost always went first. If I didn't wiggle, and I conveniently don't remember the times when I probably did, the process didn't take long. The barber would part my thick hair in a very straight line in the center, combing the front into bangs, which usually covered my heavy black eyebrows, and the rest over my ears and straight down the back. It didn't take him long to trim my bangs straight across my forehead, perhaps half an inch above my eyebrows. Then he would cut the rest so that the front portion came just above the tips of my ears and shingle the back about two and a half inches up my head. Then he'd use his long, soft-bristled brush to brush away the hair on my face and neck, ending with a flourish as he removed the long white cape from my shoulders and took the thin paper collar from around my neck. After the ceremonious use of his handheld mirror so that I could observe the result of his labor in the big mirror behind the chair, he'd help me down from the board placed across the arms of the chair and thence to the footrest which my legs never got long enough to touch when I was in the chair. Some more brushing across my back and down my dress and my turn was finished. The whole operation took very little time. I have no idea what the haircut cost.

Then it was my younger sister Martha's turn. She too was lifted onto the board on the arms of the chair, had her neck wrapped in the long, crepe-y paper, was engulfed in the big white square apron which was fastened at the back of her neck. Her hair, a somewhat lighter brown than mine and about as thick, was cut in exactly the same style as mine, but the process took a little longer. The barber - it must have been the same one most of the

time, but I don't remember the specific man - knew that her hair was less determined to be straight than mine. After he cut it, he would dampen the sections over her ears and tease them into forward curving curls, not quite the "spit curls" of the period, but almost. Then, she could preen as he showed her the front and back reflected in the big mirror. I thought she looked beautiful and so stylish, but I knew from experimenting at home that my hair was too stubbornly straight to submit even to a very wet curl. As a matter of fact, Martha's curls lasted only until her hair dried in the breeze created by walking to the car, but I thought it was simply gorgeous while it did. On special occasions Mother would use her hot curling iron to curl the ends of Martha's hair and mine, but it was a very temporary dressing up. I was quietly jealous of Martha's more biddable hair and I also envied my curly-headed friends who were able to "train" their hair into waves and curls, but eventually learned to my sorrow that no amount of eating spinach or carrots would convert my hair to curly locks. I had to wait impatiently a number of years until the advent of "permanent" waving as well as until I was considered old enough for such frivolity before I achieved my curly locks.



Another ritual connected with our hair was the weekly Saturday morning shampoo, which always took place *after* the monthly haircut so that fresh, fly-away hair would not interfere with the barbering process. Periodically, Mother bought a block of castile soap; the block as I remember it was about twelve inches long, an inch thick, and about two and a half inches wide and was somewhat roughly shaped. She shaved it into a kitchen pan which she reserved just for the soap, covered the shavings with a quantity of water, and simmered it, stirring occasionally, until she had a rich emulsion of lightly golden shampoo about the consistency of most of the purchased shampoos today. That was stored in several narrow-necked bottles and was used to wash all the hair in the family. The shampoo itself took place in the bathroom where the basin was filled from the hot and cold spigots (since the spigots were separate, the basin mixing necessary) until it reached just the proper comfortable temperature. I plunged my head into the basin to wet my hair, then applied the liquid soap (or Mother did before I was tall enough to do a good job myself) and worked up a lather.



If I was in charge, I had the opportunity to play with exotic, curly styles, possible with the white-foamed hair. Then I rinsed in the basin and re-sudsed, replacing the soapy rinse water at least twice with fresh, warm water, until a lock of my hair would squeak between two fingers drawn down its length. Then I used a small glass of vinegar or fresh-squeezed lemon juice before a final rinse. I much preferred the scent of the lemon juice rinse because the smell wasn't as obtrusive as the vinegar, but we didn't always have a lemon to squeeze, especially in the winter. The next move was to towel my hair almost dry. I would part it precisely down the middle, taking care that not one errant hair from one side encroached onto the other side. The part had to be arrow straight. I carefully combed my bangs, the sides, and back, and let it dry. Once dry, it received a vigorous brushing, and I had very shiny, straight hair until the next shampoo, needing only to comb it in the morning and occasionally during the day after being in the wind. It all sounds so simple now.