

He Should Have Been a Girl

by John Carter



“Aw Joan, don’t e look ansome, they lovely curls and great long eyelashes. He should have been a girl!” My mother nodded in agreement as Betty clasped me tight to her breast.

As the words spilled from Aunt Betty’s mouth, it was the final nail in the coffin. For a long while, various females who visited us had given way to expressing similar observations and I had resented these aspersions to my seven-year-old manhood, but this was different. Betty was my favorite aunt. She was petite, very pretty and wore a heady perfume and bright red lipstick that I invariably had to rub from my face following breathless hugs and kisses on her arrival. I guess she was my first big crush and for her to cast doubt on my manliness was unbearable to me.

It was time for action! I needed help and that was duly obtained from my five-year-old sister. She was reluctant at first, but the thought of her favourite doll being hung from high in the apple tree seemed to help her decide.

Fetching scissors from the bathroom, we slipped away to the garden and to the pigsty. Our pigsty had been totally devoid of pigs for some 30 years. My father had put sheets of galvanized iron on the roof to secure the sty from the elements and had made sure it was safe to take on its new role. With its small granite-walled yard it was in turn a knight’s castle, the headquarters of the British army, a fort that was perfect to fight off those pesky Indians, and just about anything else we wanted it to be.

The sty was about to assume a new identity, as an un-beauty parlour. Furtive looks down the long garden told us no one was following us as we hastily scampered into the parlour. I knew my sister was a bit nervous as her tiny hand wielding the large scissors was shaking quite noticeably. Even my reminder that her doll could still meet with a sticky end failed to solve the shaking.

“Mum will be mad if you do this,” said my sister.

“I’ll tell her I made you do it,” I ventured, with much more bravado than I actually felt. It was too late to go back. With her shaking hand, my darling sister started to cut my long eyelashes.

I closed each eye in turn and had to admit to some trepidation since with the eye that remained open I spied the wobbly scissors approaching to do its dastardly deed. After several attempts, each followed by studying a somewhat distorted face reflected in a shiny tin lid, my previously long and curly lashes were reduced to an acceptable manly stubble.

At that point, I was suddenly overcome with remorse. Or was it fear? My sister was right in one respect"Mum would notice." I had thought of a light trim but my sisters shaking hand coupled with the strong desire to assert my manliness had pared them down so far as to be non existent.

It was in this darkest of hours that my pure genius leapt to my rescue. It may not have brought a permanent solution, but it would certainly delay the wrath that was sure to descend on me at some point. I would become Zorro!

My shorn eyes were saved from immediate discovery as I spied my sword that was fashioned from two pieces of bamboo lashed securely together. More importantly, lying beside it was my black Zorro mask, so expertly crafted by my Gran who lived next door. Donning my mask and clutching my sword, I was again invincible. I was ready to face the world (and my Mum).

I was so lost in my reverie that my heart jumped into my throat as the most awful sound assailed my ears. Our cat Peter, normally a placid and loving animal, streaked by me as if he was on fire. Poor Peter. He had come into the pigsty seeking a little love and affection only to find my sister flushed with her success on my lashes. She looked so totally guilty that one look at the hand still grasping the scissors was enough to negate the need for her indignant explanation. "Well, he didn't seem to mind the first side of his whiskers being done," she said innocently. I think she had gotten into the spirit of things following her success with me and thought Peter would benefit from a trim.

Sadly, my Zorro disguise was only good until bedtime when my mother insisted I did not sleep with it on. The repercussions were swift and predictable. Screams of anguish from Mum, hand marks from my dad on my legs, and frequent reminders until well into adulthood of the day I mutilated my girly eyelashes.

Nevertheless, I'd do it again.