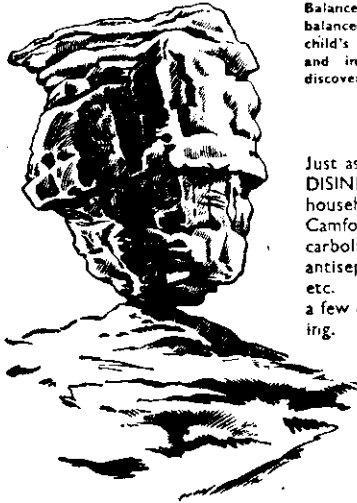


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AT THE SALON

Written for "The Listener"
by M.B.

THERE comes a time in every woman's life when she feels the urge to Do Something About Herself. In me this takes the form of having my existing hair cut off in the hope of starting afresh with something glossier, curlier, kempter than the last. Last year the annual compulsion seized me as I was cycling through the main street of a provincial town and I was forced to turn in at an establishment which boasted seven chairs, no waiting. As the gentleman in charge didn't do women's hair I came out with an Eton Crop.

This year I rang the local salon.

"Tomorrow, at 3.30?" suggests the voice.

"No, I want it now."

"Monday at 4.15?"

"Too late," I shriek.

"Thursday fortnight at 10.30," announces the voice, and rings off.

By Thursday fortnight the urge has passed. I have developed doubts. Shall I break the appointment? But on what grounds? A prior engagement is unlikely, a cold in the head no excuse.

I go.

AS I sit before the mirror at the "Goldilocks," I realise that I have been quite right to come. Any change must be for the better.

Deftly, contemptuously, the beautician unpins my ravelled braids and watches as they subside snakily to my shoulders.

"You want it cut?" she asks dubiously.

Can it be that she admires it as it is?

"Actually," I confide, "I rather like it this way, with the braids on top." (She herself wears braids on top, but the effect is somehow different.) "And my husband..."

"Men," she gurgles, "are so ridiculous. Obviously one needs regular, almost classic features, to wear braids successfully. Though in your case I scarcely know what to recommend. I feel these new short haircuts are essentially for the younger woman."

She clacks her scissors thoughtfully, lifts a lock, eyes it with distaste and tosses it aside.

"Actually, it's very difficult to do anything at all with this thick, wiry hair."

I take courage from the fact that I have just heard the assistant in the next cubicle telling her client that it is quite impossible to do anything with this thin, soft hair.

"I'll have it cut very short, please, short at the front and longer at the back. And I'll have a bang."

The operator says nothing, but a slight smile lifts the corners of her Desert Flamed mouth. She seizes a frontal lock, drapes it across my forehead and loops it up. I look more than ever like an extra from the Snake Pit set.

"I think not," she says.

My morale is ebbing. She presses home her advantage, beginning on a bright professional note.

"Your hair is what we call in the trade real problem hair. Perhaps a real good thinking? Tell me, do you usually have it thinned?"

"Yes, but it grows again."

"Ah," She broods darkly.

"What about a really good depilatory and a toupee?" I suggest.

"I scarcely think the condition warrants it—yet. Though I am at a loss to account for its lack-lustre, neglected look—"

(Elementary, my dear Goldilocks.)

"—unless, of course, it is the symptom of a general breakdown. The hair—and, of course, the skin—are excellent barometers of the bodily condition."

I peer anxiously at The Skin. It has a dead, enervated look. I feel awful.

"Not but there's still Hope. I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll give you one or two reconditioning treatments, and later a good perm. Then you won't need to have it cut at all."

"But I happen to want it cut. In any case, I don't believe in permanent waving. It ruins the natural curl."

"I couldn't agree with you more in the case of a good natural wave. But in Moddom's case the wave is so slight—"

Touchee. "I just want it cut," I blurt. "Curly-cut."

SHE shrugs and begins, saws impatiently and calls for a new pair of wire-cutters.

Snip, snip, snip.

"Ouch!" Blood drips from my right lobe. *Touchee* again.

My opponent is all apologies. She explains that she had no idea my ears were so far down. "Most unusual." Her tone

(continued on next page)



"She lifts a lock, eyes it with distaste, and tosses it aside"