**MUSINGS OF AN AGEING WOMAN (Part 2)**

In my previous piece, I mused upon my current state. But I did not arrive there overnight. In hindsight, this was a very gradual process over time, so gradual that I did not realise the journey until arrival at the destination – not so young again! Every aspect described earlier, carries a backstory. I’ll start with the hair.

As I said earlier, there was a lot of it – just past shoulder length, jet black, very thick and very curly. The weekly washing was the low point of my weekend from childhood through to adolescence. I loved the feel of the water in my hair but the entangling of the multitude of knots was two hours of sheer torture every week. I could not manage my hair and my mother combed it every day for school. She did the weekly washing, drying, combing out and styling until I was 14 years old. I thought that the torture was all mine. Little did I realise that it was as painful an ordeal for her as it was for me. At 14, I was tall and big for my age (and therein lies another story for another time). I was 5’ 9 “ tall and weighed 145 pounds while my mother was a slight 5’ 4” (in heels) and weighed just about 100 pounds. I would sit, and squirm, between her legs as she tried to make me look presentable with three thick plaits, one to the right of my forehead and two at the back. On special occasions, I would be treated to a headful of twisted curls, a creation that took longer to style than the three plaits and even longer to undo. But they were gorgeous and well worth the pain.

At 14 however, I had outgrown the three plaits and the twisted curls but what could my poor mother do with this head of hair? Time to enlist the help of the experts, a hairdresser. But there was an obstacle – my father. You see sometime earlier, a hairdresser had trimmed the ends of my mother’s hair and my father’s reaction could not have been any more different had my mother been shorn bald. From that time, he had a deep and fearful distrust of hairdressers and while he could not stop his wife, no hairdresser was going to touch the head of his only child. In desperation one day, my mother gave me the comb, the hairbrush and the hairfood (“grease” in local terms) with the instruction to go to my father and let **him** comb my hair. One hour later, I was holding a ten-dollar bill and on my way to keeping my first hairdressing appointment, accompanied by my mother. The appointment was to have my hair pressed, that is straightened with an iron comb that was heated. I was a big girl. I had arrived! The pain of the occasional accidental burn was but a small price to pay, compared to the hours-long weekly wash ordeal and daily combing that I knew and hated. I was happy. My Mummy was very happy. The only problem with pressing was that it was a physical transformation of the hair so that once wet, the hair slowly returned to its natural condition. Since I walked to and from school twice a day, for we schoolchildren went home for lunch, the straightened hair lasted less than two weeks. But two to three days of discomfort was a vast improvement on daily torture.

With the pressed hair, I was now able to comb my own hair most days, although the setting of curlers was, and always has been challenging. From pressing, I progressed to chemical straightening which could withstand water and sweat and last about six weeks. Then I got tired of having to set hair in curlers every night, and I adopted the new natural rage, the Afro. Oddly enough, detangling knots did not seem an issue during this period of ethnic re-awakening. But I did tire of that after some years, and changed the style to the happy medium of the Jheri Curl, not as curly as the Afro but not so straight that it had to be set in curlers, a chore I detested. I convinced my hairdresser to do a set and dry, contrary to the Jheri Curl manufacturers’ instruction, and the result was perfection – something that resembled a perm and would last as long as three months.

It must have been more than a decade before I thought that I needed a change. Jheri Curls were no longer fashionable and so I resumed chemical straightening. But that meant a hairdresser’s weekly appointment for a wash and set. Then I shaved (all my black friends were horrified and all my white friends thought that it looked gorgeous). After that came the Mohawk which I loved as it was the easiest to manage and maintain after the bald head. But as age crept upon me, I thought that I needed a less avant-garde and more dignified look, so I went back to the natural look but cut lower than my youthful Afro, a style which I thought that I could manage. Yet combs broke in my hair with unfailing regularity. Finally one day, I prayed in front of the mirror, “Dear Lord, can I please have back the softer, more yielding hair of my early childhood?” And He answered my prayer. I noticed that the comb would go through the hair more and more easily. I had a nice gray fringe to the front which reminded me of Indira Gandhi. The gray fringe did move back from my forehead a bit, but I still looked elegant, I thought. And then one day, as I was standing in a mirrored elevator, I saw my entire head and realized why the comb went through so easily. My hair was thinning. Instead of a skull completely covered by hair follicles, the latter were now spaced out, regularly but still spaced. And then I remembered! My mother would tell me that as a baby, I had no hair and she would put a bow on me, held discreetly by Scotch tape, (this was before baby headbands were available). What could I say, but “Thank you”? I asked and I did receive.

I now wear a no-hair style. It is low maintenance. No hairdressers, no expensive hair lotions and treatments. I shower, towel dry and I’m good to go. Life is still good, even without hair.