

Cut and run

By Anthony Anderson

Kinky, dirty, unstraight!

It's hard to find your place in the world when you're not like other girls. When I look at boys, nothing, the needle doesn't move but when I see the object of my affection, bam! It must mean something. Natasha's hair burned like a log on Christmas morning. If she only knew the magic of her locks, what her hair does to me. Today the redhead won't be on the bus but I still look for her anyway. She's probably sleeping off a busy night. Arlette peeked over her flames from the seat behind yesterday and read the name on her college folder to me, Natasha Raven. Natasha, Natasha, that's such a lovely name... *Oh, the quivering needle.* She lives at number eighteen, Chessington Gardens. Her bedroom is a short climb to the top of the angled drainpipe by the side of the house.

Slap-heads, baldies, coots.

We hate skinheads, Arlette and I. There's a group of them that gets on the bus at Templeton street. They get on here each morning. Today there are only two of them. They seem confused as to what exactly they are too. These two have safety pins for earrings; their cassette box is blasting out some idiotic punk trash. The conductor is too afraid to say anything. She should make them turn off that embryonic cat screeching.

We study them from the back of the top deck, our favourite spot. Sometimes they get on before us and steal our place. Now we walk five stops further back before getting on. It used to ruin my day when they sat in our seat, now I get to mock them from behind. One has slightly redeeming qualities, she's growing a Mohawk. I shall keep my eye on that as it progresses.

Finally, they get off. The Labour Exchange no doubt.

The coot gives me a bitchy stare as they make for the stairwell. I'm getting better at reading facial expressions.

Yes that's right, I'm sitting here at the back. We beat you to it again. You had to sit at the front today like a bald-headed baby.

She stares at Arlette, then at me with a disgusted look on her face. Arlette is frightened, so I hold onto her tightly until the slags have passed.

“Don't worry about her Arlette, she's just a baldy, she looks stupid.” My comforting words reassure her.

They've gone, normality at last. Now the good people can get upstairs, the ones with hair, now the freaks have gone. Some 'normals' get on at the same stop.

Auburn, afro, frizzy perm.

The afro looks too wiry, it makes me shudder, the thought of that 'brillo' scouring my skin.

Bed-head, cowlick, pigtails.

Some schoolgirls. I watch them play with their plaits. So pretty. They never stay still long enough, so much energy.

The bus shelters pass-by quickly as I look down to those waiting to get on.

Shoulder-length, scrunchie, ponytail.

By the cemetery, the leggy blonde ponytail gets on our bus. She's lovely. Going to work in her office attire. I bet the men can't keep their minds off her smoothly shaved legs.

“What do you think Arlette, do you like her?”

Arlette looks embarrassed, she does like her, me too, so we move up the bus to be closer. Without Arlette by my side, I’d never have the guts.

Making the first move is not my strength. I’m not an extravert by any imagining so we approach her shyly at first and sit down at the seat behind. Choosing the right moment to engage with a beautiful woman is hard. I’m sure any man would say the same thing. They must go through exactly what I’m feeling right now, trembling, nervous. It’s even harder for a girl to approach another girl like this. Arlette watches me from the next seat as I prepare to make my move, waiting for the right time, the courage, that moment when I’m feeling brave. The moment you leap into the dark, not knowing what her reaction might be. Her fragrance is like cherries. My mind wanders for a moment, caught in that scent, imagining being in bed on a Sunday morning smelling her hair, feeling it brush over my breasts. My hands quiver as my fingers hover just above her shoulder in anticipation and fear. But a faint heart never won a fair maidenhead so I get brave and just go for it. *Snip!* There, it’s done. Naturally, she doesn’t notice yet, I’m good at this. I put it, the scissors and Arlette into my bag then get off the bus. Timing is everything. If you do it just as the bus brakes, the forward momentum counteracts the weight of the missing ponytail. It’s a science fact!

With my bag in my hands, I walk the side streets to work admiring my prize, a foot long, blonde ponytail. With my nose buried in my bag, the scent fills my nostrils.

Cherries. Oh so beautiful.

I look forward to Sunday morning.

“You take care of our prize Arlette!” She will, she always does, she’s my little helper. She reclines on the bed of cherries, hair only slightly darker blonde than her own.

“Hey! You’ve lost a stiletto!”

I search my bag for the small piece of pink plastic footwear.

“How careless of you, silly girl! That was a new pair of shoes!”

“Lucia! You’re late!” My boss surprises me and I take my head from my bag.

“I’m sorry Mrs Sherridan, there were some skinheads on the bus causing trouble. They had to stop and throw them off!”

“Well, never mind. Open the garage door please and put the sign out will you.”

Mrs Sherridan runs a start-up hairdressing salon from the garage of her home. So far, none of her neighbours have complained to the council but it’s only a matter of time. It’ll probably be some comb-over, councillor-wannabe that does it. Mrs Sherridan says that by then she’ll have enough saved to rent a shop in the high street. Until then she is building a loyal clientele.

I put the sign out and the first customer arrives for her appointment. I make her tea while Rita, Mrs Sherridan discusses styles.

Mrs Winfield wants big hair like a woman on an American TV show, she brought a picture of her. I’m disappointed but it’s the fashion at the moment. So Rita backcombs it to give her an idea of the look. She looks ridiculous, like a French poodle, all puffed up.

Rita then starts to work her magic. The problem with big hair is there's never any left over for me.

Beehive, bleached, blow-dry.

The day and the customers pass.

At five o'clock I visit the junk shop and buy a very beautiful little girl who waves to me each night from the shop window. Some spiteful child has cut her hair very short but it's easily fixable. She doesn't have a name yet but we have an idea what it might be. We shall see if it fits, when we have given her a new hairdo.

When home, I kick off my shoes, unbutton my blouse and slip off my skirt. My knickers and bra go over the chair and I ease myself back into my bed. That was a busy day. For a good few minutes, my body sinks into my nest. I roll around in the hair bedding, flexing my toes through the strands, pretending to swim and sinking deeper into it. The blondes, brunettes and reds brush against my naked skin. It feels fantastic against me, on the soles of my feet and my breasts. The silky, conditioned, sweet smelling hairs brush against my body, tickling me, arousing me, until reaching that point when I'm fully relaxed. Panting, I wait for my face to cool down before getting up to make tea. This is how I lift the turmoil of my days, a simple form of meditation.

When ready, Arlette sits on my bedside table and I take her one shoe off and place it by the lamp. Dressed in her eveningwear, she then sits with me for the rest of the night as we bag up our latest prizes. They stay in airtight bags for when needed.

The evening passes quickly for us as we give our new little doll a head of beautiful flame red hair. When all the strands are the same length it's styled and trimmed into a magnificent mane.

“You can be Natasha! Natasha Raven.”

Arlette looks at me strangely, “shouldn’t a Raven be black haired?” she says.

She never says much, but when she speaks, she chooses her words carefully and is usually correct.

“You know, I think you’re right. We need some black hair don’t we?”

Loose, limp, knotted.

The walk to the bus stop next morning saw the usual mops.

Climbing on the step at the back of the bus, we are up the twisted staircase in a second. Quickly scanning the top deck there’s a stranger in our seat, a new girl on the right and a prize at the front.

Thick, bob... Raven-black ponytail!

Little choice but to go to the front and sit behind her, like a siren she calls. Her hair smells funny, can’t place it; paper, disinfectant, leather, wood and metal. While I think about it, my eyes glance at the alighting passengers.

Flowing, dyed, fringe.

The ponytail calls louder. The raven-haired one is irresistible so we check over our shoulders.

The ‘thick’ and the ‘bob’ are looking away beyond the window in deep thought so we wait until the next stop.

As the brakes begin to apply I reach slowly into my bag and grip my fingers around the scissors.

“Excuse me miss!” It’s the ‘bob’; she’s standing next to me. Didn’t see that coming.

“Yes?” I say, nervously.

“We’re going to have to ask you to get off with us at this stop.”

“Get off? Us?” my head darts around frantically trying to understand.

The ponytail in front stands up and shows me an open wallet with her photo in it. My eyes dart between them. Police!

At the stop, ponytail takes my bag from me.

“Hey!” My protests go unanswered.

Arlette is unhappy as she and my scissors are pulled from the bag. She starts to cry.

The words blurt from my gaping mouth. “Arlette! Please don’t hurt her.”

They look to each other. “Arlette?” one says.

Buzz, cropped, crew-cut.

The new hairdos question me at the station.

“Do you recognise the name Arlette Mac Pherson?” they say pushing a photograph of a baldy at me on the brilliant white table.

“No? Should I?”

“You don’t know that name? Never heard of an Arlette?”

“No, except my doll of course.”

“Yes, that’s quite a coincidence your doll having the same name as an assault victim. Your doll also has unusual hair doesn’t she? Is that human hair? It doesn’t look like fibre,” says Buzz.

My eyes avert to his head, his hair is like a tennis ball. “Where is she?”

“It’s being examined at the moment.”

It’s impolite to refer to her as ‘it’. “Can I have her back soon please?”

“We’ll see,” he says and pushes another baldy at me. “Do you recognise *her*? Notice anything strange about her?”

I study the photo for an instant. “No! She has an odd facial expression that’s all... Is she confused about something?”

“She’s unhappy! Her name is Natasha Raven,” says the pointy crew cut. “She’s not very happy at the moment because she was assaulted a few nights ago while she slept.”

The silence in the room embraces me and my body freezes. For a moment I’m sure I hear Arlette crying from outside the room. I think she’s afraid of something.

“Someone broke into her home, through her bedroom window,” pointy says. “They drugged her with a needle and shaved off all her hair.”

“That’s awful, I’d hate that to happen to me. I bet she had lovely hair too.”

“You don’t know anything about that do you?”

I jiggle my hair.

He puts a small plastic bag on the table with a letter ‘A’ on it. Inside is a pink doll’s right stiletto shoe. Then he places an identical bag next to it with a letter ‘B’ on it. Inside there is another pink doll’s stiletto, a left one.

“Do you know where we found these?” he said.

I give the same response.

“This one was on the carpet of Natasha Raven’s bedroom,” he said poking his finger at the bag. “This one,” he started to poke the other bag, “was found on your bedside table.”

My legs shake. *Arlette, how could you be so careless?!*

“Do you want to tell us about the plastic swimming pool in your bedroom filled with human hair?”

Rat’s tails, oily, dreadlocks.

I have a new job; it’s a great one too with responsibility over many girls, girls who normally wouldn’t look twice at me. Now they have to sit still and pay attention to what I am doing. Some who would normally bully me shake in fear as I touch them. My job has immense power, more than you would think when first told of it. It makes me feel very special.

The rat’s tails takes her seat.

“Give me a cut and blow-dry!” she demands with false bravado.

The guard watches me turn on the razor and start to hack away at her head with it. Her mess soon detaches from her scalp in furrows. It drops off her smock and tumbles to the floor, joining the carpet of hair building from this morning alone. They won't let me take my shoes and socks off while working but I try to remember what it feels like. It's strangely more erotic.

As the hard-nut watches herself in the mirror, tears well up on her bottom eyelids. She swallows hard and pretends it's not happening. See, she's not that tough, they never are when decades of hair growth hits the floor and they take a good look at themselves as baldies. The femininity stripped away in an instant. She'll be allowed to grow it back, as long as it's regulation. They'll even allow her to have a nice style if she's good but she'll be a regular customer of mine and will want me to do it nice for her, so she'll be polite and friendly from now on.

They don't let me keep much hair but do allow me to take a little so I can rethread my dolls. When I first arrived here, I acted up until they let me keep some dolls and a little hair. Now they let me do almost anything.

I don't hear from Arlette anymore. She testified against me at the trial. The prosecuting wig kept waving her around at the jury, she was loving the attention. It made me sad. In many ways it's her fault I'm here. She wanted the raven-black, and did implicate me with her shoe. She should be here with me. I have new friends anyway that keep me company in my cell but do miss her so much.

They say I shouldn't be here, that I should be in a special hospital but I'm very happy and don't want to leave. There are lots of new things I've learned here that never could have outside, new hobbies and interests. For instance, I've found there is nothing more fulfilling than running your fingers through the strands of an unwilling,

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quivering and terrified head of hair. Their wide eyes meet mine in the mirror on their first day of prison as they submit reluctantly from the barber's chair. After years of lowlights, these are the highlights of my life so far. It shows me the way, what I want to do forever. This is my place and if they ever make me leave it, I'll have to find a way of getting back somehow, or I'll recreate it somewhere else.