

# SCISSORS AND A CAPE

AZMIN AZRAN

*"Hello Mr. DJ!  
My song, please play!"*

The attempted music floating out of the barbershop was positively ghastly, but I had no choice other than to keep approaching it. I had tried growing my hair out before as well, but this time was different. It'd been six and a half months, and my hair had fought through the natural waves I inherited from my father, and the not so natural rough texture I'd given it with years of absent care, to just about hang below my shoulders. However, people don't like change, and when the change is a person in their early 20s trying to experiment with their hair, it's met with furious backlash. I'm of the opinion that backlash pointed at long, male hair, if channelled properly, could topple even the stickiest of monarchies. Standing outside the barbershop listening to that abomination of a song, I felt distinctly different from what I imagine a ruthless monarch could ever feel. I was not a monarch at that point in time, but the sweat was making me feel sticky in this humid April afternoon, so I pushed open the door to the slaughterhouse of my hairy dreams and walked in.

All I can say is, it felt... curious. The thing with funny feelings is that we often ignore them because they are strange and of course, they don't make much sense. I'm a firm believer in the sixth sense, or at least I am now. Had I given heed to what my feelings said when a fantastically styled hairdresser, standing in front of an empty lounge chair as if he was expecting me, I'd have turned around and walked out. But the man beckoned for me to sit down, and so I did.

"How are you, bhaijan?" I looked at his reflection in the mirror, and started to notice, one by one, his gelled up hair, his popped collars, the metal capsule hung around his neck acting as an amulet to ward of whoever knows what bad thing. His shirt was unbuttoned down to his midriff, and the sleeves folded up well past his elbow, revealing a pair of toned biceps. And just a split second before my eyes could travel high enough to notice him wearing sunglasses indoors at 3 PM, he smiled and said to me, "There's a glare from the tube-light that keeps getting reflected off the mirror. Better to put this on than go blind every 30 seconds."

As I settled in, he brought out a cape that was folded into a square, and with a single dramatic flourish of his hands, I found myself draped in it. The cape had the face of a blonde model from some Western country printed on it. Once again, almost before I could ponder the relevance of that model in a barbershop in Dhaka, the man behind me, scissors and comb ready in hand, said, "Ahh, you could have had hair like that if you let it grow out a bit more. Sad that it's come to this."



For the first time since I entered the room, I mustered a series of words to utter, "Tell me about it. Hey man, just make sure I look okay, okay? But also make sure my parents don't send me back."

"That's quite the predicament you've put me in, bhaijan. On one hand, I need to make sure you leave this establishment satisfied, but then I need to make sure your parents don't take issue. On the other hand, I have the sacred duty to the art of hairdressing, to make sure the hair on a man's head does more than just protect against the elements of nature, bestowed upon be by my Ustad Rustam," he said. Under his breath, he muttered, "Blessings of Rustam, find us."

And I'm 60 percent sure I heard the rest of the room mutter in unison, "Blessings of Rustam, find us."

I couldn't really turn my head and see for myself what just happened and why the strange barbers in this strange barbershop were muttering strange words, because the magnificent artisan standing behind me had started spraying water on my hair. And I knew it was rude to move when a barber's working on your hair.

"I'll do my best, bhaijan, but you have to trust me, okay?" he said.

"Whoa! What?! What are you plan-

ning to do, man?"

"Just trust me. All I'll say is, you'll have a good night's sleep last night."

"Last night? Do you mean to..."

With that, he combed some wisps of my hair from around my ears into place, held that bit of hair in between his scissors, and moved the index and thumb of his scissor holding right hand closer together. I remember hearing the scratchy sound hair makes when it gets cut, and the sound of the two blades of a scissor meeting. Inexplicably, I remember a feeling of warm happiness, and then nothing.

□□□

I'm not going to say I'm not a morning person like all the cool kids say these days, but I need the sun to be above me before I can function properly. That morning, however, I felt like I woke up with a splash of coffee at the back of my throat, not only because I woke up coughing, but also because I felt really fresh. I walked out of my room looking for breakfast, and as I turned right to find the kitchen, I noticed my hair out of the corner of my eye. It was still long, just about hanging below my shoulders, and as my pre-slumber memories started flooding back, my mother walked out of the kitchen.

"Good morning. You're up early today. Fantastic bedhead, by the way. Hashtag woke up like this? Hahaha."

I'd have cringed at my mother's attempt to sound relatable but I was too busy feeling shocked at what she just said about my hair. I sat down with my ruti and eggs when my father joined me at the table, "If I'd known my waves could look that good, I'd have grown my hair like you too, son. Alas! Now I'm too old."

At this point, I was just confused. I went back into my room, got ready in silence, and left for class. While I stood at a nearby intersection waiting for my motorcycle ride to arrive, I pondered the strange occurrence that just took place in my life. I noticed the men sitting at a tea stall beside me, from where a fantastically styled man with popped collars and folded up sleeves, wearing sunglasses, smiled back.

As he bowed down to take a sip from his cup, I could just about see behind his glasses, and get a look at his eyes.

In the soft glow of 8 AM sunshine, unmistakably, I saw red.

*Azmin Azran is a machine, and his fuel is food. If you have good food, you can find him at azminazran@gmail.com*