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WRY SOCIETY

the hipster beard

Growing facial hair had never been Douglas's strong suit, but the course to street cool never did run smooth...

Facial hair, Douglas thought to himself as he carefully stroked his beard in the rear-view mirror of the Mitsubishi hybrid he'd hired for the weekend, was a minefield.

Here he was, in the car park of the Cock & Bottle, the Cumbrian pub where he had spent every Saturday evening of his youth eating pork scratchings, while his father and his bearded farmer friends slapped him on the back as they dunked their manly moustaches into pints of stout. Most of them had the remnants of their supper in there too – Mr Twit-style

breadcrumbs and the odd bit of congealed ketchup. Beards, to the young Douglas, had epitomised the type of outdoorsy, macho manliness he was never going to aspire to.

As if in protest at the man it might make him, Douglas's beard had, quite simply, never really grown. At Cambridge, where he had gone to study English literature (or "reading stories" as his dad would have it), he had spent the best part of his first term – and three bottles of beard oil – cultivating some George Clooney style designer stubble, of which

he was disproportionately proud. But on returning home to a Cock & Bottle Christmas Eve chorus of "Call that a beard?!", he had lost his resolve and reached for his sister's Gillette Venus.

Moving to London and landing a job as a features assistant on a leading men's monthly magazine, Douglas had revelled in his smoothness, quickly settling on a signature style of well-fitting jeans, open-necked white shirt, tortoiseshell glasses, hairless jowls and a generous splash of Dior Homme.

For several years, he was totally and completely happy. And then he moved to Shoreditch. Both financially and culturally it was a no-brainer. Shoreditch was *the* place to be – a London mecca of retro bicycles, froyos and MacBook Pros. For Douglas, the realisation that he would need to reinvent himself dawned quickly and with a certain amount of existential

panic attached. Sartorially speaking, he had to go back to the Cock & Bottle.

Denim and cotton gave way to tweed and corduroy. Trainers became brogues. He got himself a waistcoat and a Barbour for wet weather; he spent £100 a month having his hair cut to look as though he would shortly be heading to the Battle of the Somme.

But the beard was where Douglas's fashion-faithful heart sank. Where there was a will, he wasn't entirely sure there would be a way. He looked into having a transplant, even into buying one on Amazon – a sort of merkin for the modern man.

Two years it took him. Two long years before Douglas had managed to grow an impressive enough degree of hipster hirsuteness to hold his head high on the East London Line. It wasn't a Karl Marx covering by any stretch, but it was a beard of which Jack Whitehall might have been proud.

Douglas doted on his beard as if it were a small child or a prize pot plant; he stroked it, talked to it, smoothed it, nurtured it. He even altered his diet to help enhance its wellness – who knew (apart, presumably, from 19th-century gold prospectors) that doubling your protein intake could accelerate hair growth?

When his father's 70th birthday celebrations came around, Douglas had no excuse not to return home, carefully trimmed beard and all. He might even be able – at long last – to hold his hirsute head high.

As he stood outside the pub doors, taking several anxious puffs on his cherry-flavoured vape, he heard the terrifying boom of real-man laughter coming from within. Douglas took a

deep breath, stroked his beard for comfort and walked in. His father – all 6ft4 of him – came over to greet him. Douglas almost didn't recognise him without hid beard.

"Well, will you look at this?" his father

shouted, pulling Douglas's shoulder into his armpit with such force he feared it had been dislocated. "Our Dougie's only gone and finally managed to grow a beard!" Douglas looked around the room at the sea of smooth, amused faces. Not a facial hair in sight. "See lads, I told you beards were for girls these days." **CHLOE FOX**

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