

The Worst Haircut

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I felt the cold stainless steel against my scalp as the scissors snipped deftly at stands of my caramel-brown hair. I tried to sit as still as I possibly could as I stared in the mirror in front of me at the large chunks of hair being cut from my head and fluttering to the tiled floor, the precious hair that had taken years to grow. I was at Perfect Cuts, a nearby barber shop where my mother had taken me to cut my "long, unruly" hair to a "neat, manageable" size. I hoped the woman snipping expertly at my hair would do a good job. I didn't want to go to school the next day looking like I had just rolled out of bed.

My anxious brown eyes watched the mirror in front of me as the woman began working on the back of my head. I recoiled slightly as the sharp blade pricked my neck. The woman seized her spray bottle and squirted some icy cold water onto my hair, then roughly tore a comb through the soft brown strands. I tried not to wince. I wished I had gotten a gentler haircutter.

Mom watched behind us, her dark eyes carefully surveying for even the slightest mistake. The woman continued cutting, ignoring her. "Close your eyes," the woman said sharply, and I squeezed my eyes shut. She snipped at my bangs, and I felt the cold blade pressing against my forehead. "Alright," she said when she was finally finished. "Have a look." Tentatively, I opened my eyes, and let out a gasp as I stared in horror at the mirror. My hair was much too short. It ended about an inch above my chin, and it curled in slightly, so I looked oddly like George Washington in a fancy wig, only my hair was certainly not as fancy. It was awful. My head looked like an oversized orange, round and awkward. Then the horrifying thought came to me that my hair was going to stay this way until it grew back. Tomorrow I would go to school looking like the ultimate loser! And there was nothing I could do about it.

Dismayed, I stared disbelievingly in the mirror. I looked like a whole different person with my new George Washington hairstyle. I was used to my tangle of wild, uncombed hair tumbling messily all over my head. Now, it seemed to me that all my hair had been detached from my head and replaced with an old-fashioned wig. A sense of hopelessness gnawed stubbornly at my stomach. How could I face anybody in this awful haircut?

The whole ride home, I attempted desperately to come up with plans to hide my hair from everybody at school tomorrow, but each idea seemed crazier than the last. Wear a hat? No, hats made me itch. Wear a paper bag over my head? No, I would suffocate. Cut off all my hair and say I had cancer? No, that idea was way too crazy. Hopeless, I gave up trying to think of more and stared dismally out the car window, struggling frantically to hold back my threatening tears. I watched the rain patter softly on the asphalt and knew I would just have to face everybody at school tomorrow. That's the way life is, and you can't change it.

The next morning, I walked to school reluctantly. The feeble golden rays of sunlight penetrating through the misty clouds sparkled reflectively on my hair, my ugly, ugly hair. I tore at the soft chocolate-brown strands ferociously, hoping that somehow my shaking fingers would make it longer, but my hair stayed the same, bouncing back to its new George Washington shape. I wanted to collapse onto the hard, cracked concrete and cry, but I held myself back. How would crying help?

When I arrived at my classroom, I peered inside tentatively. Most of the students were inside, waiting impatiently for the others to arrive. I pulled away from the door. I couldn't go in. I couldn't face them.

Suddenly, Mrs. Taylor, my teacher, saw me standing hesitantly near the doorway. "Why, hello, Emily," she said, smiling crisply at me, her white teeth flashing like pearls. "Lovely new haircut."

I couldn't believe my ears. Timidly, I stepped inside the room. I could feel all the curious eyes of the students on me, prickling me. "Lovely?" I asked shyly.

"Yes, it's beautiful," Mrs. Taylor said, still smiling.

"I thought it was awful," I admitted.

"No, it's not," one student piped up. "It looks really nice. You just think it's awful because you're not used to it."

"You really think so?" I said.

"Of course," another girl smiled. "It's nice."

That's when I knew that maybe my awful haircut was not so awful after all.