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One Small Change

By: Danny Wainwright

Sunny days seemed to be growing more popular as we headed into summer. Today was also sunny, like the day before, mind the few clouds scattered about in the sky. The sun laid a blanket of heat over my body, causing me to sweat a little but I didn't pay much attention to the sensation. Instead, I was more focused on what I had planned for the day. The summer breeze danced itself through my long hair, twisting it and twirling it in some way as if it was jealous of the gold color I was gifted at birth. Many people had expressed to me throughout my life just how pretty they thought my hair was; Even my best friend, Leila, who I was walking with now. The bell had just rung a few minutes ago and we were exiting from the gates at the front of the school. "You excited?" Leila asked me. I nodded, a sliver of a smile crawling across my lips to hide how nervous I really was. I was excited, yes, but also scared.

I was pulled from my train of thought when my sister's car pulled out in front of us in the school parking lot. Had we already walked that far? I must have been lost in my own head longer than I thought. Leila opened the back door while I got into the front passenger seat. I tucked my hair behind my ear, tossing my backpack between my ankles on the floorboard. My sister had begun saying something to Leila, commenting on her new hair color, when I butted in.

"How short are you gonna cut it?"

My sister looked at me, then down at her long, brown hair. I almost couldn't believe she agreed to this, but I was grateful. Her hair reached down to her mid back and it was similar to my own hair only it was a chestnut brown rather than gold; She'd been growing it out for two years.

"Pretty short." She replied, motioning for me to buckle. I strapped the seatbelt over myself as my sister turned the car around and we left.

It felt like time was moving so slow. Something so simple, a thing most people wouldn't think twice about, yet I felt as if my heart would beat out of my chest. The clock seemed to tick slower than it should have and my palms were slick with sweat.

I hadn't told my mother. That was one of the reasons my sister decided to join me, the other being that I was too nervous to do it by myself. She knew this was something I had wanted for longer than I could remember and she had opened the door for an opportunity to get it, only I didn't know if my mom would exactly be

happy with it. So my sister had proposed the idea of joining me, just in case our mom didn't like it we'd be in the same boat together.

I withdrew from my thoughts. The clock had resumed and I opened the car door, shifting my backpack to the side to get out and stand on the pavement.

I stared at the tall glass windows illuminated by the summer sun. In some way, it made everything seem a little less scary by the appearance of the white cursive print painted onto the glass that read the word 'Salon.'

Leila nudged me, encouraging me to walk inside. I shut the car door and moved on forward to make my way to the front door with her and my sister close behind. We entered the salon and my sister went to the front desk while Leila and I walked past them to meet the salon lady in the back. I went to the same chair I had sat in many times before.

When I sat down I did my best to relax in the chair and looked in the mirror, now noticing the hairstylist walking in my direction behind me. Right on time. She approached me and asked me the usual question while she placed the hair catcher over me and buttoned it over the back of my neck.

"What are we doing today?"

I didn't take any time to retrieve my phone from my pocket and show her a reference picture.

"I wanna go short, like that." I said, holding the picture up to her. She took a moment with a confused look on her face, almost as if she'd never heard of someone wanting to cut their hair short. But, after a moment, her face lightened and her mouth curled into a sweet smile as she nodded. She understood. I slipped my phone back into my pocket, allowing myself to settle into the chair as comfortably as I could and let her get to work.

She turned the chair away from the mirror and I was now looking over at Leila who sat across from me in another chair. I couldn't see myself anymore. I couldn't see what the hair stylist was doing.

Leila seemed as excited as I was. She was happy for me. That was what I had needed for so long. I'd spent a lifetime trying to please those around me who took it upon themselves to be jealous of a physical attribute I had no control over; At least, I never thought I had any control. A few times in my past I had mentioned to my peers and some family members that I wanted to cut my hair short, but all I got in return was shame for not appreciating something most people wished they had. As if it was my fault. Even still, I felt guilty.

That changed though when I had confided in Leila about my want for short hair and instead of tearing me down, she was happy for me. She and my sister celebrated me instead of putting me down. I'd never thought it'd be so simple, but they broke a cycle that I didn't realize had existed.

Leila and I had been conversating about our plans for the next day when she looked up behind me at something the salon lady was holding. She smiled, “Everyone is gonna be shocked when you come to school tomorrow,” She said, before I then heard the quiet buzzing of the shaver behind me. I sat, my body lying in wait as I felt my hair slowly begin to fall against my neck. There was no turning back now.

Leila pulled her phone out of her pocket and held it up towards me to take a picture. I smiled and held up a peace sign as she snapped a memory of this moment in time.

I thought of what I would look like. I wondered if I would look good with my short hair. I let out a breath of air when the buzzing finally stopped. The stylist took out a pair of scissors and began cutting and fixing my bangs. A few minutes passed by before she stepped back, letting me know she was done. I looked up to Leila where she was now standing. We were done already?

I noticed the look on her face and couldn’t contain my smile any longer, “How does it look?” I asked.

“It looks so good.” She replied.

The lady walked behind my chair. I held my breath, feeling as though my whole world was spinning as she spun the chair around. I felt my heart beating again when my reflection came into view. That was when everything stopped. My long hair was gone and was now replaced with short bangs. I stared, in that moment that was all I could do.

I finally recognized the boy staring back at me.

My smile grew wider, “I love it.” I said. I reached up and messed with it, flipping it side to side and running my fingers through its short length as if I was making sure it was real.

“You look great.” I heard my sister’s voice say from behind me. I whipped around, my eyes immediately looking up at her hair. It was short, like mine. Like she said it would be.

I jumped up from my seat and hugged her, feeling her arms wrap around me. I was overwhelmed with a sense of joy. One small thing had changed my life forever.

Just a moment later I pulled away from the hug when the salon lady spoke again, “Your mom’s outside waiting. Nervousness washed over me again and I looked over at my sister. She urged me forward. I allowed my feet to carry me to the other end of the salon with Leila following. I pushed the door open and stepped outside, glancing to my right where I saw my mother’s red suburban. I let out another breath and carried on, walking to the passenger side of the car and tapping on the window.

She looked up from her phone where she’d been reading, her eyes locking onto me. Her face shaped into a look of surprise as she rolled down the window, her

mouth wide open, “Oh my gosh, you chopped it all off.” She exclaimed, opening the driver side door and getting out to walk around the car to me. I looked at her, nervously waiting for whatever she had to say.

She reached her hand out to mess with my hair while she looked over at my sister. “You too?” She said, surprise still scratching at her throat.

I brushed her hand away, “Do you like it?” I asked.

I tried my best to remain calm, my hands fidgeting with the hem of my sleeve. She thought for a moment before smiling softly, “It’s a little short for my liking, but I won’t melt.” She said, “I do think it suits you.” She added, messing with my hair one last time before dropping her hand back to her side.

My worry disappeared and was replaced by relief. I had found myself through one piece of change; It wasn’t the only change to come, but I’d finally found myself.

