

A Mother's Love

"You're getting to be such a big girl. You wanna go to the beauty salon for your haircut instead of me trimming it?" Mama asked me when I was nine. Ever the girly-girl, my long blonde hair always tied with bows or pulled up in ribbons, I delightedly agreed. How exciting to spend a day with my sweet mother, going to where grown-up ladies go for their lovely hairstyles! She said we'd get my hair cut in a "pixie," and I conjured up images of elegant fairies with flowing curls, sprinkling magical pixie dust. I felt on the cusp of a transformation.

As I was seated in that special chair and the nice woman put a cape around my shoulders, I felt like a queen with a personal attendant. She played with my hair, nodding as the queen's mother ordered a pixie. And then the dream ended, the illusion shattered. With a quick click of the shiny scissors, more than a foot of my long locks were gone. I cried out to the mirror, to the woman, to my mother, "Stop! What are you doing!?" My face reddened with anger; my tear-filled, blue eyes stared out in stark contrast.

"You're getting a pixie. Just relax; we can't stop now," said the stranger with scissors. Clip, cut, snip. I metamorphosed into someone I didn't recognize—a boy climbed out of my feminine self as very short hair replaced my tresses. "Don't worry, sweetie. It'll grow back," Mama offered with a conflicted voice that, while sincere, failed to comfort me. Confused, sad, powerless. I cried. I cried all the way home.

Later, I heard my parents talking in strained tones. I couldn't make out the words and it didn't seem like a fight, exactly, but I knew something was wrong. That night I learned my parents were divorcing. I learned Mama cut my hair because she would no longer be there to help me with it, and she didn't know what else to do. She told me she had faith that I would learn to take care of my own hair as it grew out; she trusted I would survive the loss of my hair, her presence. Who was I to doubt her?



A Father's Love

The three children stood like soldiers in a line, a reverse firing squad, on the gold shag carpet. Their disabled father paced, hobbled, on crutches in front of them. They'd thought the worst was over, having learned that their parents were divorcing, having seen their mother move out. Little did they know that the worst had just begun.

He fired on the two elder children first. "Do you want to live with your mom or with me?" Jeff was gray with the apathy of a hurt-too-often child about to turn eighteen and move out. In some sense the question and answer were moot—they both knew that Jeff would choose the father, as it was easier and the time would be short.

Next in the crosshairs was Patty, red with the suppressed rage of an already-too-worldly-wise thirteen-year-old. In some sense the question and answer were moot—she knew that Dad would never let them go. She knew that Mom could barely afford to support herself, let alone any of the children, and that no support would be required from the disabled father. Why fight it? Better to stay to protect everyone.

Then he turned to the youngest girl, Stephanie, telling the nine-year-old, "And you, Little One, if you choose your mom, I'll kill myself." Stephanie, translucent and trembling with the responsibility of the unexpected momentous choice, had thought she would choose her mother. She was too young to know her mom couldn't afford her and old enough to feel bad, surprised, that neither of the other two had chosen Mama; so she'd thought she should and would. But overcome with confusion, with grief, what choice did she really have in the face of her father's admission, his threat?

The father made Stephanie call her mother to report her decision—that she had chosen her dad. Maybe Stephanie had killed a parent that night after all.

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