

The Haircut - Luca Garcia-Kytola

WHAP!!! The teacher slapped her ruler on the blackboard, everyone's sphincter collectively puckered.

"Pay attention, Luca!" She snapped, glaring at me.

"Miss, I've finished." I held my completed work up for the teacher to see, she nodded not-quite-acceptingly. I groaned and fingered my hair, it was loose and reached my shoulders, well, it would until midday. I glanced over at my friend Jemma, she was looking at me encouragingly.

"It's okay to be nervous y'know," she comforted, turning back to her work. I sighed.

"I know, that's why I am." I replied half-heartedly.

"You're brave," she said.

"S just a haircut." I said, going back to doodling in my margins, it's not like I'd never had a haircut before, heck I cut thirty centimetres off in year 4 just because I wanted to. *This is no different*. I told myself, fully aware that if it was no different, I wouldn't be telling myself so.

What if I didn't really raise as much money as I'd thought I would?

That was my primary concern. Sure, I was a little worried about my appearance, but when you decide to shave your hair and the whole school knows about it, there's no backing out. Looks were the least of my worries.

What if I cried in front of my whole school?

I groaned disruptively, earning a glare from my teacher. She shot daggers out of her eyes, looking over the top of her laptop screen. We had suspicions that she was just watching 'The Titanic' on her laptop. I snickered quietly at the thought and ran a hand through my hair again.

"Stop doing that or I'll take all of your money and melt it into a toe ring for my dog," Jemma deadpanned, gesturing at my hair. I returned her look.

"Bold of you to assume that I have money."

"Funny."

"I thought so." I turned my head to one of the many windows and stared past the trees. I checked the clock. 9:30. I sighed *again* and flicked through my workbook, looking for incomplete work.

I checked the clock.

9:34.

I tapped my fingers on the table and received a few annoyed glances.

I checked the clock.

Again.

9:40.

Had time turned to tar or something? I resumed my pencil tapping and waited it out until the next load of work was given.

I'd been called down to organise the cake stall at about 10:40. I carried a few plates of cupcakes out from the hall to the row of plastic tables that had been set up. I placed them down with an underwhelming *crash*.

"Feeling nervous?"

"Are you grumpy or is it your face?"

"I'm pretty sure my mum gave me money to give to you."

"You excited?"

"Did you choose to do this?"

I must have gotten a comment from every person manning the cake stall by the time recess hit. And boy was I glad when recess hit, everyone was too distracted by the children flooding out of their classrooms to bother pestering me.

Recess was over before I knew it, the initial stampede of kids coming to get their fill of cakes (very) slowly died down to a gradual lull of already sugar-filled kids coming back for fifths.

The general ambiance of the playground was enough to stop my jitters, with kids screaming and hurling hula hoops in your direction, it's hard to feel nervous. The bell rang just as I sold my last cake to a hungry eight-year-old. I watched on as the whole school sat down in lines under the school cola instead of heading off to class. My father had arrived at the school, clippers in hand, a few minutes prior to now and had placed a chair at the front of the crowd. That chair was for none other than me.

The kids' chatter didn't die down as I abandoned my station at the cake stall. It grew. I stepped over and around kindergarteners to reach my chair. I saluted Dad as I sat down. He tied the hairdresser's cape around my neck and waited for the principal to quieten down the assembly. Soon, all that I heard was the steady buzz of the clippers.

Regrets instantly flooded my mind.

Did I raise enough money?

What if the clippers break?

And before I knew it, I had hot tears rolling down my cheeks as the clippers made their first contact. I didn't know why I was crying but I felt the tears make wet tracks down my cheeks and fall to my lap. The chant that had started off as one child grew close to thunderous as more and more of my hair fell to the ground.

It didn't matter if I didn't reach my money raising goal.

It didn't matter if everyone hated my hair afterwards.

And it certainly didn't matter that I was crying in front of my whole school.

The money that I had raised would help fund research into cures for leukemia. At the end of the day I raised \$1080, not much compared to what other people had raised. But it was enough to give a regional family a free place to stay close to treatment for a week. And that was enough for me.