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The Hair King Experience

by

Narayan V. Subramoniam, Georges Vanier Secondary School, North York

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The presence of amphibians in an area tells a lot about the overall health of the entire ecosystem. Chemical pollutants, human intervention, and other stresses can result in your neighbourhood's newts and frogs (rather unwillingly) to croak. Similarly, the mood and mental health of a barber is the best indicator imaginable of a society's well being, or lack thereof. Let me now back it up.

But allow me to back up farther and give a bit of background. In what could arguably be called a borough, but is in all honesty an ordinary run-of-the-mill area, is where my school, Georges Vanier is situated. The area, quite famously, is called "The Peanut" by its youthful denizens and "a wonky roundabout" by the chronologically experienced. These fascinating names arose due to the peculiar road structure which surrounds my school; namely a wonky peanut-shaped roundabout. On the southern tip of this gloriously crafted peanut, lies the little shop called Hair King.

Quaint is putting it politely and cramped is naming it rightly. It seems as if they took the definition of shoulder room, took it into an alley, beat it, and then put back the remnants back into their dictionary. This is apparent because, the room is always packed shoulder to shoulder to head (there are small children as well). Necessity has forced the inhabitants of Don Mills to arrive at Hair King due to its pauper-friendly prices. Decor-wise, the walls are the colour of cream atop a layer of milk that has somehow gained sentience and decided that orange is the new

white, and the floor has followed suit. Mirrors take their positions on walls where posters of hairstyles that were considered modern when the word “modern” was invented do not. Despite their esoteric taste in decor, the place is immaculately clean and nine out of ten neurosurgeons agree that they could operate on the same chairs that the barbers use for their art.

Now, we have arrived on the chair where the magic happens. Yet again, one must note that despite the tennis-court green chair’s rickety nature, it is pristine. On this chair, the customer is seated, but not greeted. They are met with a neck cloth that has certainly been used to cover the eyes of calves before slaughter, along with a spotless body cover, that has been expertly thrown upon the customer. So far, the artist is silent. She glances at the customer, and although knowing the answer, she asks, “What you want?”. It is in these words that countless essays about the nature of choice can be written; well, at the very least one can be. The questioner has completely removed all needless flowery language, unlike the author of this document. Similarly, I’ve noticed the lack of unnecessary beauty in this small pocket of society. Posters advertising rental spaces have pecks of useful information and nothing more. People are focused on the brevity of paths, or maybe have not found pleasure in beating around the bush. They also do not appreciate avoiding direct questions, deflecting investigative reporting, or refusing to continue the plot.

Following the question, the customer points to one of the hairstyles, and the barber begins her art. She takes the customer’s head without the slightest hint of gentility. One hand holding the head in hiatus, and the other organizing the operation with scissors. Take a moment to reflect. It is in this show of force that the throes of the middle class are felt. Barbers around the world have their own techniques and a measurement of their treatments are an area worth researching. Each grip a statement, each violent head movement a rebellion against submission. And each spray of water is most likely, just a spray of water.

The barber swivels the chair with an experience that is utterly uncanny. She knows each jarring motion the chair will make, and compensates her strokes for it. Thinking four, five moves ahead, playing a sport that is equal parts chess and jujitsu. It is as if we have become our tools, having attached themselves mentally long before we strapped them on our heads, legs, and wrists.

Extensions of metals that jut out awkwardly to the untrained eye but move with an attuned grace of a ballerina who has perfected her craft on the surface of some distant moon.

Before you know it, the deed is done. The artist is completely satisfied in their work and as a formality, picks up a mirror that had been sitting in some shelf and places it just behind the customer's head. Barely recognizing the purpose of this newfound hindsight, even that is gone. The end has come quick and suddenly, akin to a play whose playwright thinks five acts is four too many. She has left no room for petty concepts like suggestions or requests. This explains the trough of constructive criticism that the community has found itself in. Students receive report cards confused, unknown of its purpose. Suggestions on following grammatical conventions, and keeping the reader's attention in mind, have been thrown without.

The cloth-stripped and violently brushed customer now walks to the counter where in bold typeface it is written, "**HAIR CUTS ONLY \$8**". The customer hands a 10\$ bill to the artist. They exchange glances, one expecting TTC fare back and the other expecting them to walk away. The pressure builds up, like the inner chambers of a diving apparatus sinking to the depths of impoliteness. After a long gaze, the customer sighs and walks the long way home.