

Years 9 & 10
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Year 10, John Calvin Christian College

Crew Cut

The bell on the front door of *Maggie's Hair Salon and Barber* jangled loudly. A middle-aged man with greying hair stepped through the door.
“Morning! Do you have a booking?” Nadia, a fifteen-year-old apprentice, asked. She stepped towards him, tucking her scissors into her apron pocket.
“I’m Charles Dalley. I have an appointment for uh . . . nine?” he spoke with a low, gruff voice and he was well-built, tall, and strong. But his shoulders were slouched, and bags shadowed underneath his eyes. Looking him over, Nadia had a feeling there must be something weighing him down, something burdening him.
“Where do you want me to sit?” Charles asked, shuffling on his feet and pulling Nadia from her thoughts.
Nadia smiled at Charles and tucked a stray blonde lock behind her ear.
“Just over here.” She led him to the red, round chair.

Charles took his seat, the chair squeaking as he sat down, and waited as Nadia clipped the gown around his neck. It was itchy and tight at his collarbone. He breathed in sharply and shifted in his seat.
“So, are you keeping with the same style, Mr. Dalley? Crew cut? Or are we getting a new one?” Nadia asked, pulling his head slightly back to examine his dark hair. Her fingers felt cool against his skin.
“Same please,” Charles spoke, his voice cracking on ‘please’. His stomach rolled with unease. Haircuts were a reminder of having his head shaved back when he was in the army. Those days were so long ago, almost five years now, but Charles still remembered them as clearly as though they were yesterday. It was a constant pulse in his mind. The memories and flashbacks came so quickly, so uncontrollably. Like a nightmare he couldn’t wake up from.
Charles watched as Nadia took her razor off of its charger, humming as she went. There was a tiny snap as she flicked it on.
Click.
Guns clicked into place. A heavy smell hung in the air.
Dirt.
Blood.
Head spinning.
The bitter taste of blood filled his mouth. A body lay on the ground.
No.
Not David . . .
It was his fault.
He should have taken that bullet.
But it was too late.
Another bang of a gun and pain rippled through his chest. Shirt soaked with blood.
Dizziness.
The gun shots kept going.
Black smoke surrounded him, choking him with the thick scent.

He had to get out . . .

“Mr. Dalley?” Nadia’s voice broke through the flashback. “Are you alright?” she asked.

She clutched the razor, her knuckles white. Charles closed his eyes as dizziness gripped him. The memory surrounded him, a prison with no escape. His teeth chattered violently. His body shook. It was his fault that David had died. *His fault.* Gunshots echoed in Charles’ mind like a jarring, screeching song playing on repeat. The haunting melody continued; the nightmare that wouldn’t stop.

“Should we have a rest? Finish it later?” Nadia asked gently, touching him lightly on the shoulder. Charles, still breathing heavily, felt anger suddenly pulse through his veins. He stood up, whirled around, and roared at Nadia.

“Leave me ALONE!” the yell echoed around the room.

Nadia stepped back quickly. Her shoe scuffed on the linoleum and knocked the razor, which tumbled to the ground with a loud crash. Charles’ arms thrashed out, shoving Nadia against the bench. Anger blinded him, making him unaware of what he was doing. Nadia gasped as she struggled to keep her balance. She grabbed onto a chair, tears beginning to stream down her cheeks. Charles’ mind was overtaken. Overtaken by a monster, a monster that needed to escape. A roar of anger erupted from his mouth. Gasping and screaming from the customers followed. Charles tugged hard at the hairdressing gown around his shoulders. All he could see was red. Red like the blood that covered David, red like the anger and pain that filled his mind. With another yell, the button popped off loudly and the gown fell to the floor with a soft whoosh. It was silent in the salon, only the sound of Charles’s heavy breathing remained. *His fault.* Charles, overcome with utter exhaustion, crumpled to the floor, shaking with sobs. His shoulders shook silently as he crouched on the hair-spattered floor.

Sadness surrounded him; a heavy smoke filled with misery. The anger had rushed out of him in a tidal wave, but now all he felt was empty. The war was always with him, always taunting and tormenting him. Would he ever wake up from the nightmare? Charles felt a gentle touch on his back. Hands lifted him to his feet. He heard voices speaking to him, asking him questions, but he was too weary to answer. He felt as though he was watching himself from afar.

“Who should we call to bring you home?” an older woman spoke softly.

Charles mumbled a response.

“Frank Dalley, my brother.”

Charles watched as they made arrangements for Frank to come. His heart was raw, his voice hoarse from yelling. Nadia came over towards him, and stood next to him, leaning against the bench.

“What happened?” she spoke, her voice almost in a whisper. Charles could see tears glazed in her eyes. He glanced down at his tightly folded hands and took in a shaky breath.

“I was back in the war.” Charles’s voice was barely audible, and it cracked with emotion. Nadia was silent for a moment.

“Are you in the army still?”

“No. It’s been five years.”

“And you still go back to it?” Nadia thought for a second. “In your mind?”

“It never leaves,” Charles whispered, his voice cracking again and his dark eyes filling with tears.

“Like a nightmare that I can’t wake up from.”

“You’re not there anymore, Mr. Dalley. You have to wake up now,” Nadia said softly, touching his rough hand.

“I-I can’t . . .” tears ran down Charles’s cheeks, his shoulders silently shaking. He knew he had to do something. Nadia was right. He needed to escape his memories. He needed to break free.

The bell jangled at the front of the salon. Frank was here. Charles straightened, pulled out a fifty-dollar bill, and handed it to Nadia.

“For all the trouble,” he spoke. Nadia smiled.

“You don’t have to do tha –”

“Please,” Charles said softly. His smile was creased with sadness.

Nadia nodded slowly and took it from his hands.

“Maybe I’ll see you again one day, sir,” she said, smiling kindly at him. He nodded back, his face unreadable.

“Perhaps.”

Charles stepped out of the door.

Two Years Later

“Alright, that’s all finished for you!” Nadia said, unclipping the hairdressing gown. Her client took a look in the mirror.

“Oh, beautiful! Thank you!” the woman exclaimed, grabbing her purse and walking to the counter.

Nadia smiled, glad to be almost done for the day. As she began to sweep up the hair, she found herself thinking about Mr. Dalley again. Charles.

“I wonder whatever happened to him,” she murmured under her breath.

She had thought about it a lot in the past two years. The event that had occurred in this very shop never left her mind for more than a few days. Nadia had even done research, trying to figure out if there was any such mental illness that caused what Mr. Dalley had gone through. She had found there was. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, if she remembered correctly. She had read that it often happened with people who had been through abuse, an accident, a disaster, and who had been in war or the army. Nadia hoped with all her heart that Charles had found this out himself, found that what he was experiencing was something that with help of professionals, he could free himself from. Nadia hoped ever so much that he had gotten help, and that he was doing okay.

The bell jangled and Nadia looked up from her sweeping. As the door swung shut, Nadia gasped. She quickly tucked the broom next to the counter, hurrying to the front door where a middle-aged man stood. A smile broke out on her face as she took in the familiar figure. He was no longer hunched over and tired-looking. His hair was longer, his face a little older but he seemed less burdened. Less weighed down by sorrow and pain.

“Hi, do you have a booking for a haircut today?” Nadia asked, unable to keep from smiling. The man nodded.

“It’s Charles Dalley,” he smiled. “I have an appointment for four?”

“Of course, sir.” Nadia took his hand with a grin. “Right over here.”
Charles took his seat and Nadia clipped the hairdressing gown around his neck.
“Crew cut?” Nadia asked. Charles nodded. Nadia flicked the razor on. *Click*.