

The Red Wig

“If only I hadn’t bought the red one.” Christie Maguire repeated the same lament to her friend Sarah Sims for how many times Sarah could not have said.

“I know, I know, but you did, and we’re here now, so forget about it and let’s enjoy the evening. Have fun.”

“How can I forget about it? People are always pointing and laughing. Charlie Brown had a crush on the little redheaded girl. Why can’t someone have a crush on me with my red hair?”

“Maybe you got one that was too red,” Sarah suggested. “Surely the hair salon had some that were not so flaming red. Or how about a blonde wig?”

“No, not blonde. Half the girls in our class are blondes. I didn’t want to be like all of them - just one more peroxide blonde. I’m glad you have your natural brown hair Sarah, not bleached. Mine would still be brown too if it weren’t for that darned old cancer and chemotherapy I had to have. I prayed long and hard that the chemo wouldn’t make my hair fall out, but it did anyway.

“Yeah, I guess I could have gotten a different color wig but for some reason this one caught my fancy. My mother tried to talk me out of it, but I just had to have it. The lady at the hair salon said all sales are final and she won’t exchange it now that I’ve worn it for a couple of weeks. She said she could try to dye it, but she hasn’t had very good luck with that and wouldn’t guarantee the results. She said it might just ruin it and then I would have to buy a new one, which I can’t afford. I guess I’m just stuck being a flaming redhead for the next few months until

my hair grows out enough that I don't need a wig anymore."

"Keep on feeling sorry for yourself if you must, but I'm going to have some fun. It isn't every day that a girl's best friend's twin brother wins the school award for "Outstanding Defensive Player of the Year." You should be proud of Danny and helping him celebrate tonight."

"I am, I guess. It's just ..."

"Christie Maguire. You should be ashamed of yourself."

"It's not because of Danny. It's because of being here with half the school and me with this stupid red wig on. Everybody's pointing and laughing. 'Hey everybody, run. It's Christie. She'll set you on fire!'"

"It's not that bad."

"Seems like it," Christie said.

Sarah leaned forward to be sure she had heard Christie's reply.

Six months earlier

In the office of

Dr. Paul Coleman, Cancer Specialist

Christie and her mother, Maureen Maguire, anxiously but wordlessly sat in Dr. Coleman's office to

receive the results of the battery of tests he had ordered performed on Christie over the past two weeks. Christie had not been feeling well for several months so the doctor had ordered an extensive battery of tests, the results of which Christie and Maureen were now so anxiously awaiting.

Christie broke the silence. “Mother, what if it really is cancer? Will I have to have chemotherapy? Oh Mother.” Christie began to sob and buried her face in her mother’s chest.

“Oh Christie, dear, I know you’re afraid, but let’s wait until we hear what the doctor has to say. It may not be that bad. Let me dry your tears.” Maureen got out a handkerchief and began gently daubing Christie’s face.

Dr. Coleman came into the room and smiled warmly at the daughter and mother duo. “Good morning, ladies, Christie and Mrs. Maguire.”

“Let’s get right to it doctor,” Christie said. “Do I have cancer?”

Dr. Coleman’s bright smile faded, and he looked at Maureen with a question in his eyes.

“Please doctor, yes or no and if it’s yes, what are our options,” Maureen asked.

“I’m afraid the answer is, ‘Yes, Christie has the early stages of leukemia, a form of blood cancer,’ but we have caught it very early and...”

Christie's loud cry of anguish interrupted the doctor.

Dr. Coleman let Christie cry for a two full minutes before speaking. "Christie, I'm so sorry to have to bring you this news, but leukemia is treatable and having caught it so early you should make a full recovery. And you are in perfect health in every other way. We can get you started on chemotherapy right away to start fighting this thing. I have every confidence you will make a full recovery and a year from now this will all be like just a bad dream."

Dr. Coleman continued to explain the intricacies of Christie's treatment. "I will schedule your chemo treatments to begin as soon as possible – probably next week. You will be contacted by the chemo lab to set up a specific date and time."

"Will I lose my hair during the chemo treatments?" Christie asked.

"Most likely you will," the doctor answered.

Christie buried her face in her hands and sobbed softly.

Christie and Maureen had a few more questions for Dr. Coleman then left for home. The chemo lab called and Christie's treatments began two days later. "Will I lose my hair?" she asked the chemo technician.

"Almost assuredly," came back the answer. "You will want to get a wig and we recommend

Millie's Hair Salon on Broadmoor Boulevard. Millie is a very talented hair stylist and can help you select a wig to suit your style and tastes."

Two weeks later as Christie was brushing her hair before school, her hairbrush was filled with her soft brown hair. A few minutes later she ran her fingers through her hair and there was little doubt that they were covered with hair. She called across the house, "Mother, it's time to go visit Millie. My hair is definitely coming out now." Christie called Millie's and made an appointment for that afternoon after school.

Maureen met her daughter at the door that afternoon when Christie got home from school. "I'm sorry but something has come up at church that needs my attention and I can't go with you to the hair salon. You can take my credit card and go ahead now or we can go together tomorrow."

"I'd like to get this moving so I'll go ahead now," Christie told her mother.

"Very well then young lady," Millie, the salon's proprietress greeted Christie after she explained why she was alone. "What did you have in mind? I understand from our conversation this morning that you probably will lose most of your hair due to chemo treatments. I'm so sorry to hear that, but we will try our best to help you through the experience. Would you like a wig that matches your natural hair as closely as possible? That is what most of my customers want;

to make the change as unnoticeable as possible. On the other hand, some people want to take this opportunity to try out something different; a new style. After all, it will only be for a few months, hopefully, until your cancer is cured, your chemo is no longer needed, your hair grows back and you don't need the wig any more."

"I think I'd like to try something different. Most of the girls at school have either brown hair like mine or they have bleached it blonde; you know, peroxide blondes. I was thinking of red. I'd like to be a redhead."

"Now that would be a change. Are you sure?" Millie asked.

"Can we try some and see what they look like on me?"

"Of course." Millie left and returned several minutes later with an armload of boxes. "These boxes all have wigs of varying shades of red. Let's start with this one. It's an auburn shade of red."

"No, that's nearly brown. I want red, red," Christie said.

"Okay, try this one," Millie said and pulled a wig from the last box she had brought out. "How's that?"

Christie put the wig on and looked at herself from all angles in a mirror. "That's better, but I'd like

one that is even redder. Is this the reddest wig you have in the whole store?”

Millie rolled her eyes and grimaced. “No, I have one more that was ordered as part of a costume – Halloween, I think – but was never picked up. It’s real red. I could trim it to make it a regular hair style. I’d even make you a special price, but I warn you, it’s really, really red.”

Millie got the wig and Christie tried it on. One look at herself in the mirror and Christie knew she had found her hair and could not wait for the rest of her hair to fall out so she could start being a redhead fulltime. “I’ll take it,” Christie said and handed her mother’s credit card to Millie.

“Thank you. Just remember that all sales are final and we cannot exchange it once you leave the store.”



Two Weeks Later

Christie’s First Day At School Wearing Her Red Wig

“Omigosh! Christie! Is that you?” It was Anita Sims, one of the most popular girls in the senior class in the school. “What happened to your hair?”

“I grew some new hair. Like it?”

“Like it? You kidding? I’ve heard of people dying their hair before, but this is ridiculous. Hey everybody! Come see the reddest redhead in school! In town! In the world, maybe!” Soon a small crowd of high school students had gathered around Christie, Anita and the other kids. It seemed to Christie that they all were laughing and joking about her beautiful new wig. She reached up to yank it off but remembered that would leave her bald – a condition she dreaded more than her classmates’ ridiculing.

Christie reached up with both hands and tried to cover as much of her head as she could as tears gushed from her eyes and she dashed for the nearest open door into the school building. The day’s classes had not started yet and fortunately the first person she ran into was Mrs. Butler, the school nurse and counselor, who listened very attentively to Christie’s story. She advised Christie to wear a heavy scarf over her head, keep a stiff upper lip, and try to ignore everyone who made fun of her; unless she could find some way to get another wig. Christie assured Mrs. Butler that she could not afford another wig so she was just going to have to live with it.

School became a Living Nightmare for Christie Maguire.



The Night of the School Athletic Awards

“Come on, Christie. They’ve made all the awards, Danny got his, pretty soon they’re going to dim the lights, the band will start playing and the dancing will start,” Sarah said. “That’s when the fun will really start.”

“Maybe for you, but not for me. I’m ready to go home. Let’s go.”

Just then the lights dimmed and the band started playing. Couples got up and began to dance on the gym floor. After the third number started playing, Charley Levy walked over and asked Sarah to dance a slow number with him.

After that song was over, Christie felt someone sit down beside her. It was Bobby Dodson, who had just won the award for Outstanding Lineman of the Year. “Hi Christie. I’m Bobby Dodson. Wanna dance?”

“Sure,” she said as she got up.

It was another slow number which gave them a chance to talk. “Congratulations,” she said.

“Thanks.”

They continued to talk about the evening’s activities, the band, some of their mutual friends, and other things until he surprised her by saying, “I absolutely love your red hair.”

Christie stopped dancing, took a step backward and said, “Do you really? You’re the first person to say that!”

“Oh, I do. I’ve been wanting to tell you that since the first time I saw you with it.” He pulled her to him and kissed her.