

The Reveal

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When I first started working at the firm three years ago, I was assigned to work with one of the shareholders. Typically a legal assistant will be assigned to work with two or three attorneys. I have always worked with Sam, one of the partners, but I've kind of floated from attorney to attorney as my secondary. For some reason, every associate I am placed with is either fired or quits. I would take it personally, except, I was never really all that sad to see these associates go. Also, they *always* made easy targets for me to make fun of behind their backs because for some reason I am assigned to the outcasts of our law office.

After I had been working at the firm for a short time, I was assigned to our newest hire, Morty. Morty was recently divorced after 25 years of marriage and looked it too. He was a disheveled mess and my heart really went out to him. He came into work with a rumpled suit and a sad story every day. But that's not the first thing you noticed about Morty. The first thing you noticed about Morty was the ridiculous toupee he wore. It was a dark brown, tangled, spiky mess. It was so bad that my friend Mike was convinced it had to be real hair because, "Who would buy something that ugly? No, that has to be just a bad haircut."

But I knew better since I had experience in this arena. My grandfather wore a hair piece for years (45 and counting). He thought he was fooling everyone, but in reality, he was fooling no one. He was in his sixties and sporting a dark brown Elvis/George Jetson masterpiece. The grandkids were all instructed to play along and pretend that somehow this older man had sprouted a beautiful mane of acrylic atop his head. We never spoke about it. We never stared at it. For the most part we did pretty well avoiding it. Except to occasionally ask if he had a haircut recently, but if it was one of those really windy days my cousins and I had the hardest time holding it together as Grandpa's toupee flapped at us frantically from atop his scalp. But for his ego, and because he was Grandpa, we played along and pretended not to notice.

Needless to say, when I started working for Morty, I had experience playing the "Gee, that's a nice haircut" game. Besides, I kind of felt bad for the guy. He was harmless enough and often asked me for dating advice pulling me into his office to show me the newest lady he was attempting to woo on J-Date. He was the kind of guy who would ask advice and then never take it. For example, he asked if he should tell the women he dated if he smoked, to which I advised him yes. He didn't take my advice and then went out on several dates where the women could smell the cigarettes on him from a good six feet away and subsequently he'd never hear from them again. Then he would complain about the sad state of his dating life and why he couldn't find a good woman. He was annoying, but harmlessly so. Besides, he made for

great material when I was amusing the troops at happy hour.

I worked for Morty for about six months. I didn't mind him so much as a person, but he began to get a bit tedious. He'd pull me into his office for an hour at a time to lament his love life, his gout, his divorce and it started to affect the work I did for the other attorney I worked with. It was about this time that I was reassigned to another attorney. One day a few months after the reassignment I walked by his office and he caught my attention:

"Hey, kiddo. Ya got a second?"

"Sure, Morty. What do you need?"

"Well, I have to ask you a question. I need some advice."

I walked into his office and he closed the door behind us. I expected him to ask me for my advice regarding his newest lady friend. However, I was completely unprepared for what he was about to ask and do.

"I've been dating this new girl for a while now," he said. "And well, uh. . . she says . . . Well, let me just ask you," he looked away, looked down at his feet, and then back up and me and said sheepishly, "You know I wear a piece right?"

"Yeah, Morty," I said, knowing he needed to hear this truth. "Everybody knows."

"What? Everybody knows? It's that obvious?" Morty was almost knocked over by this bit of information. He told me that he'd been wearing that hairpiece for 25 years. Not just that he had been wearing *a* hairpiece for 25 years, but that he had been wearing that particular hair piece for 25 years. And he had been under the impression that it didn't look 25 years old.

"Well, shoot. I guess she's right. Listen, I let her see me without it the other night, and she said that I look better without it. But I haven't been without it for so long, I can't be sure. I need your opinion. What do you think?"

That's when he took off the wig, quickly and without warning. It was a Scooby-Doo reveal moment. I was simultaneously embarrassed for him and nervous as well. My immediate response was completely immature: laughter. My face froze as I tried to fight off this impulse and I kept repeating in my head over and over again "don't laugh, don't laugh, don't laugh."

But the weird thing was, that laughter that I was stifling subsided very quickly because the man that stood in front of me without the wig was completely and utterly vulnerable. He had spent the last quarter century of his life with this facade and now, he was laid bare. I remember thinking, "Well, if this isn't some sort of karma, I don't know what is." Because I couldn't make fun of him and I couldn't tease him. The only thing I could do at this point was advise this bald, insecure man in front of me that the hairpiece didn't matter and that he actually *did* look better without it. And he did. He told me that on Tuesday he was going to come into the office without it and swore me to secrecy.

The first person I called when I got back to my desk was my co-worker

Missy. “Missy, you’ll never believe it,” I said. I told her the whole story and she gasped, “No way! You’re kidding?” she exclaimed.

“Nope. Dead serious,” I said. “But listen, he’s going to come into the office on Tuesday without it, and you cannot laugh at him. It’ll crush him and then he’ll put that stupid thing back on his head.”

Through her giggles, she agreed to pass the word on, and shortly after that I got another call from Donna, the office manager.

“How did you keep from laughing?” she asked.

“Well, honestly Donna, it wasn’t that easy at first, but you should have seen how vulnerable he looked standing there with the wig tape on his head. It was kinda sad, and well, I didn’t want to hurt his feelings because can you imagine how hard that was for him? I mean, yeah, it was funny, but you cannot laugh at him on Tuesday!”

Tuesday came and Morty arrived with his brand new shiny head. It was oddly paler than the rest of his face, but still a vast improvement. He sauntered down the hallway completely pretending that he wasn’t terrified.

“Good morning, kid,” he said as he walked by my desk.

“Morning Morty, lookin’ good!” I replied.

Morty went *au natural* for a few more months, but not much longer than his relationship with his lady friend. He told me later that the hair piece was his security blanket and he just couldn’t keep it up. Not long after, Morty left the firm for reasons I am not privy to. I’m a bit more careful now of who I do impressions of at happy hour, who I gossip about and who I gossip with. Because sometimes they reveal their vulnerability and humanity and occasionally I’m left feeling like a heel for mocking someone who is just a person doing the best they can. If only they didn’t continue to give me such good material.