



My Hair ... My Marriage

Felecia Pearson Smith

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Different hairdos reflect the author's continuing journey in her life and marriage.

Felecia Pearson Smith draws a sometimes-successful comparison between her hairstyles (with all their dos and don'ts), the various stages in her life, and the process of marriage in *My Hair...My Marriage*, a somewhat cursory narrative.

Smith contends that the ten hairdos she has sported in her lifetime, and the trials and tribulations afforded by each, parallel her thirty-eight years of marriage: "Marriage, like hair, requires making a decision about what you are willing to go through to get the end result." Some of the hairdos provide clear comparisons. Smith's experience with her first perm and the use of hair relaxer cream, for example, taught her that "no matter what you do to your hair, it is still a process." Smith makes the comparison that "a good marriage is also a process."

The metaphor often works, as with the cornrows Smith showcased at the end of her college years. The cornrows required work and tenacity to complete the intricate process of braiding. The author, who has a very tender head, wanted to cry during the process, but was determined to have what she believed was a "really cool hairstyle," so she struggled through the pain and difficulties. The result, though it continued to give her a headache, was a beautiful style she wore with pride. While the comparison between working hard to create the hairdo and working hard on the marriage is clear, often the basic conclusion drawn about each hairdo is somewhat repetitive: "Marriage is work, and it requires a daily commitment that we will make it, if we choose to."

Though Smith's premise is that her "journey with styles, cuts, and colors runs parallel to [her] marriage over the past thirty-eight years," the narrative actually recalls her hairstyles beginning in her childhood, with memories of her mother's "heavy-handed" way of doing her hair, or of her mother "not feeling the big hair" when she sported an Afro. While Smith offers specific details, such as her husband wanting a lot of sex when they were first married, the relationship is often generalized, and problems are simply described as "challenges" or "stuff," which keeps the reader detached. Smith's details about her relationship with her mother—"the memories of our talks in the kitchen, talks over the shampoo bowl, and the talks in her chair"—often make that relationship more identifiable than her marriage.

The narrative could be made stronger by adding more specifics about Smith's husband and by removing some of the repetition, for example, of the fact that Smith's mother was her beautician. The caricature-like sketch at the beginning of each chapter showing the hairdo being described or a scene from the chapter, such as a mother tugging at her daughter's hair with a hair tool, adds to the personal and informal tone of the narrative.

Another comb-through of *My Hair...My Marriage* to add detail would highlight the true significance of the author's hairstyles and how they reflect her relationships.

MAYA FLEISCHMANN (January 23, 2014)

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