

EMBRACING ME

Written by

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EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - SIDEWALK - DAY

A cross street with a four-way stop.

MACK, 18, black with locks, stands next to a stop sign. A school bus rounds the corner and stops. The doors open.

ZION, 8, a black girl, steps out, a black hoodie over her hair. She walks to Mack. Sweat runs down her forehead.

He gives her a hug.

MACK
Hey, buddy!

She grins as they walk toward their house.

MACK (CONT'D)
How was your day?

ZION
Okay.

MACK
Just okay?

ZION
I don't wanna talk about it.

MACK
Alright. We'll talk about it later.

They walk home.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

They enter. Family photos decorate the area. A neutral-toned couch sits against the wall. A piano sits in the corner.

Zion puts her backpack on the couch.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

They enter. Neutral granite countertops accent a red rug.

ARIEL, 40, black, stirs a pot on the stove.

ZION
Hey, Mommy.

ARIEL
Hey, Baby!

Ariel stops cooking and gives Zion a hug.

Mack sits at the table.

ARIEL (CONT'D)
 Girl, you not hot in this hoodie?
 Mommy got your hair all pretty, and
 you done sweat it out.

Ariel pulls Zion's hood off her head.

Zion backs away, looks down, and fiddles with her thumbs.

ZION
 A boy at school said it looks like
 a bird's nest.

Ariel and Mack's jaws drop.

ARIEL
 Do I need to make a phone call?

MACK
 You want me to beat him up?

Zion lifts her head.

ZION
 No, no, no!

ARIEL
 Boy, you ain't fighting no child.

Mack tsk's.

ARIEL (CONT'D)
 I'ma let it slide this time. Let me
 know if he says anything else.

ZION
 Yes, ma'am. But I was wondering.
 Could I choose a new hairstyle?

ARIEL
 Is this because of that little boy?

ZION
 No. Just want something different.

ARIEL
 Go get your stuff together, and
 I'll do it before I go to work.

Zion skips toward the bathroom smiling.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Zion enters, gets hair products from under the sink, puts a towel on the floor, and grabs a cup off the counter.

Ariel enters.

ZION
Can I have some twisted ponytails?

ARIEL
How many you want?

Zion's eyes light up while she points to her head.

ZION
Two in the front, two in the back.

ARIEL
Okay. Go head and sit down.

Zion does a goofy happy dance.

Ariel laughs.

ARIEL (CONT'D)
Girl, sit down.

Zion kneels on the towel and leans forward.

Ariel reaches for the cup. A PHONE RINGS. She answers it.

ARIEL (CONT'D)
Hello?

Her face goes blank. She rolls her eyes and nods.

ARIEL (CONT'D)
Okay. I'll be there in a few.

Zion looks up at her mom with puppy dog eyes.

ARIEL (CONT'D)
Listen, baby, Mommy has to leave earlier than she thought.

ZION
But--

ARIEL
Baby, Mommy needs to go. Maybe I'll do your hair tomorrow, okay?

Zion looks down.

ZION

Okay.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ariel passes Mack on the couch as she exits.

ARIEL

Baby, they need me at work early.
Watch your sister please.

MACK

Yes, ma'am.

Mack walks to the bathroom and sees Zion sitting against the cabinets hugging her legs.

MACK (CONT'D)

Think I can give it a shot?

Her eyes light up as she grins.

ZION

Really?

MACK

Heck, yeah, really!

ZION

Alright. Can you grab my comb out
my backpack on the couch?

He walks to the couch, unzips her backpack, and sees an invitation: "Come to My Slumber Party!" He pulls it out, grabs an orange wide tooth comb, and heads to the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

He enters and holds up the envelope.

MACK

You goin to a slumber party?

ZION

That silly thing? I'm not going.

MACK

What! Why?

Zion looks down and fiddles her thumbs.

ZION
I don't look like the other girls.
I feel like I don't belong.

Mack's eyes tear up while he hugs her. He lifts her chin.

MACK
Well, I think you're the most
beautiful girl in the world.
Plus, it'll be fun.

ZION
Okay, Okay. I'll go. Oh, and
beautiful is not a word.

MACK
Well, it is now.

They laugh.

MACK (CONT'D)
Now, let me wash this hair.

She leans over the tub and he shampoos and rinses her hair.

Soap splashes her eyes and she hollers. She reaches to the side of the tub and grabs a towel to pat her eyes.

MACK (CONT'D)
Come on now. I'm almost done.

She leans over the tub. He adds conditioner and rinses.

She grabs the towel, pats her eyes, and tosses the towel over the back of her shoulders.

ZION
Mommy combs it out while it's wet.

She grabs the comb off the counter and hands it to him.

MACK
Okey-dokey.

He grabs a stool from in front of the sink and sits down.

She sits on the floor in between his legs and leans back.

ZION
Hold my hair close to the root
before you start combing.

MACK

Girl, I got this. Now, I see Mommy
put a part down the middle--

He parts her hair and holds each section as he combs it out.

She winces and let's out a holler.

ZION

Watch it. I'm tender headed.

He sighs and combs softer.

ZION (CONT'D)

You gotta do it like Mommy does it!

MACK

Okay, look, you wanna just wait and
have Mommy finish it tomorrow?

Her face goes blank. She rolls her eyes.

ZION

The slumber party is tomorrow. And,
Mommy's gonna wanna take a nap when
she gets back in the morning.

MACK

Well, you gotta work with me now.

He finishes combing her hair.

MACK (CONT'D)

So, what style did you want?

Zion's eyes light up as she points to her head.

ZION

Twisted ponytails. Two in the front
and two in the back.

MACK

Got it. Let me pull up a tutorial.

He grabs a phone out of his pocket.

MACK (CONT'D)

Youtube bout to be my best friend.

He finds a tutorial and parts her hair into four sections.
The comb gets stuck. He wiggles it until it comes out. He re-
tangles her hair.

Zion leans away from him.

ZION
Stop! Stop!

MACK
Hold still now!

ZION
Can you just straighten it? I don't
want this style anymore.

He takes a step back and sighs.

MACK
You sure that's what you want?

ZION
That's how the girls wear their
hair. They always looks so pretty.

MACK
You're pretty, too, you know.
Scratch that. Beautiful.

ZION
Alright. I'm beautiful. Fabulous.
Gorgeous. Now, straighten my hair--

MACK
You gone keep yelling at me?

ZION
No. No. I promise.

MACK
Okay. I gotta find a video first.

He finds a tutorial. He combs out her hair and parts it.

ZION
Wait. I need to grab Mommy's spray.

She grabs the spray from under the sink and hands it to him.

He sprays her hair as he straightens it to the last section.

MACK
Gotta use the bathroom. Hold this.

He has her hold the flatiron while the section of her hair
stays clamped in between. He runs out of the room.

Zion stands, looks in the mirror, and smiles.

Smoke rises off the iron. She screams when she sees that half the section is gone. She bursts into tears.

Mack sprints in, sets the iron on the counter, and hugs her.

MACK (CONT'D)

You're okay. You're okay. Hey. Hey.
Listen to me. Breathe. Breathe.

She sniffles and takes a few deep breaths.

He wipes her eyes.

MACK (CONT'D)

I can fix this.

She sniffles and looks in his eyes.

ZION

You can?

MACK

Of course. I've seen this in those
salon movies Mommy watches. Now,
the hairdresser normally does
something that's gonna sound a
little scary, ok?

Zion's eyes widen.

ZION

What?

MACK

I gotta cut it.

Zion steps back.

ZION

What! No!

He pulls her close.

MACK

It's okay. We can do it together.

ZION

Together? What do you mean?

MACK

I have to cut the rest to the same
length as the short piece. Then wet
it so it goes back to normal.

Zion looks down.

ZION

Okay.

He lifts her chin.

MACK

But, listen. I'ma cut mine too.

ZION

You're gonna cut your locks?

MACK

It's not the end of the world. Yo
big bro gone be fine either way.

They laugh. He kneels down and holds her hand.

MACK (CONT'D)

Can I tell you somethin'?

ZION

Yeah.

MACK

You know why Mommy named you Zion?
In Hebrew it means, "highest
point." When you were born, she was
at her lowest point. She felt that
all the beauty she ever had was
lost. You became the highest point
of beauty in her world.

She smiles while tears fill her eyes.

MACK (CONT'D)

At your purest form, you had all
the beauty one could ever pray for.
So, whether your hair is long or
short, thick or thin, straight or
curly, none of that matters because
beauty isn't defined by your
appearance. Your real beauty is in
here.

He taps on her chest.

ZION

Wow. She never told me that.

He stands up.

MACK

So, what do you say. You trust me?

ZION

Yeah.

MACK

Ahhh. Okay. I'll go first.

He pulls open a drawer, grabs a pair of hair scissors, looks in the mirror and takes a deep breath.

Zion's face scrunches up.

He cuts his locks, sighs, then looks at her.

MACK (CONT'D)

You ready?

ZION

Just get it over with.

He puts her hair in a ponytail, cuts it to the same length as the short piece, fills the cup, and rinses her hair.

Her hair shrinks back to it's natural state. She stands, grabs a towel, and throws it over her shoulders.

They turn around and face the mirror.

He grabs the leave-in-conditioner and rubs it in her hair. He opens a drawer, grabs a Denman brush, and brushes her hair.

MACK

If those girls don't wanna be your friend because it looks like this, trust me, you don't want friends like that.

She touches her curls while he brushes the last section.

MACK (CONT'D)

Cause, baby, these curls are stunning! That's on, period! Okay!

She laughs, looks in the mirror, does a goofy happy dance, and hugs her brother.