
Before I Knew It

On barbershops, print shops, a song,
and the doors that stay open.

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A companion, not a code.*



When to Read This

This is not a text for every moment. It may land differently depending on where you are.

You might find it useful —

When you notice yourself going back to the same places, and you're not sure why.

When you're tired of explaining why something ordinary means so much to you.

When you need permission to trust that a single good experience is enough reason to return.

When you want to remember that not everything needs a spreadsheet.

When you have a place, a song, or a person that entered your life quietly and never left.

You might not find it useful —

In the middle of a crisis that needs immediate, practical help.

When you're looking for a step-by-step plan to build customer loyalty. This is not a marketing insight.

When you're too exhausted to read anything at all. In that case, rest first. These words will wait.

If you are in a survival crisis — without food, shelter, or safety — please prioritize finding immediate, practical help. These words are not made for that kind of storm. They will be here later, if you ever need them.

If your basic freedom to leave, to say no, or to seek help is being taken away — by a person, a group, or a system — these words are not a lifeline. They cannot intervene. They cannot act on your behalf. Please seek out those who can: crisis services, legal advocates, or someone you trust who is physically able to reach you.

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This is a companion for certain moments. Not a manual for all of them. 🌸

Before I Knew It

I have a barbershop I always go back to. Not because it's famous. Not because it's cheap. Not because it's in a convenient location. Just because the first time I went there, the barber didn't rush me, didn't force a conversation, and didn't try to sell me a membership card when he was done.

He just asked what I wanted, cut it quietly, stepped back, looked, and asked: "A little shorter here?" I said yes. He adjusted. Then he said it was done.

I walked out of that shop without the usual relief of "finally, it's over." Just a quiet sense that this was fine. I'd come back.

And I did. Every time I needed a haircut, that shop was the first thing that came to mind. Not because I chose it. Because it had already chosen itself.

There's a print shop too. I went there the first time because I needed something urgently and it was the closest one. Small shop. Old machines. A middle-aged owner who didn't say much.

I handed him a USB drive and said I needed a few pages printed. He took it, looked at the file, and asked: "Are you sure about this format? It might come out crooked." I said I wasn't sure. He said: "Wait. I'll fix it."

He spent a few minutes adjusting it. Didn't charge extra. Didn't say "this is a lot of trouble." Just fixed it, printed it, handed it to me, and said: "Done."

Now I go out of my way to that shop. Not the closest. Not the cheapest. Just the one I want to go to.

And there's a song. I didn't find it. It found me.

I was scrolling one night. A video came up. A young girl was singing. Her voice was clean — no technique, no deliberate emotion. She was just singing. The song was called "本当だよ" — It's True.

I wasn't in a good place that night. Nothing specific. Just gray. And then her voice came through the screen like the first breath of cold air when you open a window in winter — clean, sharp, but not painful.

I didn't suddenly become happy. The gray just became a little lighter.

That song is now in my "play on repeat" list. Not because it has the highest rating. Not because anyone recommended it. Just because the first time I heard it, it landed exactly where I needed it to.

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I never made a rational decision about any of these. I never made a spreadsheet comparing prices, distances, or quality scores. I never asked anyone for recommendations.

I just needed something — a haircut, a print, a moment of quiet — and my brain handed me an answer without asking permission. It remembered how something felt the first time, and it made the choice before I could think about it.

The barber doesn't know I still go back because of how he asked that one question.

The print shop owner doesn't know I take a longer route because he spent a few minutes adjusting a file.

The girl who sang "本当だよ" doesn't know her voice caught a stranger on a low night, and that the song has never left his list since.

I don't know her. She doesn't know me. That's all a stranger can do for another stranger — be there, without knowing, and let the moment do the rest.

I told a friend about the print shop. He went. He came back and said: "It's okay. Just a regular print shop."

I told another friend about the song. He listened. He said: "It's nice, but not as special as you made it sound."

I paused. Then I understood.

They didn't have my first time. They didn't walk in needing help and get it without asking. They didn't hear the song on a night when the gray needed a crack of light.

That's what a first experience does. It decides whether something becomes a thing you compare, or a thing you don't have to think about anymore.

Before I knew it, these places and this song had already entered my "don't have to think" list. Not because they were objectively the best. Because they were there at the right time. And that was enough.



A Note on How to Read This

This story is mine. It is not a standard. Not a test. Not an instruction.

Don't use this story to prove a point. These words are not an argument. They are not a tool to win a conversation, convince someone else, or defend a position.

Don't use this story to measure yourself — not against me, not against anyone else. Your first times are yours. They don't need to look like mine.

Don't mistake this for advice. I am not telling you to go back to a place just because it was good once. I am not telling you to trust your gut over your brain. I am just describing what happened.

They are not professional advice. If these words resonate deeply because you are carrying something heavy — please don't carry it alone. You deserve more than words on a page. You deserve a real person, trained to help, who can sit with you in the dark.

If someone gave you this PDF to prove a point, or to tell you that you should be different — that point is theirs, not mine.

If you finish reading and feel understood, even just a little — then this has done what it was meant to do.

If you feel pushed, pressured, or like you should be something you're not — please put it down.

You are more complex, more alive, and more deserving of specific care than any piece of writing could ever contain.

This is just a slice. You are the whole thing. 🌸

One Last Thing

Maybe one day, I'll look back at this story and see that I oversimplified it.

This was never meant to be a permanent truth. Just a small image I wanted to hold onto — of a barber who asked one question, a print shop owner who fixed a file, and a girl who sang a song called "本当だよ."

The goal was never for you to find your own barbershop, your own print shop, your own song. The goal was for you to notice the ones you already have — the places and moments that entered your "don't have to think" list before you even realized it.

Those are yours. Not mine. 🌸

A single page, taken alone, is not the whole message.

If someone removed this line, they took what wasn't theirs.

This PDF was written to be shared freely, in its entirety.

If it helps someone you know, pass it on. 🌸

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For your own words.