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# Beyond the Blonde

Kathleen Flynn-Hui

Why Pay Retail?, or,

A Hair-Raising Event

I would have to say that it all began – or rather, it all began to end – the morning Faith Honeycomb passed out on the floor of the Jean-Luc Salon. Up until then, it had been a busy day. As in, crazy busy. I was thirty-four years old, but in nearly two decades as a senior colorist, I had rarely a salon so completely insane. The frenzy was brought on by that crowning event in the New York City social season: the Pink and Purple Charity Ball. This particular ball spanned all age groups: Park Avenue dowagers bought their thousand dollar tickets, and invited their granddaughters, who took the afternoon off from Spence or Brearley or Dalton to get their hair done. Socialites arrived by chauffeured Mercedes starting the moment the salon opened, and we were slightly understaffed, because some of the stylists were out making house calls.

All up and down Fifth Avenue, blow dryers were being plugged into wall sockets and hair was being washed in bathroom sinks. Manicurists were spreading towels across laps, and dipping bejeweled hands into bowls, as telephones rang and little dogs scurried underfoot.

“Darling! Where are you?” Pause. “John Frieda? Really.”

This really would be a drawn-out sigh, a pity party for the poor dear who had to be ministered to in public.

“Moi? At home, darling. With the marvelous...what is your name, honey? Oh, never mind. A girl from Jean-Luc who is genius with the blow-dry.”

A house call from a junior stylist at Jean-Luc cost a minimum of five hundred dollars, and a senior stylist could run you a thousand. But some people will pay a lot for their privacy. Like, for example, if you’ve had a face lift, otherwise known as having work done, or, taking a quick trip to Beverly Hills. Some people will go to great lengths to make sure nobody sees the scars.

Anyway, back to poor Faith Honeycomb. What with all the ladies in for their pre-ball primping, there was no indication – no frisson in the air (frisson being an expression that the ladies who frequented the salon loved to use, along with chérie, por qoi, and mon dieu) – that an ambulance would screech to the curb and a squad of EMS technicians with their equipment and squawking radios would invade the plush taupe-and-burgundy inner sanctum of Jean-Luc.

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I was working on Mrs. H. at my station. It was ten forty-five and she was already my third head of the day: a double-process with a chestnut base and golden auburn highlights. Tiffany, my assistant, had wheeled a tray next to me, with tail combs and clips, cotton, extra gloves, and three pots of color, one of which I had a feeling was there by mistake, left over from Mrs. G's Scandinavian blonde highlights.

"Tiff, could you check this?" I asked, pointing to the bowl of thick, white bleach that would – if I hadn't caught it – have turned Mrs. H. into a punk rocker instead of the Park Avenue matron that she was. And that would have been a catastrophe.

Let me explain: there are all sorts of reasons why women pick one colorist over another. Some will go to you if you have the same kind of dog, or because they like the way you look. Some will only go to a man, because they want to feel a man's hands on them. Then, of course, you have the editorial mongrels, who will only go to whoever is in this month's *Elle* or *Allure*. But no matter what brings them to you in the first place, they only keep going to you if you're a good colorist.

Which means, no mistakes. Not ever. Brain surgeons are allowed more mistakes than hair colorists. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that what I do is brain surgery, or in any way important. Between you and me, it's just hair. But a certain kind of woman cares about her hair. A lot.

Anyway, that crisis was averted. Out of the corner of my eye, I watched Tiffany dump the bleach and mix Mrs. H.'s color. She had been out late the night before. It was one of the assistant's birthdays and they had gone club-hopping. I could see her hands shaking as she opened one of Mrs. H.'s foils. I made a mental note to talk to her. She was younger than me, and I could see all the pitfalls, the mess her life was going to be if she wasn't careful. Assistants came, and assistants went. I mean, the pressure was on, and they made, like, no money. They lived on their tips, sometimes for years, hoping and praying that one day they'd hear that magic word: promotion. It was hard. All any of them dreamed of was one day having their name printed on a Jean-Luc announcement and placed by the vase of freesia by the front desk. We are pleased to announce that (insert name here) has been promoted to junior stylist. I should know. I had been one of those lowly assistants myself.

"Sorry Georgia," Tiff whispered over Mrs. H.'s head. Not that Mrs. H. would have noticed. She was deep into the latest issue of *British Vogue*. I peered over her shoulder and saw that she was reading about the new generation of skin creams.

"No problem," I said.

No, it wasn't easy, being an assistant – especially being an assistant at Jean-Luc, the salon-of-the-moment, the epicenter of beautification for all Manhattan women – or really all women of the tri-state area. Come to think of it, geography was meaningless to the Jean-Luc customer – dozens of women flew to New York for the sole purpose of having Jean-Luc himself rake his elegant hands through their hair and pronounce: this isn't working for me...it is too – fill in the adjective: fluffy. How you say...shaggy. You are a beautiful woman. Bee-you-tee-ful. And with a

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blandishment of his famous scissors, a toss of his own long, dark mane: And now, we will create a new you...yes?

I had three clients waiting on the banquette in their burgundy robes (burgundy for color, taupe for cuts and styling) and two others who had just checked in and were getting changed. Jean-Luc had instructed the front desk to book clients for me every fifteen minutes, and even by mid-morning there was a bottle-neck of waiting ladies. Ladies who weren't used to being kept waiting, but nonetheless waited. Patiently. Sometimes for hours. Somewhere in the rules of etiquette it was written that one never, ever got huffy with one's colorist or stylist. Doctors, lawyers, accountants, stock brokers could all be yelled at – and easily replaced – but we at Jean-Luc were golden. They needed us. Mrs. H's formula (and Mrs. P.'s, and Mrs. B.'s., and Ms. A.'s on the banquette) was my little secret, locked in my file box – a small metal box where every single client's formula was recorded on index cards. What each of them would have done for their formula! They would have gone six months without Botox. A year without self-tanner. Please, Georgia, they'd beg, I'm going to be in Aspen all month. What will I do? And part of me was tempted to give it to them. It didn't matter, really. I mean, I could write down their formula, but the minute they gave it to some Colorado hairdresser, it would just turn to shit. It was how the formula was applied that made all the difference.

I saw Mrs. P. on the banquette check her gold Cartier watch. She definitely didn't have the primo appointment of the day. That would have been more like four o'clock. That way, there would have been plenty of time for all those beautifying-but-hair-mussing treatments: the Tracie Martyn electrical current facial. A salt scrub at Bliss, and then a massage from the divine Rebecca at Georgette Klinger. And then, after the oils and the electrical currents, the blow-dry.

Let me give you an idea of the perfect, pre-charity-ball day in the life of a Jean-Luc woman. For argument's sake, let's make her one of the youngish ones, who lives in a twelve-room apartment on East Seventy-something street. First, she would require a very strong cup of espresso at Via Quadronno, the café on East Seventy-Fifth that feels like a quick trip to Milan. This, of course, after dropping the children off at All Soul's pre-school or the Ninety-Second Street Y. This drop-off is, in equal parts, guilt-induced (the nanny does everything else for the rest of the day) and an important social networking opportunity. Where else do movie stars, wives of mini-moguls, heiresses and the occasional scruffy-but-successful artist dad, all mingle together but in the halls of their children's school? After the espresso, back home for a two hour private yoga session. A shower, hair left undone, then a quick dash to the shrink to discuss said guilt about neglecting children, and the ongoing question: to Prozac or not to Prozac? After the shrink, feeling that mental lightness unique to yoga, psychoanalysis, and an empty stomach, a quick stop at Barney's. Damage: \$300 jeans, a \$600 knitted poncho (so Bohemian!) and a pair of antique diamond earrings. Later, the guilt comes roaring back (will have to hide bill for earrings from husband) and she makes her way over to the Jean-Luc Salon. We are her church, her temple, the place where she will be undone, then done. Restored. Brought back to her perfect, radiant self.

Mrs. P. was one of these. I called her The Manhattan. I secretly classified all my clients this way. The Manhattan. The Greenwich. The Bedford. The Long Island. The New Jersey. Even the Boston and the California. But more on that later. I still had the back of Mrs. H.'s highlights to do, but I walked over to the banquette and paid quick respects to my waiting clients.

"Mrs. P.!" Kiss, kiss. As if I had only that moment spotted her there. "Great lip color."

Mrs. P. smiled delightedly. "Chanel," she said. "I just picked it up at Barney's." And then she held up a pale green leather bag with the small silver Prada triangle at its center.

"I just picked this up too, to go with my suit," she whispered conspiratorially. "What do you think, Georgia?"

Seven hundred and ninety-five dollars was what I was thinking. I couldn't imagine spending that kind of money on a bag, but then, I hadn't paid retail in years. I can tell you the exact moment that I realized that I didn't have to. It was when I was still a junior colorist at Jean-Luc, and I had no money, but still, I needed some nice stuff to wear. Clients respect you more if you have a pretty ring on, or a good pair of shoes. It makes them feel more like you're one of them. So I was on the seventh floor of Barney's, standing on line, waiting to pay for a sweater – a little cashmere cardigan in a bright tangerine that would look good peeking out from under my white smock. And all of a sudden, someone snatched the sweater out of my arms. I whirled around, and there was Kathryn, one of the other junior stylists.

"What are you doing?" she very nearly hissed.

"Um – buying a sweater?" I said, taking it back from her.

She pulled it away from me again.

"We don't pay retail," she said. She checked the label on the sweater. It was by an up-and-coming designer. Not as big as Calvin or Ralph, and the sweater wasn't even that expensive.

"She's a client," Kathryn said about the designer. She folded the sweater and put it on the counter. "Let's go."

Back at the salon, I got my first lesson in the art and science of graciously accepting gifts from clients. Because they wanted to shower us with gifts. They really did. I watched and listened as Kathryn called the designer client and told her how much we had loved the little tangerine cardigan. Do I need to tell you what happened? You think the client sent over the sweater the next day, right? Wrong. She sent over two shoppings bags – one for me, one for Kathryn – full of sweaters. One in every single color. I'll tell you, it was a revelation.

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Mrs. P. was still waiting for my verdict on her brand-new Prada bag. It was a cute bag. I made a mental note to call my client at Prada.

“Perfect,” I said. “I’ll be with you in a few minutes.”

Now, I know I mentioned the Manhattan a while back, and by this I do not mean the delicious cocktail, though often the Manhattan client can be equally tart, bracing, and sometimes even a bit bitter. But the Manhattan (which actually is split into two broad categories) is far from the only type of client who sits in my chair every day. I thought it might be helpful if I create a road map, a glossary, if you will, of the various types of Jean-Luc women.

1. The Manhattan (socialite): I believe I covered her fairly extensively earlier. But oh, let me add this. I hate to generalize, but she tends to be a lousy tipper. In my experience, people who have never had to make their own money don’t really think about how other people make theirs.

2. The Manhattan (working woman): zips into the salon while on cell phone. Cell phone does not leave ear, even when head is in sink. Orders lunch from the Viand coffee shop on Madison and eats it while multi-tasking: hair, manicure, pedicure, business call. Only for her every-six-weeks-like-clockwork eyebrow wax does she close her eyes and stay still. This, the eyebrow wax, is the closest thing to a Zen moment that she ever has. The MWW is often married to (or divorced from) an equally type-A executive, who she drags in on Saturday mornings for his haircut, manicure, and – for those unfortunately hairy ones – eeew alert! – his back wax. Kids? Rarely. Or, you’d never know it. One of my MWW mother clients has shown me photographs of the house she just purchased in Litchfield County, but not of her children. Needless to say, the MWW’s are fantastic tippers.

3. The Bedford: Think horses, and everything that goes along with them. Rolling hills and stone walls, houses with names. These ladies don’t just have street addresses. No. They have stationary printed with the names and sometimes elegant, lightly-etched drawings of their homes. Longmeadow Manor. Hilly Knoll Farm. The Bedford wears haute couture riding clothes when she drives into the city in her car (Range Rover, black) to have her hair done. These, of course, are not the clothes she’d actually ride in: a cashmere sweater-set, pearl earrings, suede jodhpurs by Ralph. In the circles the Bedford runs (or rather, rides) in, Ralph means only one man – he of the polo pony empire. Ralph actually has a home in Bedford, which makes the whole thing even more authentic. The Bedford wants to leave the salon looking like she’s had nothing done. Hair color must be beyond subtle. She must look like she’s been born with it. Actually, she often brings in photos of her children, or even the children

themselves, and asks me to copy their color exactly. Usually, she wears no make-up. She has very good bones, and a lanky figure from all that riding. You will never hear her use a swear word. She likes to say gosh darn, and I'll be, and heavens to Betsy. The Bedford is a reasonably good tipper, always leaving exactly twenty percent.

4. The Greenwich: hard to believe, really, that Greenwich and Bedford are next to each other, geographically speaking. Because the Greenwich couldn't be more different from the Bedford and still be a rich white woman. Range Rover? No. Mercedes, yes, yes, yes. Preferably the 500-something sedan, but if the Greenwich has a large number of kids – often she has three, four, even five – the Hummer becomes the vehicle of choice. There's nothing quite like seeing the Greenwich, her make-up and hair already perfect before she enters the salon, stuck circling the block on Fifth Avenue because no parking garage wants to take her Hummer. I mean, she looks like a little kid pretending to drive her parents' car. I'd have to say that the Greenwich has the best fashion sense of all the suburban clients. In fact, she's so terrified of appearing suburban – she, who left the city after her second kid was born and you just couldn't find anything decent for under three million – that she spends hours every day scouring the Barneys and Bergdorf catalogues, surfing the internet for fashion websites like Net-a-Porter or Scoop.com, reading *W* and *Vogue* cover to cover, examining ads, dog-eared pages of interest and calling her personal shopper so that she'll be sure to have just that season's Balenciaga bag, or the hottest pair of designer jeans. She doesn't want to lose track. Seven for all Mankind are so over. Diesels aren't far behind. Which to acquire? Her California Closets are ready and waiting. Chip and Pepper? Rogan? Each month, *Vogue* anoints a new favorite. It's impossible to keep up, but still, the Greenwich tries. Oh, how she tries! Her hair is perfection. Highlights every eight weeks, with root touch-ups in between. Layers or no layers, depending on what Jennifer Aniston is doing. Earth-toned make-up from Bobbi Brown in shades like brick, sand and stone. She wears a huge men's chronograph on her skinny wrist, and checks the time religiously, because she has to be home in time for pick-up at her kids' schools. I guess if you took the MWW, but removed the big career and built her a faux-Tudor mansion with a cathedral ceiling in the entranceway and huge leather sofas in the surround-sound media room, you'd pretty much be left with the Greenwich. And as a tipper? Hmm. I don't like to bad-mouth my clients. But, I'd have to say she's a little worse than average. Sometimes she's in such a rush to beat the traffic that she just forgets.

5. The Five Towns: You'll know a lot of what you need to know about the client from Long Island if you understand that she lives in one of the five towns commonly known as, well, either "the five towns" or "the South Shore": Lawrence, Cedarhurst, Inwood, Hewlett and Woodmere. The FT is a little...flashier than her northern Westchester and Connecticut counterparts. She favors the bling-bling designers, and, in fact, she uses the term bling-bling in regular conversation. As in, I'm gonna take me to Fred Leighton later on and get me a little bling-bling. Gucci, Vuitton, Dolce & Gabbana are her gods. And she prefers these designers with their labels facing outward, if you know what I mean. She is not about subtle. It would not be



unreasonable to expect the Long Island to show up at the salon (her husband's driver waiting downstairs in their Lincoln Navigator, the windows tinted black) wearing half the alphabet on her back. A D&G gold belt buckle, the candy-colored bag embossed with dozens of LV's, loafers festooned with interlocking G's. Don't get me wrong, though. The FT is a nice lady, and she knows exactly who she is. Her role model, her idol to end all idols, is – depending on her age – either Madonna or Britney Spears. And she wants color. She's not interested in natural. She's a lot of fun, this client, because she always wants to try something new. Make me red this time, darling. And she's almost never unhappy with the results. She has a heart of gold, the FT. A lot of clients, they sit in my chair month after month, year after year, and never ask me one single question. The FT knows about my whole life, and my assistant's life, and the shampoo lady's life. She may be rich as all get-out, but she's not a snob, and she remembers where she comes from, which is usually the very tip of Long Island – the wrong tip, that is to say, Queens. And speaking of tips, she's the best – even better than the MWW.

6. The Short Hills: Think, the New Jersey version of the Greenwich. In other words, the Greenwich with a serious inferiority complex, since it's just about impossible to live in New Jersey and not feel just a teensy bit bad about it. And to make up for feeling bad about it, and to avoid resentment of her husband (whose Wall Street commute and only average-by-Wall-Street-standards bonus means a perfectly nice Colonial in Short Hills rather than, say, a mansion in Greenwich or a duplex on Park Avenue) she requires the best of everything, as dictated by that amazing place, Mecca for all Jean-Luc clients who reside in the state of New Jersey: The Short Hills Mall. It is there, at the mall, that the SH develops her aesthetic sensibility. Tiffany for her 4.2 karat diamond solitaire – upgraded from the 2.1 karat diamond that her husband, then a junior trader, had given her as an engagement ring. Cartier for the watch. And all those cute little departments at Neiman Marcus for everything else. Her style could be described as suburban-chic, which, contrary to popular opinion, is not an oxymoron. Because, unlike the Greenwich, she isn't trying to look like she lives in the city. She wears head-to-toe Juicy Couture velour sweat suits and J.P. Tod's driving loafers, the ones with all the small rubber nubs in the soles. She will not be seen without her status handbag, also by Tod's. Her most fun accessory, though, is her cell phone, with all the latest bells and whistles, encrusted with pink rhinestones. The SH is fussy about her hair. After all, she could be getting it done closer to home – there's a perfectly decent place in Millburn – but her visits to Jean-Luc are part of her quest for the best of everything. And so, having driven her BMW convertible all the way into town, she wants exactly the highlights on the magazine pages that she unfolds from her purse. Before I even look at the clippings, I can almost always guess. For blondes, it's Meg Ryan, or lately, Jessica Simpson. For brunettes, it's Jennifer Aniston, or occasionally, Jennifer Lopez. Sometimes I have to laugh, because the celebrity whose hair they're showing me and asking me to copy is someone who has been seeing me forever. Do you think you can do this? The SH will ask. And I'll nod. I think I can.

7. The Beverly Hills: Oh, what a difference a coast makes! The BH has her choice of fabulous salons to pick from, just a fifteen minute drive down Rodeo, or Burton Way. She has Laurent D., Frederic Fekkai, even old Jose Eber is still around somewhere. Why, you might ask, would she fly all the way to New York to have her hair done at the Jean-Luc Salon? Because she can, darling. Because the grass is always greener, and the blonde is always blonder. Because New York, to people who live in L.A., is the height of sophistication. I can always spot an L.A. a mile away. She's gorgeous, of course. Even the ones that aren't famous look like they should be. And she's dressed in Fred Segal fabulousness – a kind of blend of faded denim, diamonds, bits of turquoise, and a perfectly-cut, buttery shirt of some kind, showing off a glowing, not-too-brown tan. Those Beach Boys knew what they were singing about, I'll tell you. A California Girl stops traffic on Madison Avenue. I've seen it happen over and over again. But – not to diss my professional colleagues on the west coast, and truly I'm not talking about anyone in particular – their hair is a fucking mess. The L.A. often comes to me with hair the color and texture of straw, from being so over-processed. Honey, you've got so many chemicals in your hair, I'm surprised you didn't set off alarms at the airport, I'll tell her. I mean, whoever decided that platinum blonde was the answer to all that ails the L.A. woman? I spend hours doing corrective color. Weaving in bits of buttery highlights, hints of dark blonde, giving them back the color they ought to have after hanging out on Malibu Beach. Some of them are nervous when they come to see me, because their next stop is Letterman, or a crack-of-dawn call for "The Today Show". The young starlets sit in my chair, quivering: this appearance is a make-or-break for them. At least I can give them great hair. It's amazing what great hair can do for a panic attack. Oh, and in terms of tipping? I know this is going to seem unfair, but we don't charge a lot of the L.A.'s – whether they be full-fledged stars, or stars in the making. Even the ones who are just starting out get a discount. And they don't tip. Not a penny. Not at all. They feel entitled to be comped – after all, it's publicity that money can't buy when some magazine asks them who does their hair and they say Georgia at Jean-Luc in New York – so who can blame them?

A fine mist of styling products and water being blown off damp hair hovered like a fog over the salon floor. The night of the Pink and Purple Ball happened to be a Tuesday – one of our busiest days, even in a normal week. Saturdays we got a lot of bridge-and-tunnel, but Tuesdays were the big days for those in-the-know, and friends of those in-the-know. (If Thursday had, long ago, become the new Saturday, now Tuesday was the new Thursday.) Faith Honeycomb was in her usual station, next to the window, coloring the roots of an actress I recognized but couldn't quite place. Dark hair, angular cheekbones, a strong jaw I had seen on television, but where? Most of the actresses went to Faith. There were even some who flew in monthly from the west coast, or paid for her first class plane ticket. She was the doyenne of hair colorists, the first who had actually become famous herself. Faith was somewhere north of sixty – no one knew for sure – and her own hair had never seen a chemical. It was snow white, and cut into a sharp, shoulder-length bob. Her



blue eyes flashed and her head cocked to one side like a watchdog as she listened to her actress-client.

On the other side of the salon, by the window, I saw T., the hot-shot publicist and a perfect example of a MWW, in Jean-Luc's chair. He stood behind her, his hands resting gently on her shoulders, dark eyes boring into hers in the mirror as she talked rapidly, gesturing to her raven pageboy. I wondered what they could possibly be talking about, given that T. hadn't changed her hair in ten years. All women – even T. – seemed to shrink as they sat in our chairs. The robes, the small towels around their necks, their sleek, wet heads were great equalizers. Devoid of all their trappings (well, most of their trappings – the watches, rings, handbags still remained) the shine was taken off of them. But then, after their highlights, haircuts, waxing, blow-outs or up-do's, after they put on their elegant clothes once again, they came back to life: buffed, polished, confident and ready to tackle the world.

"Fifteen minutes under the lamps," I said to Tiffany, turning Mrs. H. over to her.

"It won't be too light, will it?" asked Mrs. H. as she rolled up the British Vogue (the salon's copy) and stuffed it into her oversized handbag.

"Would I make you too light?"

She started to answer of course not, but I had already turned to Mrs. P.. It was a rhetorical question, after all.

I had just asked Tiffany for a tube of 6 and a half of 6.1 when I heard the crash behind me.

"Oh my God!" someone screamed.

I wheeled around just in time to see Faith Honeycomb crumple like a piece of discarded tissue to the floor, her sleek white bob fanning around her.

"Somebody do something!" Sweetie shouted. Sweetie was the salon's head receptionist whose job, over the years, had morphed into being Faith Honeycomb's personal assistant. Sweetie kneeled down next to Faith, his long auburn curls hanging, and his dress hiked up above his knees – knees that were truly the only giveaway that Sweetie was a man.

"Faith! Honey! Faith, can you hear me? Blink or something. Open your eyes!"

The salon had grown silent, the din of blow-driers suddenly quiet. Horrible French pop music piped through the sound system. I heard someone in the next station talking to 9-1-1.

In the distance, through the thick double-windows of the salon, an ambulance wailed. Was it coming for Faith, so soon? I pressed my face against the glass and peered down at Fifty-Seventh Street. An ambulance roared by the entrance to our

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building and kept going. I wanted to run downstairs in my white smock and flag the ambulance, make it stop like a taxi.

All around me, there was a steady murmur of voices. Heart attack, I heard someone say. Stroke. Seizure. Allergy. Shock. I looked down at Faith, who appeared to be sleeping peacefully on the floor, her lips curled up into a rare, small smile.

“Georgia?” The unmistakable accent, the fingers brushing my shoulders. Jean-Luc had suddenly appeared behind me. “You will need to... handle... Faith’s clients,” he whispered, gesturing to several women seated on Faith’s special banquette. They all had a similar expression on their faces, and I tried to figure out what it was. Worried? No, that wasn’t it. Disturbed? Agitated? No, and no. Then finally – as the EMS technicians burst through the doors of Jean-Luc and transferred Faith to a stretcher – I realized what it was: they were put out. It was, after all, the night of the Pink and Purple Ball.

“Faith! Darling! I’m coming with you,” wailed Sweetie. Mascara was running down his cheeks in great, black rivulets.

“I’m sorry... Ma’am,” said one of the technicians, looking mildly confused by the appellation. “No one’s allowed in the ambulance.”

“I don’t think you understand,” said Sweetie, drawing himself up to his full, towering height. “This is Faith Honeycomb.” His glossy lips quivered over her name.

“I don’t care if it’s Jennifer fucking Lopez,” snapped the technician. Sweetie was blocking their way. “Those are the rules. Now, move!”

They carried Faith past Jean-Luc’s station, through the reception area, nearly toppling the enormous vase of freesia and baby roses that was placed there each morning. Sweetie followed them, wailing like a widow in a funeral cortege. The salon doors swung silently shut behind them, and slowly, the usual sounds resumed – sputtering at first, then catching like a car’s engine until within minutes the salon was back to its usual speed and roar.

Mrs. P. looked at me in the mirror as I stood behind her, trying to breathe.

“Georgia?” she asked, wiping a non-existent bit of smudge from beneath her eye. “My goodness. That was exciting.” She said it in the droll, flat way that only a woman born in Darien and educated at Miss Porters can get away with. As if life itself is ironic. Especially when it’s happening to somebody else.

My fingers tightened around the handle of my tail comb, which I wanted to jab into her hard pink scalp. I looked around me as people resumed what they had been doing before Faith Honeycomb had the poor taste to crash into the French tile floor. Two assistants were looking at a page from Hamptons magazine and giggling. T. had moved from Jean-Luc’s chair to the manicure station, her hair damp, freshly-polished fingernails gingerly holding her cell phone to her ear. The woman in the seat in Faith’s station – the one who Faith had just started to work on – calmly

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ordered a seafood salad and ice tea from Nello. She caught my eye and beckoned me over to her. I didn't know her name, but I had seen her around the salon. She was one of the ladies who we called the O.W.'s – Old Wasps – dressed in threadbare cashmere, baggy khaki's, and possessor of one of the few decent face-lifts around. She reminded me a tiny bit of my own mother, though I wasn't sure why. Lord knows it wasn't her social status. Her eyes crinkled in a way that seemed kind, and I bent towards her.

"I just want to remind you, sweetheart, that Faith always uses a gloss."

I took a few steps back. I didn't trust myself to speak, much less to douse this woman's head in chemicals. I thought of poor Faith Honeycomb, alone in the back of an ambulance racing through the streets of Manhattan. Faith, with her meticulous makiage and precision-cut hair awakening (if indeed she were to awaken) in the dingy, frightening corridors of a city hospital. She wasn't married and had never had kids. We at the salon were the closest thing to a family that she had.

That will never be me.

"Georgia?" Mrs. P. sounded impatient.

That will never, never, never be me.

I turned back to her, forcing myself to smile.

"Yes, Mrs. P.?"

"Not to rush you, darling. But I have a one o'clock appointment with the caterer for Kristen's wedding."