

Stephanie Mark

Hair in My Eyes

It happens most often at work. Especially on the day after. My hearing becomes fine-tuned, really sharp and I don't miss a sound. Sometimes I make a game of it. First I look over the customer, evaluate his hair, then guess what kind of noise it will make. I'm pretty good. Curly hair is the easiest, it almost always makes a wire-like noise when you cut it, kind of like a Slinky. Red hair sounds like sizzling bacon, or biting a carrot. I have red hair so I know this is true. Brown hair can be a little trickier to guess because it varies, depending on the shade. Dark brown is like the noise windshield wipers make on a clear day. Light brown can be tinfoil being ripped on a serrated edge.

It's shaggy blondes who are the sneaky ones. By that, I mean their hair doesn't make any sound at all. But it's not really silent, either. Not really.

My first customer this morning has gray hair and this throws me off completely. He's a drop-in, which means he doesn't have an appointment. I'm the one who usually gets these people because I haven't been here long enough to develop a following. Suzette has a following. She's always booked up right through lunch. Always on a diet, that one, so she skips meals. Some of my drop-ins even ask for her once they get a glimpse.

"Who is that thin blonde over there?" they'll point. "Is she available?"

But by then they're already in my chair and I've got them

anchored down with this heavy robe which sounds like steel weights clanking together at the gym. So they stay with me, but sometimes on the way out, I overhear them booking their next appointment with Suzette. She's always booked up right through lunch. But then I haven't been here to develop a following.

I hold the scissors exactly like I've been trained, on a slant above his head. This man has dandruff though, so I close my eyes. I'm one of those people who gets queasy fast. Not from actual things, but from what actual things remind me of. Dandruff reminds me of chalk dust, like the day when Mrs. Gibbs wrote math equations on the board after lunch. Sherry Ann had spaghetti in the cafeteria and then hung upside down from the monkey bars. I had to close my eyes when she threw up long strands of red by her desk. The smell was very Italian. So now I have to close my eyes around spaghetti and chalk and I guess, even dandruff.

I cut the first strand of gray with my eyes closed, but it's okay because I'm a pretty steady hand. My eyes open when I hear a loud clatter like pots and pans banging together. I smile down at the wisp of hair on the floor. I wasn't too far off really. I guessed the sound of a blender grinding ice. Both are kitchen noises.

"Just a little off the sides," he says.

"Don't worry," I say, "I'm quite good with my hands." I've been saying this to all my male customers to see what their reactions will be. Besides, I think flirting is how you develop a following.

"I won't worry," he says and looks at my left eye in the mirror. He has eyes that slant down like my husband's. My husband's hair isn't graying yet, so there's no real resemblance. He's not at work today, so it's important I work overtime. Drop-ins don't usually tip that well, but this one seems receptive to me and my scissors. He doesn't even remark about my closed eyes.

I hear the sound of a xylophone and turn to see Suzette laugh and wind a roller in her customer's hair. The customer nods as if she too, understands the joke. I almost smile but remember my gold crown and cover it with my tongue.

"Got a toothache?" my customer asks. I guess he's been watching me in the mirror. That's the bad part of this job. Even

when you think you're behind someone's back, you're really not.

"Are you a dentist?" I ask. He doesn't answer and I'm sure he thinks that was one of those sarcastic questions. But I was only curious.

I notice his eyes are already slanting toward Suzette's station. Why can't these drop-ins ever be faithful? So she diets and it shows. Who cares? You have to be in a good frame of mind to diet, otherwise everything upsets you and makes you want to eat. I know this is true because last night, after my husband and I fought, I went to Bob's Big Boy and ordered a hot fudge sundae. Not directly after, because I was still kind of queasy, but a couple of hours after.

The waitress was polite and didn't even stare so I knew I would tip her well. She was in a white uniform and set the plate down so quietly it sounded like a pillow. The ice cream and fudge made soft aquarium sounds like in the dentist office. But the cherry did not belong. It was like a hard marble or something. It was okay though, because I knew she was trained to put it on top. I know about training. I left her two dollars and the cherry wrapped in my napkin. A good tip can change your day.

When I got home, Nathan was already asleep and when I looked at my eye in the mirror I was surprised to see it wasn't noticeable hardly at all. Nothing to stare at. I put ice on it just the same.

Next to Suzette's station is a manicurist and next to her, a makeup artist named Charlene. Charlene bends over a woman with a red pencil. The woman purses her lips. Charlene draws a thin line not quite as full as the woman's real lips. I know a lot about makeup even though I don't wear it myself. She stays just far enough from her so it doesn't look like they're about to kiss or something. Maybe Charlene has bad breath. You have to be careful about things like that in our business. Or you never develop a following. She finishes up her lips and smears some white cream on her eyelids. I touch my own eye.

"Got a problem with your eye?" I imagine my customer asking.

"Are you an eye doctor?" I would ask and he would know I was not being sarcastic. None of this happens though, instead he throws

off the gray robe. It crashes to my feet like a cymbal.

“That’s enough,” he says and half runs up to the cashier with hair cuttings on his collar. They talk in quiet tones and glance back at me. I smile, forgetting my gold crown. I assume they are discussing how much of a tip to leave me.

It is in an empty chair between Charlene and the manicurist and watch carefully. She is doing the eyeshadow now. The lady has small eyes and I know enough about makeup to see that Charlene uses bright colors like peach to make the eyes appear larger. It has something to do with the light and reflection.

The lady’s eyelids quiver and Charlene steadies her hand on her shoulder so she doesn’t goof up or make a smear. I smell a strong odor and turn to see the manicurist shaking a bottle of nail polish. Red. She applies it to the young girl’s left hand until her nails look just like five cherries. I feel a little queasy. A woman comes in the door and the bells overhead sound like the ice-cream truck. She looks like a drop-in and I see the cashier point her finger at me. I motion with my hand and the woman comes my way. She wears a white uniform and has blonde hair. There’s no use guessing about any noise, I think. Unless she’s not a real blond which is possible these days. I like this idea. What kind of sound would hair with dark roots and blonde ends make? I am thankful my job is challenging in this way. She’s real polite and looks kind of familiar. The moment she sits down she notices.

“Oh, what happened honey? Did you have an accident with your eye?”

I think for a long time in my head, but really only a minute passes before I answer her. “It was stupid. I bumped it on that blow dryer over there,” I point. “Earlier today when I did a customer.”

“Oh,” she says softly, like whipped cream. My eye is only slightly swollen and I’m surprised she noticed. The appointment is over quickly because she only wants her bangs trimmed. She leaves me five dollars and a marble wrapped in a napkin. A good tip can change your day.

At lunch time, people start to gather their things and make plans to go out. Even Suzette pats her absent stomach and says, “Oh what the hell, some vegetable soup couldn’t hurt.” I hope she orders ice

cream instead. She leaves with the cashier and the manicurist. I am left with the young girl who sweeps the hair up into a dustpan.

She sits on a stool, her knees grasp the broomstick and blows a bubble. I will her to look at my eye but she doesn't.

"Do you mind watching shop?" she says and the bubble snaps.

I look at the shampoos and curlers. "I'll watch shop," I tell her. The bell over the door rings like the man who stands in front of the Thrifty Drug. I am alone.

Instead of going to my own station, I sit down at Charlene's. There is an array of eyeshadows in all colors, not just bright ones. There is blue, brown, bronze, violet, and a purple shade. I pick up the little brush and rub it over the purple container. It smooths on my left eyelid easily like satin. I pat a little violet around the sides, extending toward my cheek. Then I mix in a little blue until I get the exact shade. I do this carefully and slowly. Not too much, but definitely not too little. There can be no question. I blend the edges so all the colors run together on my eye. I add some black shadow, which is only supposed to be used for contouring but is quite effective here. Black and blue. I keep blending with a cotton swab until it doesn't even look like makeup anymore. It looks like what it is.

I put small samples of the shadows in my purse. I will need them for later, after I have taken my shower. I may want to do my jaw for when Nathan wakes up from his afternoon nap.

I imagine him sleeping on the couch. When I walk in the door, I'll see a package with a note sitting on the coffee table. "Sorry about last night," the note will say. Underneath it will be a box of See's Candy with a big red bow on top. Chocolate covered cherries.

I will stand perfectly still and wait for a noise, any kind of noise. The sound of breaking glass, a dog howling, or yelling. Any kind of sound. But there won't be any because Nathan will be asleep on the couch, his shaggy blonde hair silently splayed out on the pillow.

I look away from the eyeshadow and toward the cutting shears at my station. I think for a long time in my head, but really only a minute passes before I say aloud to the mirror, "When is the last time Nathan has had a haircut?" Then I pick up my purse with the samples inside and head toward home. He is long overdue.