

# DIRTY BLONDES

At salons across the country, shampoo isn't the only thing getting worked into a lather: Some women are taking their hairstylists to bed. **By Lindsay Van Gelder**



**H**aircut by haircut, the sexual tension mounted. The way he told her he couldn't wait to get his hands on her hair. The intense stares in the mirror, his eyes probing hers. His thigh pressing against her arm as he worked. The way he crouched down next to the chair so he was literally breathing on her neck.

"It was a form of foreplay," says Alix\*, a 31-year-old writer who had a long fling with a top Chicago stylist. "I'd always had gay hairdressers, so this was

\*This name has been changed.

***"He started to wash my hair, then suddenly the clothes were coming off."***

new." With any stylist, she adds, "there is a sense that they're in control...but they also service and pleasure you." Add sex, and it's a female pasha fantasy.

Talk to stylists, and you'll hear stories so hair-curling that you'll need to

buy a diffuser. The Park Avenue ladies who add a very special tip for a blowout house call. Women who make their availability known by slipping their hairdresser a number, but also by flashing their underwear in the chair or even going naked beneath their gowns. One New York City colorist says the most novel thing a client ever did was show him nude photos of herself. Another seductively inquired about highlights on her hair down there.

But it's hardly just the women who play the aggressor—some hairdressers are serious satyrs. There is the French farce of handling two love interests who

happen to show up simultaneously (hint: Don't put them in adjacent chairs). One stylist remembers a colleague whose inamorata discovered incontrovertible evidence that he'd had sex with another woman—and hurled her rival's panties across the salon floor.

Plenty of hairstylists never date clients, and plenty others eventually quit their wild ways. But there's no doubt salons can be candy stores for straight men. "It's like if you worked in a bicycle shop," says one owner of a salon. "You'd want to ride the bikes."

**T**he stylist-as-stud notion goes back at least to *Shampoo*, the movie released in 1975 and set in 1968. Some of the most successful heterosexual men now cutting hair say they chose the profession in part to score as prodigiously as Warren Beatty's character, George. "I grew up in the *Shampoo* era, and I became a hairdresser so I could meet a lot of girls—not just the clients, but the staff," admits Nick Arrojo of New York City's Arrojo Studio.

Things have changed over the past 41 years. Having sex with George was beefcake on the side, like Lady Chatterley doing the groundskeeper. At the end of the film, George is bereft, the girl he loves having moved on to a guy with real money. The paradigm was shifting within a year after *Shampoo*, when hairdresser Jon Peters morphed into a producer and Barbra Streisand's boyfriend. But today, hairdressers don't have to switch careers. They're superstars in their own right.

Meaghan\*, now a 28-year-old accessories designer, was in college when she got involved with one of the most famous hairstylists on the planet. On their first date, "he picked me up with his car and driver, and at the sushi restaurant, people recognized him and were stopping him left and right." On their next date, he took her to a celebrity-laden red-carpet event at which Meaghan had to adjust to paparazzi snapping *him*.

Their first sexual encounter was in the shampoo room. A superstar stylist doesn't

usually do his own sudsing, and Meaghan later wondered how many other clients were receiving such service. "We went into this little room, and he kept telling me how beautiful I was, how perfect. These were things I wanted to hear, no doubt about it. He started to wash my hair, then suddenly the clothes were coming off. Afterward, back in the normal world, he cut my hair."

Both then and now, the hairstylist's secret weapon seems to be what he does with his tongue—you know, *talking*. "We speak to women all day long; we're good at communicating," says Joel Warren, co-owner of Warren-Tricomi Salons. "When you think about it, we're the one male relationship where women always walk away happy."

It's about compliments, according to Oscar Blandi of the Oscar Blandi Salon

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in New York City. Husbands and boy-friends don't give enough of them, in his opinion. The stylist "knows what a woman loves to hear. I always compliment a woman, always. I can tell her that she looks beautiful, that she should wear this dress, those tight pants, sexy boots," Blandi says. "The stylist is telling her what guys like—and he's making sure she knows that *he* likes it."

When intimate conversation dovetails with focused attention and sensual touching—all acceptable, even essential components of the salon visit—you've got tinder for flames of burnin' love. "When I cut hair, I'm with the person for 45 minutes, and that concentration is rare in modern life," says Rodney Cutler of Cutler Salon. "I feel like there's a certain energy that goes with being a straight hairdresser. There's something incredible about helping people shape their images. It doesn't need to be sexual. But when you touch someone, the

dynamics change. There's a connection that can take it to the next level."

"It's one of the only situations in which you can invade a woman's personal space," explains Arrojo. And Joseph Artale, owner of the Arté Salon in New York City, says, "The things a guy would do to impress a woman... you're already there."

A hairstylist can also use this easy friendship to check out a woman's availability. "He might ask where she's going that night looking so beautiful, and if she says she's going home to walk the dog, he can insist that she go out for a drink with him instead," Blandi says. "Or he may mention that he's going to such and such restaurant. When he walks into the place and sees her with her friends, of course he goes over and says hi."

The fact that your conversational soul mate is also making you beautiful doesn't hurt. Artale once met a woman visiting Manhattan from Dallas. He asked her out as she was leaving the salon, then got a second date by offering her a free blowout the next day. He maneuvered to see her again a few months later by volunteering to meet her at Kennedy Airport while she was on a layover on her way to Slovenia for Christmas. "We went into the ladies' bathroom, and I cut her hair," he says. Love blossomed, the woman moved to New York City, and "when we started living together, I would blow-dry her hair bone-straight every day before she went to work. All her friends were jealous."

Alix recalls strolling with her hair-god lover and meeting a woman who raved about her do. "It was the best moment," Alix says. "As good-looking as he was, I wouldn't have been so turned on by him if he'd given me a crappy haircut."

Their first tryst happened when he invited her to the salon on a Monday, when it was closed. He cut and colored her hair before they found themselves entwined "against the counter where they mix the dyes, which got all over my elbows and legs," Alix reports. "Let's put it this way—these guys do great things with their hands."

"This job can be a playground," Blandi says. "I didn't take advantage of every situa- (continued on page 190)

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tion when I was single and a pretty girl was sitting in my chair. But any hairdresser who tells you he never dated a client—that's a big lie."

Unlike Warren Beatty's character, today's hair guru is prime husband material. Artale walked down the aisle with his Slovenian girlfriend. Jonathan Antin, the former owner of a salon in West Hollywood and a judge on Bravo's *Shear Genius*, had a client several years ago with baby-fine hair. "I gave her a big Victoria's Secret long-layered look, and she was throwing her hair around and working it. She turned and said, 'You know, you're going to marry me someday.'" They now have two children. And Frédéric Fekkai's 2006 wedding (though not to a client) was written up in *Town & Country Weddings*.

The life of a stylist stud is not, however, without complications. "I always kiss my clients, both at the salon and when I run into them socially," says a Manhattan salon owner. At a party one evening, a client "had two glasses of wine and stuck her tongue in my mouth during the kiss. It's hard to bring it back" to an innocent flirtation, he laments. A woman scorned doesn't stay a customer.

Other stylists point out that in the *Shampoo* era, sexual harassment was not on the radar. "When I was young, I couldn't have been wilder," Warren acknowledges. "But once you become an owner...you evolve into professionalism, and—I know this sounds creepy, but you get to a point where the money is better than the sex. I have to be flirty, but it's unacceptable if I lose clients."

For the client, an affair that ends badly means not only the usual weepiness but the need to find a new stylist. It was her lover's technique with scissors that Alix missed most. "He understood how to work with my cowlick," she says. "The next guy I went to left a bump by it. I almost started crying."

But in the calculus of salon love, one's loss is just another's gain. Alix's heart has mended, and she's noticed a certain frisson with her newest stylist—even though he hasn't made her cowlick behave. "He's so cute," she sighs. "The last time, we talked about restaurants, and I thought, Maybe..." ♦

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