Bergdorf Blondes

Plum Sykes

Chapter 1

Bergdorf Blondes are a thing, you know, a New York craze. Absolutely everyone wants to be one. I'm not trying to freak you out or anything, but it's easier getting into Harvard than being a Bergdorf Blonde. The whole thing requires a level of commitment comparable to, say, learning Hebrew or quitting cigarettes. You wouldn't believe the dedication it takes to be a gorgeous, flaxen-haired, dermatologically perfect New York girl with a life that's fabulous beyond belief.

Getting the hair color right is murder, for a start. It all began with my best friend, Julie Bergdorf. She's the ultimate New York girl, literally, since glamorous, thin, blonde department store heiresses are the chicest thing to be here. Someone heard she'd been going to Ariette at Bergdorf for her color since high school, because apparently she told her personal shopper at Calvin Klein who told absolutely everyone. Anyway, it was rumored in certain circles that Julie got her blonde touched up every 13 days exactly and suddenly everyone else wanted to be Thirteen-Day Blondes. The hair can't be yellow, it has to be very white, like Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy's was. She's the icon, the hair to worship. It's beyond expensive. Ariette is like $450 a highlight, if you can get in with her, which obviously you can't.

Inevitably, Bergdorf Blondes are talked and gossiped about endlessly. Every time you open a magazine or newspaper there's another item about a BB's broken heart or new outfit (right now they're obsessed with fringed Missoni dresses) or romantic carrying on at some party. But sometimes gossip is by far the most reliable source of information about yourself and all your friends, especially in Manhattan. Why trust myself when gossip can tell moi the real truth about moi, I always say?

Anyway, according to gossip I'm this champagne bubble of a girl about town — the town being New York of course, because no other town cares about having girls about it - living the perfect party girl life, if that's what you think a perfect life is. I never tell a soul this, but sometimes before the parties I look in the mirror and see someone who looks like they are straight out of a movie like Fargo. I've heard that almost all Manhattan girls suffer from this debilitating condition. They never admit it either. Julie gets the Fargos so badly that she's never able to leave her apartment in The Pierre in time for anything she has to be in time for. It really gets her down sometimes.

Everyone thinks the party girl life is the best life you can lead here. The truth is that combined with work it's completely draining, but no one dares say that in case they look ungrateful. All anyone in New York ever says is 'everything's fabulous!' even if they're on Zoloft for depression. Still, there are plenty of upsides. Like, you never have to pay for anything important like manis or pedis or highlights or blowouts. The downside is that sometimes the freebies wreak havoc with your social life -

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believe me, if your dermatologist's kid can't get into Episcopal he'll be on the phone to you day and night.

To be specific, last Tuesday I went to my friend Mimi's townhouse on 61st and Madison for her 'super-duper-casual baby shower. Just the girls getting together,' she'd said. There were three staff per guest, handmade pink cookies from Payard Patisserie on Lexington and chocolate booties from Fauchon. It was about as casual as the inauguration. No one ate a thing, which is standard protocol at Upper East Side baby showers. I'd just walked through the door when my cell rang.

'Hello?' I said.

'You need highlights!' yelled a desperate voice. It was George, my hairdresser.

'Are you in Arizona?' I asked.

'Just back,' he replied.

('Arizona' is what everyone says instead of 'rehab'. A lot of hairdressers in New York visit Arizona almost every month.)

'If you don't go blonde you are going to be a very lonely girl,' continued George tearfully.

Even though you'd think being a hairdresser George would know this already, I explained that a brunette like me can't go blonde.

'Can in New York,' he said, choking up.

I ended up spending the present-opening ceremony in Mimi's library discussing addictive personality types with George and hearing all the one-liners he'd picked up in rehab, like 'let the river flow' and 'say what you mean and mean what you say and don't be mean when you say it'. Every time George goes into rehab he starts talking more and more like the Dalai Lama. Personally I think if hairdressers are going to offer deep insights they should be exclusively on the subject of hair. Anyway, no one thought George's behavior was odd because everyone in New York takes calls from their beauty experts at social occasions. It was lucky I was out of the room when Mimi opened my gift, which was a library of Beatrix Potter books. She totally freaked because it was more books than she'd ever read. Now I know why most girls give fashion from Bonpoint rather than controversial literature at baby showers.

Sometimes the hairdressers and their addictions and the parties and the blow-outs take up so much time it starts to feel like work and you can't focus on your real career. (And I do have a real career to think about -more of which later.) But that's what happens in New York. Everything just kind of creeps up on you, and before you know it you're out every night, working like crazy and secretly waxing the hair on the inside of your nose like everyone else. It's not long before you start thinking that if you don't do the nose-hair wax thing your whole world's going to fall apart.

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Before I give you the rest of the goss from Mimi's shower, here's a few character traits you might want to know about me:

1.Fluent in French, intermittently. I'm really good at words like moi and tres, which seem to take care of just about everything a girl needs. A few unkind people have pointed out that this does not make me exactly fluent, but I say, well, that's lucky because if I spoke perfect fluent French no one would like me, and no one likes a perfect girl, do they?

2. Always concerned for others' well-being. I mean, if a friendly billionaire offers you a ride from New York to Paris on his PJ (that's a quick N.Y. way of saying private jet), one is morally bound to say yes, because that means the person you would have been sitting next to on the commercial flight now has two seats to themselves, which is real luxury for them. And when you get tired you can go sleep in the bedroom, whereas however hard I look I have never found a bedroom on an American Airlines 767. If someone else's comfort is at stake, I say, always take the private jet.

3. Tolerant. If a girl is wearing last season's Manolo Blahnik stilettos, I won't immediately rule them out as a friend. I mean, you never know if a super-duper nice person is lurking under a past-it pair of shoes. (Some girls in New York are so ruthless they won't speak to a girl unless she's in next season's shoes, which is really asking a lot.)

4. Common sense I really am fluent in. You've got to recognize it when a day is a total waste of makeup.

5. Eng Lit Major. Everyone thinks it's unbelievable that a girl who is as obsessed with Chloé jeans as I am could have studied at Princeton but when I told one of the girls at the baby shower about school she said, 'Oh my god! Ivy League! You're like the female
Stephen Hawking.' Listen, someone that brainy would never do something as crazy as spending $325 on a pair of Chloé jeans, but I just can't help it, like most New York girls. The reason I can just about afford the $325 jeans is because the aforementioned career consists of writing articles for a fashion magazine, which say that spending $325 on a pair of jeans will make you deliriously happy. (I've tried all the other jeans - Rogan, Seven, Earl, Juicy, Blue Cult - but I always come back to the classic, Chloé. They just do something to your butt the others can't.) The other thing that helps fund my habit is if I don't pay my rent on my Perry Street apartment. I often don't because my landlord seems to like being paid in other ways, like if I let him come up for a triple espresso he reduces my rent by over 100%. I always say, waste not, want not, which is a terrible cliché the British invented during the war to get kids to eat their whole wheat bread, but when I say it I mean, 'waste not money on boring old rent when it can be un-wasted on Chloe jeans.'

6. Punctual. I am up every morning at 10.30 a.m. and not a minute earlier.

7. Thrifty. You can be frugal even if you have expensive tastes. Please don't tell a soul, because, you know, some girls get so jealous, but I hardly pay for a thing I

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wear. You see, fashion designers in New York love giving clothes away. Sometimes I wonder if fashion designers, who I consider to be geniuses, are actually thick-os, like lots of mean people are always saying they are. Isn't giving something away for nothing when you could sell it for something a bit stupid? But there is something really, really clever about this particular form of stupidity because fashion designer type-people all seem to own at least four expensively decorated homes (St. Barths, Aspen, Biarritz, Paris) whereas all the clever people with regular jobs selling things for money only seem to own about one barely-decorated house each. So I maintain that fashion designers are geniuses because it takes a genius to make money by giving things away.

Overall, I can safely say that my value system is intact, despite the temptations of New York, which, I regret to say, has made some girls into very spoilt little princesses.

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