

1990

I've been the wash girl at Minnie's Press and Curl for over 25 years. Truth be told, girlhood is so far from me, I barely can recall it. I just turned 42, actually.

I don't take no offense to 'wash girl', that's just the title of the job. And for the most part I can honestly say I'm content in my role. The shop is in a bubblegum pink brick building with black awnings on a busy Blvd in the heart of the city. It has seen its share of styles over the decades: afros, Jheri curls, relaxers, and now it seems hard presses and French Rolls are what women want.

Every Thursday, Friday and Saturday women from all walks of life lower their heads into my bowl and let me scrub and knead and sud their crowns clean.

Washing hair is holy work. It's vulnerable for women to give up control in that way. Surrendering under my eyes which can see everything. They can't hide nothing from me, I see all the new growth, bald spots and rebellious kinks, but I treat them all with reverence. Some of them got dandruff caked like snow, but I just tilt a few drops of tea tree oil and scrub it completely out. Other women come in with bald spots or stress spots as I call them, from cheating husbands and hard headed children. They lay it all out there for me. Some women I can tell, by the way their eyes close as soon as water hits their head and the lines around their lips relax, that this is the first time all week they haven't had anyone pulling on their coat tail, or telling them what to do. So I leave them in that quiet place to fasten their minds and soul together. Other women chat away telling stories with details I ain't ask for; they go on about dates at The Velvet Room, and false alarm pregnancies and low paying jobs and dreams, I offer my two cents when I feel it necessary but oftentimes they just need a listening ear. so a nod and 'uh-huh' from my end will do. Hell, some even lower their eyes and apologize for the tattered

condition of their hair before sitting down and I just smile unsure why they feel the need to say they sorry.

I like to drench their hair all the way through before applying the shampoo. Then I lather them up real good with a combination of Motions and Dudley's with a few drops of rosemary and mint. The aroma fills up the salon and opens up their noses and hair follicles for a deep clean. Most ask where to buy it. The women think I'm lying when I tell them it's a special recipe, but it's true. I keep my nails filed down just right so I can scrub out all the dandruff, dirt and debris. Over the years my hands have become dull. My nails are weak and bent I think from constantly being in water. I rinse them out then lather them for another shampoo. Once the conditioner is rinsed out they get up, hair still sopping wet, and head to Minnie's chair to be transformed. I leave the hard work for Minnie. Minnie wears bright bold pinks, purples and yellows, and I don't know how she manages to, but she keeps her nails perfectly manicured and polished red day in and day out. I would be telling a whole lie if I said I ever saw them chipped, its magic really.

Her voice is loud like a clatter of pots and pans but yet in still, she always knows the right things to say. Harmless gossip and talks of celebrities swirl. When Minnie is telling something real juicy her voice drops to a whisper and her eyes get to blinking real fast then she looks to me as if to back up what she's saying. But half the time don't even know what she be saying. When she is done she spins her clients around to the mirror and the joy nearly spills out of their eyes when they see how pretty they are. Sometimes I picture myself spinning somebody around showing them their new do. But you gotta have a license to do hair in a salon and hair school, last time I checked, it costs well over \$3,000 to attend, so just as quickly as the thought comes, it goes right out of my mind.

I still do hair from time to time in my kitchen. Women from my building or pay in lotto tickets or Chardonnay and I fix them up real nice. Ain't no fancy chairs in my space just a wobbly kitchen stool and pressing comb heating on the stove eye. They be happy though. My good friend Opal from the 4th floor come down every other Thursday night and complain about Doug who is married but lays up with Opal every weekend. She's always so giddy when I get through with her that when she looks at herself in the handheld mirror She laughs with her whole body, her cheeks and breasts in her dress jiggle like jelly. She got mouths to feed so I don't press her about money. She usually bakes a sweet potato pie and we call it even.