

The Clinique Counter

She stopped and just breathed in all of the flowery scents wafting through the air. Clinicians in crisp white jackets were bobbing in and out of the aisles like seagulls on the ocean. You could see them spritzing their scents onto thin strips of paper and then eagerly (and slyly) handing them to every customer that looked their way. "Vultures," she thought. All they wanted was that sale...that commission.

Slowly she turned herself around, taking in the shiny black marble floors and the many -faceted colored glass jars in the clear counters stretching down aisle after aisle of the store. Every kind of make-up imaginable seemed to be available for purchase. She sniffed to herself. Maybelline and Cover Girl were all she had ever used...and if she was honest with herself...all she could afford.

Here, in this section of the store, heck, you could *feel* rich. All those clinicians eagerly approaching you with their red, red lips smiling those fake smiles while trying to convince you that you could look like Cleopatra. Their goal was to make you feel so pampered that you forgot yourself and bought their wares.

She sighed. It was nice to imagine for just a tiny moment that she could really afford all this vast glamour. It was kinda like a kid in a toy store...except she *knew* she couldn't afford any of it. Sample this! Smell that! Try this bronze powder for high cheek-bones! Buy! Buy! Buy! "If only..." she thought wistfully.

And then, *they* walked in and walked toward the Clinique counter. The perfect couple. The woman had long, frosted blond hair hanging down her back onto her soft brown cashmere coat. "Is that a *Fendi* purse?" she thought as a sheer pang of envy stabbed at her heart. Her eyes trailed down to the woman's shoes that were probably as expensive as Sarah Jessica Parker's shoes on that old Sex and the City series. And the sunglasses... "Just oh," she thought. Gold frames matched the gold earrings and the woman couldn't have been any more perfect.

The man, whose arm was laying tenderly across the woman's shoulders, was reflected off of the woman's sunglasses. "Now that's what you call eye candy," she chuckled to herself. Rich brown hair hung over his eyes but not before you saw those blue, blue eyes that seemed so intent on the woman. He was steering her directly to the front of the Clinique counter and then seemed to do all of the talking. He had that suave attitude of a very rich man. She looked at his coat and the silk scarf that wrapped around his neck. "Yeah", she thought, "totally rich." For a moment Joe came to her mind. He really was a *good* husband. He worked so hard for the electric company. He could climb poles like nobody's business and yeah, he made pretty good money. Still, he came home every night in dirty boots and jeans and she herself drove a frigging school bus. "No need for make-up in my job," she thought wryly.

The man and woman were leaning over the Clinique counter by then, listening intently to the eager clinician as she pulled out tiny containers of eye shadow. There were all sizes and shaped miniscule containers with embossed letters and designs on the lids. Some looked like they sparkled, some seemed like tiny jewels, and there appeared to be a million different colors. She looked on longingly, now caught up in the moment. "Down girl," she told herself, "It's just *eye shadow* for crying out loud. It's not like you *need* it or could even afford it." She was quite sure those beautiful designer containers were well out of her price range. She tried to stem the bitterness and envy. "After all," she thought, "I look fine just like I am...! And Joe is a wonderful man and we have a wonderful marriage and...Shit" she thought. "Give it up." The couple was the perfect pair with the perfect looks and even," she snorted, "the perfect clothes."

She watched longingly as that perfect man reached out to remove the woman's sunglasses. The woman seemed to flinch as he placed a strand of hair behind her ear. All of a sudden, she saw it. The woman stiffened as the man picked up one of those tiny containers of eye shadow had held it near her eye. A *very* black eye. "Holy Moley" she thought to herself. The woman's eye was every shade of green, black, and yellow and the man was somehow trying to match the eye shadow to that black eye. As the man's hand came near the woman's eye, she seemed to shrink inside herself and her shoulders started to heave as tears came streaming down her face. That beautiful, rich, suave man got the ugliest look on his face as he furtively glanced around before giving the woman a vicious shake. The poor woman started to shake her head back and forth and suddenly picked up a container of the eye shadow and threw it on

the floor. Now everyone was looking at the "perfect couple" ...only now they were not near so perfect.

All of a sudden Joe and his jeans and boots looked pretty special to her and she couldn't wait to get home and fix him his favorite meal. "I am even going to bake him an apple pie!" she says to herself. Turning away from the Clinique counter and the baubles of wealth, her life and her Maybelline and Cover Girl didn't sound so bad anymore.

Dedicated to the 4.8 million American women that are physical assaulted at the hands of their intimate partner every year.