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## The Washington Post

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# On my wedding day, my hair was a disaster. If my mother were there, how would she fix it?



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January 15, 2020 at 7:00 a.m. EST

I glance at my maid of honor in the salon mirror, my eyes pleading to her for help. This can't be happening, not on my wedding day.

I have an updo so messy that it looks as if Edward Scissorhands has fashioned a giant piece of tumbleweed to the crown of my head. My hairstylist stands back to get the full visual, but even he knows that his creation is terrible. My hair looked perfect the first time he did it, but a piece fell out, and instead of using hair spray, he started over.

“Let me try again,” he says.

A few more stylists gather around us to assess the situation. “Do you serve alcohol here?” I ask.

My mother, who wore her hair down on her wedding day, would be horrified at what this man has done. The entire time I planned my wedding, I wished she were here. But I never needed her more than now, with this distressed hairstylist who's so nervous that his hands are shaking. She died when I was in college.

Maybe my wedding veil, the same one she wore 40 years ago, will cover the damage. But what if it doesn't?

"Let's just do a blowout," I say.

I think about the inspiration photo I brought to my hairstylist a few days earlier. I found a photo of Blake Lively that I liked. Her hair always looks perfect — relaxed and flowy, cascading down her back. I knew I wouldn't look exactly like her, but one can dream, especially on her wedding day.

When I showed him the photo, my hairstylist scoffed: "I think your hair would look better up."

I realize now that this was my first mistake: hiring a hairstylist who didn't listen to me. But I humored him as he effortlessly swept my hair off my neck. I loved it. I still looked like me, just a little more glamorous. Plus, my fiance was so used to seeing my hair down.

Maybe it would be fun to surprise him!

Now, though, I'm the one surprised by how drastically wrong this day is turning out. It's as if this man fluttering around me has forgotten that he's a hairstylist. He paces around my chair, then picks up a comb.

I had actually been waiting for this — the rite of passage so traumatizing that the bride can share the tale only months after the wedding. I just hadn't expected my story to involve my hair, the thing I cared about most.

"Let me try again," my hairstylist pleads.

I mull it over, wincing each time he pulls out a bobby pin.

"I think I should wear my hair down," I reply.

"Trust me," he says. Two words no bride ever wants to hear from her hairstylist on her wedding day.

I glance at my phone. "Okay, but hurry. We're running out of time."

My hairstylist dashes off, then returns with a strange-looking hair piece shaped like a doughnut. “I’m going to build your updo around this,” he says. “It’ll give your hair extra volume.”

I don’t want a fake hair piece. What I want is my mother. I imagine her flying through the door like a superhero, packing heat with two cans of Aqua Net hair spray to save the day so I don’t have to get married with a doughnut in my hair.

Hair was everything to us when I was young. Every morning before school, when it was so early that it was still dark out, we’d be making great hair happen in the bathroom. It was our war room: cans of hair spray strewn about with their lids off for easy access; five types of combs, picks and brushes; and the curling iron perched on the side, heat on its highest setting.

Every day, my mother found some way to jazz up my straight brown hair with polka-dot bows, clips in the shape of rotary telephones and sparkly butterfly barrettes. Sometimes, she would crimp my hair or feather my bangs. My first perm really changed the game. It transformed my limp hair into tight, rotini pasta full of volume. My mother had been getting perms for most of her adult life and was proud to pass on what she had learned.

“It looks really good!” she said when I walked out of Famous Hair with my new do.

I pulled on a curl, and it bounced right back up. “I can’t even get a comb through it! It’s perfect!”

To complete the look, she bought me my own can of hair spray, which I wish my hair stylist had doused my hair with from the very beginning, instead of trying this hair doughnut nonsense.

While planning my wedding, my grief over losing my mother resurfaced every time I made a decision without her. When I bought my powder blue wedding heels, I thought about her shoes that I gave to Goodwill after her death. I wanted to keep them, but they didn’t fit.

When I found a seamstress on the Lower East Side to refurbish her wedding veil so that I could wear it, I struggled with the realization that I would never get to hear from her what her own wedding day was like. When I looked at myself in the mirror in my wedding dress, I thought about the photo my mother took with her own mother on her wedding day, both of them smiling at each other in her dresser mirror. I would never have that, either.

I yearned for her opinion on my choices — my dress, jewelry, makeup — but always came up empty. Now, though, in this terrible moment, I know exactly what my mother would tell this man holding a hair doughnut: “Don’t skimp on the hair spray,” I say.

This time, he gets the message. There's so much hair spray floating around the room by the time he finishes that one light of a match would probably set the salon on fire.

When my hairstylist spins me around to see the back of my hair, I have to admit that I'm impressed. He used the doughnut in my updo, and while there's no trace of it to the eye, it's still there behind the scenes, holding me in place.

He doesn't charge me a cent, but I still tip generously before walking out the door. My mother would have done the same.

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