

The Changing Room

C.W. usually takes number 6. She leaves two cocktail rings, the valet tag and lip gloss in a leather wristlet, but puts her BlackBerry in the pocket of her robe. Hanna leaves a Birkin filled with goodies—a Symthson diary, black AmEx, ‘scrips—in number 11 on Mondays and Thursdays. And an unnamed patron with an impeccable silver bob favors number 18. The shoes she leaves are insanely good, if I was lucky enough to be her size.

I take 24 in the corner. But I won’t tell you what I keep in it yet.

You really don’t need to bring anything here. In the atrium, there is always hot tea and yerba mate, fresh fruit and a crisp stack of magazines. The girls provide a warm robe and slippers and a little brass key that matches a numbered brass plate on your locker. Just drop your car with the valet and give your signature for all else. You don’t need anything, but it’s amazing the things people bring.

The moneyed are trusting, I told Brewster. Just last month, I returned a handbag from Filene’s Basement to Ralph Lauren. And the tony catering spot next door took my personal check without asking for an ID or running it through a machine. It’s as if you wouldn’t even know they existed unless you were one of them, so of course you can afford it.

When I joined Highsmith, there was a whole docket of paperwork to fill out. But when I gave the guest services manager my check, she simply folded it into her appointment book.

“Do what you need to do and get out of there,” said Brewster. “Get the hell out before they try to cash that check.”

It takes time, I told him. I need to learn routines. Hanna, for example, takes off her

jewelry before a massage so it doesn't get slick with lavender oil. C.W. doesn't wear her rings to her appointments with the new young pro.

It's not too hard to fit in. Old money, that's what you want to be. Old money has a certain look. Don't bother with the runway stills in *Harper's*, take note of what the philanthropists are wearing. I chose a camelhair coat, oversize sunglasses, a pair of ballerina flats and a burnt-orange "Kelly" bag. The faux-Hermes stays tucked snug under my arm, so you can't see the crooked stitching. My studs are CZ.

I go straight to the ladies' lounge without opening my coat. There's no point in wearing anything underneath. If I wanted to dress like them, though, I'd wear one color from head to toe. Preferably ivory or cream. You have to be well-off to look immaculate in a color that's so easily stained. Old money shies from color at the argument of quality. If you get regular manicures, you shouldn't need polish. Fingernails and toenails should be the healthy pink of a seashell. Polish is tacky, acrylic tips are tacky, logoed handbags and piss-colored diamonds are tacky.

A woman should have the resources and leisure to take care of herself. As far as they know, I do.

My hair is blown-out daily. I choose smoothies of anti-oxidant rich berries. I allow myself to be lulled by the water-play in the fountain, by the hush-hush of slippers in the corridor. In between treatments, there's a steam room and an endless pool. As I relax in the atrium, flipping through *Philanthropy* magazine, the ladies are escorted down one hall to the med-spa, down another for wet treatments, another for the salon.

New money women gossip incessantly about their husbands, their help and each other. They look for their own photos in the social pictures of the metro magazines. But even I know that a lady should only be in the paper twice—upon her marriage and upon her death. My silence is taken as new money manners, which is just as well. When I do speak, I am amicable to everyone. I am gracious to the manicurists, the juice girl, the

laundry girl. I remember everyone's name and thank them sincerely. It would be tacky not to.

When you are given such thoughtful attention, you want to be lovely enough to deserve it. Everything and everyone is nice. The lockers don't even need vents. In most changing rooms, they need to make sure your unaired gym clothes don't go skunky. Here, you leave your spent tennis whites or yoga pants in a little mesh bag, and a girl brings them back cleaned and pressed on a hanger.

The changing room here smells like Boucheron, brass polish and vanilla bean. Brewster smells of charred coffee and curdled milk. His polo gets soaked when he empties the garbage at Sweet Bean, and I swear that stink won't wash out. Brewster makes \$7.75 an hour and splits the tip jar. He just doesn't understand.

I don't want to squander all of the amenities that Highsmith Resort Club & Spa has to offer. Though I haven't told Brewster, I slipped my check right out of that drawer when no one was looking. It will take them a little longer to realize it's gone, and apologetically ask for another, than it would to bounce the first. I haven't yet tried the restaurant's signature salmon and micro-greens or any of the seven types of yoga at the Health & Wellness Pavilion. I haven't stayed in the villas. I did, however, sign for a couple of great pieces from the boutique, so I'll have something to wear besides the robe.

Today, as I make my way across the lawn, I see Brewster. He's pacing outside the gates and waiting for me to come out. His arms, ripy from hoisting bags of beans, strain his knit shirt. Brewster's ready for his cut and ready for me to come home. But I don't think that security will buzz in an angry guy in a dirty barista apron. Even if he has a bit of a temper, Brewster's not stupid. He won't interfere if there's still a chance of getting the goods.

"Get them when they're down to their drawers," he said. "If a women is as classy as all that, you could slip a ring right off her hand during a mud bath, or whatever it is, and

she's not gonna run half-naked after you."

Honestly, Brewster just doesn't get it.

Still, I skip Pilates in the pavilion and head back to the changing room before Brewster can see me. And there, kneeling in front of number 24, is the laundry girl. She's got the lock to my Kelly bag in her right hand.

Now, the lock should be engraved with the word "Hermes" and a number, and this number should match one engraved on each of two keys. Lottie knows this and I know this. Just the same way the little brass key clipped to my sleeve is engraved with "24." Lottie—that's the laundry girl—I've always remembered to thank her by name. The counterfeit handbag is a moot point, though, as Lottie has two pages from *Philanthropy* clutched in her other hand. On one I'd kept a careful ledger of the comings and goings of the other guests: when and what they would leave in their lockers. On the other (and this list was almost as long) I chronicled Brewster's exploits, as leverage in case he decided to rat on me.

The old me wouldn't know quite how to handle this, but the new me feels absolutely clear. I focus on the H embroidered on Lottie's knit shirt and I take pity on her. It reminds me of Brewster's sad work shirt and its little stitched heart and coffee bean. I take a deep yogic breath before I speak.

"Lottie, do you need some help?"

She startles and drops the bag.

"Lottie," I say with infinite patience, "if you needed bus fare to get home, you only need to have asked."

"Oh no, miss," she says. "I just came to hang your cleaning in your locker."

“Thank you...”

“And all of this just fell out.”

“I see.”

Lottie smooths the lists flat, then hands me the orange Kelly, my un-cashed check, a hair clip, an earring.

Poor girl, I think. Once you're caught going through a member's personal belongings, it would be hard to get another job at a nice place like Highsmith. It would be hard to get minimum wage at Sweet Bean.

So I won't say anything about it. I'm a private person, really, and I don't want to bring undue attention upon myself.

“Thank you, Lottie.”

I put the papers in the bag, the bag on the hook, the clip in my hair and the earring in my pocket.

“You're welcome, miss.” Then her face flushes pink and sweaty as if she'd steeped in the steam room. And she goes.

It's getting late. The ladies come and empty their lockers. They have pressing social engagements. I sit in a dim corner of the changing room, turning the earring over in my hand. See, if there's a rash of theft, no one will keep their valuables in their lockers anymore. They might just leave the club altogether. And girls like Lottie could lose their jobs. And, eventually, they'll be looking for me. But one earring out of a pair, that's not a theft, that's just carelessness. It's bound to turn up.

Once it's dark, I'll pry the diamonds out of Hanna's Fred Leighton piece. And I'll be able to properly pay my membership dues.

The door to the changing room opens. I expect it's the laundry girl's return, but it's the prematurely-silver socialite. I see her though she doesn't see me. She takes an oversized hobo bag from number 18 and drops in something shiny. Then, after giving the room a quick scope, she grabs a stack of freshly laundered towels and two pairs of slippers and shoves them in, too. It's a shame. I'd think that a woman with shoes like hers would have better taste.

The door of number 18, like the rest of the changing room, is immaculate. Slick and polished, no breathing holes. The little brass plate catches the light. And, before she can see me, I've decided to take care of this myself. Taking towels is just plain tacky. We can't have that kind of thing here. It's an atmosphere of trust.