



CounterCulture

The Holy Trinity of Beauty and the Texas Triple Threat

by amanda tackett | illustration by carol adair

“My goodness,” the sales associate exhaled, **“your pores are gigantic.”** She was wearing a contraption on her head, like a combination miner’s helmet and jeweler’s loop. With her perfect hair, skin, nails and *that thing* on her head, she looked like Hasidic Spelunker Barbie. I was at Neiman Marcus’ biannual Beauty Event.

“How big are we talking?” I asked. Barbie made it sound like I had a fleet of Hummers parked on my face. She was eyeing me like a wildcatter on the Barnett Shale.

It never ceases to amaze me. They can simultaneously insult me and entice me to spend. Those Barbies are something else. But they have a svengali-like hold on me. They hold the keys to the Holy Trinity of beauty: Bobbi Brown, Trish McEvoy and Laura Mercier.

Beauty Event is a big deal. *Everyone goes*, even me. I don’t *need* to go, *obviously*, but I am a sucker for the “gift with purchase” concept. The best thing about Beauty Event is The Bag. For a \$100 cosmetic or fragrance purchase (which, let’s be honest, is incredibly easy at Neiman’s), they give away these cute handbags. Somehow, I always manage to go over budget.

“You don’t use toner, I can tell,” Barbie announces, “and if you do, it’s full of alcohol.” The only alcohol going through my pores was passive respiration of wine from the night before but I wasn’t about to admit that to her. Barbie continued, “*and your skin is feeling the effects of environmental damage...*” *Oh*, that.

I apologized, “I’m going to start recycling next week, *I swear*. I bought the blue bag but I couldn’t find them for like a whole year,

and when I was looking for wax paper in the pantry last week, there they were!”

She squinted at me, “No, I’m speaking of living in a city, pollution, *smoking...*” *What, was she my mother, now?* “And other toxins in everyday life.” Barbie gave me a knowing look, and was ready to slap cuffs on me and drip water on my forehead until I admitted that once, in 10th grade, I fell asleep without washing off my makeup. I squirmed out of the stool. I feared an impending hemorrhoid frisk.

“What I really came here for today is two little lipsticks, or a lipstick and a gloss, or some cheap perfume, but I don’t want to smell cheap. You got anything like that?” My voice trailed off. She was drilling me with her glassy Barbie eyes.

“We’ll get to *that* later,” said Barbie. For now, she was exploring with her special head-mounted light. Exploring my credit limit and about to head up a beauty *intervention*. There I was with my big dirty pores, addicted to ugly. Resistance, I knew, was futile. Under the perfect soft lighting at Neiman’s, I thought for a moment of the irony of my situation.

My father, an electrical engineer, had re-done all of the lighting in Neiman Marcus stores. As my father told Mr. Marcus, people make >>

“You don’t use toner, I can tell,” Barbie announces, “and if you do, it’s full of alcohol.” The only alcohol going through my pores was passive respiration of wine from the night before

Beauty Event is a big deal. Everyone goes, even me. I don't need to go, obviously, but I am a sucker for the "gift with purchase" concept. The best thing about Beauty Event is The Bag. For a \$100 cosmetic or fragrance purchase (which, let's be honest, is incredibly easy at Neiman's), they give away these cute handbags. Somehow, I always manage to go over budget.



their buying decisions in the dressing room and at the cosmetics counter. "Eighty-six the harsh fluorescents so that a woman can see exactly *how big* her butt is, and how she looks with all that *crap* smeared on her face, and your clerks can reel 'em in." This was back in the day, when Stanley was at the helm of Neiman's. I can't imagine my dad saying "big butt" and "crap" to Stanley Marcus. Regardless, there I was in Neiman's, a victim of soft beautiful lights, and there was no escape from Barbie. *Gee thanks, Dad.*

"Are you familiar with Orlane? You need Orlane." Barbie glided over toward another counter.

I wasn't sure what she was talking about, but pretended I did, "Oh, I know, what happened to those people in that hurricane was just awful..." I followed her.

Barbie stopped suddenly causing me to rear-end her. She turned, made a sweeping Vanna White gesture and triumphantly announced, "No, Orlane, *the brand*. Infused with natural botanicals to fight free radical damage?"

My response: a blank stare. Barbie's response to my response: "Have a seat."

Barbie referred to her inventory as *product*. Singular. Rather than products. Plural. I nervously eyed the jars, bottles, and tubes lined up in a fancy acrylic display. "Oh," I replied, still stuck on the pesky free radicals, "I know, I saw that about the PETA demonstrators bugging ya'll..."

As it turns out, free radicals kill you. I had a lot of free radicals. I was a walking time bomb of free radicals. Barbie was unfazed as she whipped out a cotton swab, "The first product you desperately need is an eye treatment." I winced and thought, *careful, Barbie, you could put my eye out with that thing*. She was busy *transforming* my left eye with *product* when one of her helpers, Geriatric Barbie, stopped to gawk at my pores.

"I'm almost 40," I chided Barbie and her elder, expecting them to recoil in disbelief. No way! *I don't believe it! We need to see ID before dispensing Orlane products!* >>

Geriatric Barbie piped up, “Well I’m way past 50, and you will love what Orlane *product* does for you, honey.” I kept my thoughts to myself, but I could tell by just looking at the older Barbie, that she, like me, never met a merlot she didn’t love, and was intimately familiar with the business end of a Marlboro.

Barbie was now rubbing the muscles in between my eyes, hard, “These are the labia muscles of the face. I am rubbing so that the product *penetrates*.” My fears of the hemorrhoid frisk, as it turns out, may not have been so irrational. The way she said ‘penetrate’ was like something from a forensic TV show.

Barbie was now rubbing my neck, “You need to *recognize* the different needs of your skin.”

Now we were getting around to the 12 steps of the intervention. “Your eyes are *tissue paper*, your face is *writing paper*, like fine vellum, and your neck and chest are *wrapping paper*, and this you can put on your twin friends...” her hand went close to the top of my sports bra. I snapped back about two feet.

Was I in Neiman’s or a seedy massage parlor? Geriatric Barbie moved in for the kill, massaging my arms with *special arm product*. Over the next few minutes they introduced me to a lot of different product. Arms, legs, face, eyes, stomach, neck (*and friends!*), they all need their own product.

I was confused by the paper thing. “What kind of paper are my armpits?” I asked, “What about my toes, the tops, not the bottom? Is there product for that?” Barbie ignored my questions as I pondered all of the potential problem areas on my body. “You know that weird skin behind your ears, but not really your neck...”

“And *the product* specifically targets the adult acne we all get before menopause,” she raised her voice, and teased me with her Holy Grail, the gift with purchase. “I don’t have zits.” I said nervously. She might deny me my bag.

A mental note card flipped in Barbie’s head, and the pitch changed script. “This is an active *product*, it cleanses, refines, *and* fights aging...” Geriatric Barbie chimed in again, “We also have fabulous new revitalizing hair *product* that will bring your tresses back to life...” I was being tag-teamed.

I’m no fool, well, at least *not all the time*. I looked the Barbies square and said, “Your hair is dead, that’s what it *does*, be dead. When I took biology in college, *pre-med*,” I threw in for good measure, “I learned that hair is like ear wax, it’s technically a cell by-product.” I drew the line when some no account Barbies start picking on my hair, my only good feature.

By the time it was all over, the Barbies got me for some toner, the magic cream, two eye creams and a mask. A very official Barbie in a white lab coat confirmed my diagnosis, and wrote out some instructions.


I went a little over budget. That got me The Bag, the one from Beauty Event, and another, better bag from Orlane. Both bags contain *product*. I was like a junkie who had just scored.

Barbie never finished my eye treatment (right side), and I wore my sunglasses the rest of the day, lest I look uneven. When I got home,

I could tell by just looking at the older Barbie, that she, like me, never met a merlot she didn’t love.

I immediately unwrapped the day’s take. I lined up the pretty new bottles next to my sink. I studied my *beauty prescription*, written in earnest by Dr. Barbie, in her Neiman’s lab coat. I had to get the steps in order, or gosh, who knows what would happen? I was smart, pretty, and had a new purse. The Texas Triple Threat.

I couldn’t wait to test out my new *product*. After thoroughly cleansing my soiled pores, I decided to apply my new mask, which seriously hurt. It felt like battery acid. They didn’t smear that on my *writing paper* in the store. I was desperately rinsing the mask, and it seeped into my *tissue papers*. Afterwards, I patted my *fine vellum* dry. Blinded, I reached for the small pump dispenser to *penetrate* my facial labia. I mistakenly slathered my husband’s Nioxin hair growth serum all over my *tissue, fine vellum, wrapping paper* and *friends*.

How will I explain this to Barbie at the next Beauty Event? She will glare disapprovingly at me, *again*. I will have dreadlocks sprouting from my cheeks. The ones on my face. With Barbie, and her legion, you have to get specific about body parts. Surely she can recommend *product* for that, too. Color me there. 

Amanda is a local freelance writer. Her e-mail is thewifeyone@aol.com.