

## **An Eternal Statement**

“Fabric, Miss Collingsworth. It always comes down to fabric so the selection of the right one is paramount. All of my most influential and fashionable customers—the *grande dames* as I refer to them—appreciate our vast array of fabrics here at Haverly & Moss. Of course we search the world for only the finest textiles and textures so that our refined and demanding clientele are presented with only the most exclusive options.

“We have been, after all, described by *The New Yorker*, as creating ‘the standard for all that is remarkable and ravishing for the 1950s in Manhattan’s elite society.’”

Mr. Martin Haverly was the very definition of sophistication and elegance. Prissy was a word that was often used. His voice was, well, soft—just barely above a whisper at times—and it had a fluttering quality to it. It was probably manufactured because no one could reasonably track it to any region or culture on earth. Certainly it was well-practiced.

Still, to the upper crust ladies who visited his salon, it was, as they said, “quite exotic.”

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He also looked the part, something he spent hours each day perfecting before he ever left the front door of his 23rd floor apartment in the city. His features were sharp and unforgiving with a needle-like nose that was both too long and too narrow and that aspect alone was sufficient to describe the man as “snooty” in the truest sense.

His hair, thinning since he was a teenager—if he had ever been an adolescent—was black and sparse and greased to a near-hardened skull cap over his small but elongated head. The ears were decent, the mouth thin, the mustache as if it had been crafted in 1920. His skin could be fairly described as alabaster, even translucent, and there was no evidence he had spent a day of his life in the sun.

Never appearing in anything but a classic Saville Row tuxedo with tails, he clearly resembled Fred Astaire during his heyday but without any of the warmth that the cinema star so naturally exuded.

Every suit that Haverly wore was virtually identical except to someone who had developed a unique ability for identifying shades of black. Each was fitted tightly at the waist, with large pads in the shoulders, silk-satin covered peaked lapels, and a four-button double-breasted jacket.

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Each of the cuffs on his starched white shirts were emblazoned with monogrammed cufflinks. There was a jettied pocket on either side and the one over the left chest had a satin handkerchief elegantly tucked into it.

The pants, also of Merino wool, were pressed to perfection with pleats as sharp as the edge of a knife blade.

As he spoke, his hands were cupped together in front of his waist, elbows fashionably extended to Emily Post's exact specifications. His chin was high, his shoulders back, and his chest puffed out to whatever degree he could manage. Seldom was it impressive.

But the overall package was absolute perfection. As it should be for such elite clients who had selected Mr. Haverly and his creations from among the many others in the uptown portion of the city who longed to have just a fraction of the trade he enjoyed. To have an appointment with the man was indeed something to crow about and many of his older patrons, in fact, died waiting before they even had a chance to get his advice and suggestions.

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Such was the Fifth Avenue crowd in Manhattan and although some bristled at his demanding nature, none dared challenge it nor risked being blacklisted. There were, after all, only so many appointments available on any given day. Thus Haverly, who usually went by a single name like Halston, was secure in his position in New York society.

There also was no question about that for Miss Myrna Collingsworth—38 year-old socialite, philanthropist, mover and shaker. Oft-mentioned in the New York society pages, she was a member of the exclusive Mayflower Club and owned a permanent box at the Polo Grounds. She was, as they say, *somebody*.

On this particular afternoon, Haverly was holding his familiar platform position on the upper landing of a series of marble steps shaped in a semi-circle and rimmed with 14-karat gold. It was patterned after a design on the Titanic because, well, because Haverly aspired to such ostentatious surroundings without a single thought about the unfortunate ultimate fate of the original. Such was his hubris.

From his throne-like perch—and fully in his element—at the moment the man was addressing and entertaining an audience of one.

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This would, of course, be Miss Myrna Collingsworth of the famed Boston Collingsworths. She had arrived on this day somewhat uncharacteristically under the social radar and with little attention other than the overwhelming amount she was currently receiving from Haverly who had no problem fawning over her.

“Fabric, Miss Collingsworth. It always comes down to fabric so the selection of the proper one is paramount. Of course we present our esteemed clientele with only the most exclusive options.”

As he spoke—his eyes never straying a centimeter from his client—with a wave of his hand an assistant appeared from each wing of the gilded room carrying a swatch book of fine textiles as elegantly as if they were the Crown Jewels. It was a perfectly choreographed event which was also perfectly executed.

Featuring a variety of fabric textures and colors, the assistants displayed the swatch books to Miss Collingsworth on one arm like a waiter at the 21 Club presenting a vintage wine selection.

Miss Myrna began flipping through the options somewhat indifferently which launched Haverly into full pitchman mode.

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“Silk, of course, is all the rage these days but for a woman with such discriminating tastes, might I suggest linen. It carries an understated elegance and our linens are imported from Ireland, of course. Those little lasses will work their fingers to the bone for you my dear, you can be assured of that.”

If it was his attempt at humor, it fell flat. Haverly instantly regretted his comment and, after clearing his throat somewhat dramatically—as if that might wipe away his words—he continued on with his well-rehearsed sales push.

“Might I suggest, ma’am, linen with some satin panels as a mixture of textures that will delight the eye. We call it the static and dynamic interchange. Very European, very *haute*. It will most assuredly be a stunning creation. One of a kind. The stuff of legend. Setting a new social standard.”

Miss Myrna wasn’t responding as expected, however—just examining the swatches without acknowledging the high-class huckster—and so he read the room and took another tack.

“Oooo...hand-painted linen and satin with tiny roses. Yes! Yes, my dear! That would be breathtaking. Oh my God, it would be a Haverly masterpiece. I’m feeling a quiver, Miss C, I truly am.”

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For the first time, she glanced up at the man with her piercing eyes causing his blood to run cold for a second. "Silk. I want silk."

"Excellent choice, my dear. You have such exquisite taste. Of course, silk it is. Brilliant. Might I suggest a midnight blue? I am finding these days that Parisian fashion is dictating an understated..."

"Burgundy. I want burgundy trimmed in a rose color."

"Stunning! You are a genius, Miss Collingsworth! Of course, of course...burgundy. Absolutely ravishing, spectacular, gorgeous, might I say even devastating! Your eye is simply impeccable."

The effusive praise was gagging, but then that was Haverly.

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“Well, my dear, now it is time to discuss structure and design. We can measure for size as well and of course there are a myriad of accessories to consider. Everything must be perfect, absolutely perfect for such a grand and memorable occasion. Perfect....nothing short of perfection!”

Haverly paused for a few seconds to build the suspense, for the next line he would deliver is the one he treasured the most.

“After all, Miss Collingsworth, the selection of the proper and appropriate casket is one of the most important decisions of a lifetime. It makes an eternal statement!”