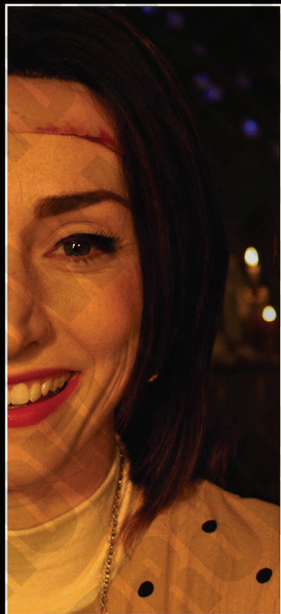




NAJARRA TOWNSEND

BREA GRANT



THE STYLIST

SIXX THREE CLAY PRODUCTIONS METHUEN MEDIA and THE LINE FILM COMPANY in association with WIDEORBIT LTD presents "THE STYLIST"
NAJARRA TOWNSEND BREA GRANT JOHN NICHOLAS CLEGG JOHN HALLUX SHARP JOHN PAUL THOMPSON SARAH SHARP ANDREW ROBERT PATRICK STEEN
DIRECTED BY KYLE CLARK PRODUCED BY PAUL PAWLOWSKI JASON DUNN WRITTEN BY CHRIS KNITTED PRODUCED BY NAJARRA TOWNSEND JOHN PAUL THOMPSON
EDITED BY JILL GEWARGZIAN & ERIC HAVENS AND ERIC STOLZE EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JILL GEWARGZIAN

THE LINE FILM CO

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CAST

Najarra Townsend Claire

Brea Grant Olivia

Davis DeRock Charlie

Sarah McGuire Dawn

Jennifer Seward Sarah

Millie Milan Monique

Kimmy Igla Rose

Laura Kirk Frankie

Bety Le Shackleford Christie

CREW

Directed by **Jill Gevargizian**

Written by **Jill Gevargizian & Eric Havens** and **Eric Stolze**

Produced by **Jill Gevargizian, p.g.a., Robert Patrick Stern, p.g.a.,** and **Sarah Sharp, p.g.a.**

Producers **Chris Knitter, Jordon Rioux, Najarra Townsend,** and **John Pata**

Executive Producers **Kyle Clark, Paul Pawlowski, Jason Bunn,** and **Maisey-Kay Kendrick**

Associate Producers **Chelsea Brown, Tony Wash, Robert & Judy Knitter, Alan & Eve Rioux, Thomas Stern, Elizabeth Gray, Mark DiBona, Christopher Dean McAfee,** and **Nick Ford**

Line Producer **Chris Knitter**

Director of Photography **Robert Patrick Stern**

Production Designer **Sarah Sharp**

Edited by **John Pata**

Original Score by **Nicholas Elert**

Costume Designer **Halley Sharp**



THE STYLIST

A CURIOUS CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

by Emma Westwood

In the opening shot of *The Stylist*, psychopathic serial killer and hair stylist Claire (Najarra Townsend) drinks from a takeaway coffee cup, upon which the barista has identified her; her name written in black: *Claire*. While the camera remains fixed on this Claire—who comes across as anxious, an emotional state that we soon realize characterizes her more than any other—our eyes are drawn to that coffee cup, and also her name by way of cinematic introduction. *Claire*. Furthermore, this introduction hits a note of irony that then resounds across the rest of the film: that of Coffee Cup Claire's profound inability to be at ease in her own skin (*nay, hair*)

and the extreme identity confusion that transmutes¹ her into a homicidal maniac whose pathological impulses see her wearing the scalps of others.

Who is Claire? We know very little about her, even when the end credits roll following her devastating bridal charade. Across the film, she recounts her backstory in the type of fragmented dialogue that typifies her character. It's enough for us to glean that she is orphaned with a less-than-ideal upbringing, although with the resources to maintain a comfortable solo existence in a very large, ornate house.

"We all want what we don't have," says Claire's first client-victim and, in doing so, delivers the prophetic proclamation that underscores Claire's murderous rampage. Claire wants what she doesn't have and, by wearing her victims' hair, she feels she can somehow take possession of what they *are* and make it her own. Yet, when she undergoes these transitions in the dressing-room basement of her home, the emotions sliding across her face suggest she is merely grasping at ghosts, at the impossible. One moment, you can see her feeling the exuberance of her new self, and the next moment, infernal self-loathing and anxiety—her "natural" state.

The opening of *The Stylist* mimics the short film from where the feature film found its genesis, which explains the self-containment of this initial sequence: Coffee Cup Claire developing a rapport with a new client, treating her to a glass of spiked wine (poison often considered the preferred weapon of female killers) before sensually washing her hair in a slow-motion sequence (quite literally "grooming" her victim) and then repurposing her hair styling implements to claim her victim's scalp as a trophy. The rest of the film is a clever propagation of this establishing sequence; one where the motivation comes from the giddy acceptance Claire feels after being

¹ The use of "transmutes" in this context is significant. Curiously, while Claire is pointedly female in gender—to the point that she embodies a number of feminine clichés—her homicidal desire to assume the identities of others echoes the handling of transgender characters in horror. Think Norman Bates as his mother in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) or Dr. Robert Elliott's alter ego in *Dressed to Kill* (Brian De Palma, 1980).

inveigled by Olivia (Brea Grant) into being the hair stylist for her wedding. We can see how Claire's desire to be "normal" and enter into a friendship with Olivia causes her to bottle homicidal tendencies that are always threatening to erupt, and indeed they do at times of emotional stress—her skinning of scalps an expression of other forms of demonstrative, yet predominantly female forms of self-harm such as cutting or bulimia. Witness what Claire goes through after each kill and you can see traces of "this hurts me more than it hurts you."

Over the decades, there has been much discussion in cinema criticism circles about the male gaze in horror and how it has influenced storytelling within the genre, negatively and otherwise. *The Stylist* comes from the directorial POV of a woman, Jill Gevargizian, with screenwriting assistance from two Erics, Havens and Stolze respectively. Despite masculine writing involvement, it can rightfully be considered a woman-on-woman perspective, which consequently affords it distinct qualities. For instance, *The Stylist* is stylish. Compare it to the sweaty sleaze of the hyper-masculine *Maniac* (William Lustig, 1980)—a film that draws comparisons due to its scalplings and first-person murderer perspective—and there is a visual loveliness here that suggests that, while cut from similar cloth, *The Stylist* presents such psychopathy through an entirely different lens. If a comparison could be made, it's the worlds created by Peter Strickland in *The Duke of Burgundy* (2014) or *In Fabric* (2018) that come to mind.

The dominant aesthetic of warm browns, oranges, and yellows highlighted with washes of green, blend lusciously with Claire's long, red hair—and she does have gorgeous hair, but *we all want what we don't have*, right? Red wine, red hair, red blood, all pulse through the kill scenes and, occasionally, they will stain a shoe or a dress (in the words of Lady Macbeth, "Out, damned spot!"). Claire herself is also notably stylish; those clothes and those silk pajamas, one seemingly for every night of the week, are on a color spectrum match to her blazing locks. However, when grooming herself to join the bride-to-be at her bachelorette party, she stands in

front of the mirror and changes her outfit several times before finally settling on her original selection—a ritual that would be all-too familiar for many a woman.

Her obsession with other women is notably “Single White Female” in nature, referring to both the 1992 film by Barbet Schroeder and the phenomenon. Even in its creepiest moments of intimacy and intensity—the washing of hair, massaging of scalps, wearing of Olivia’s lingerie, and then deigning to use her vibrator—Claire’s obsession remains firmly heterosexual. It might be difficult for some viewers to fully appreciate the murky, bottomless depths of female jealousy, rage, and rivalry, although *The Stylist* does a superb job in illustrating what the inner machinations of a highly disturbed female mind might be capable of.

The central tenets of *The Stylist*—“bridal” and “hair,” appropriately conjoined as “bridal hair”—are where the pronounced femininity of the film really finds its expression. Olivia urges Claire to come to the rescue as the hair stylist for her wedding. She does so indirectly, via SMS and the filmmaker’s deployment of split-screen, in a non-confrontational yet highly manipulative fashion. Similarly, Claire generally chooses not to directly attack her victims; the “roofies” she serves them rendering them unconsciousness and allowing her to “claim her scalp” (*victory!*) in a relatively unaggressive manner, any hiccups notwithstanding. When Claire finally succumbs to Olivia’s insistence to be her bridal hair stylist, the praise Olivia heaps on her is heady, seductive, inclusive. It makes Claire feel worthy and seemingly gives Olivia the upper hand, although Olivia’s emotional manipulation of Claire will eventually turn into self-sabotage and unwittingly position her as victim.

Body parts frequently play a fetishized role in cinema but arguably never more pronounced than in horror. In Greek mythology, one of the most recognizable female monsters, Medusa, is identifiable by her mane of hissing snakes. In *Bride of Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1935), the mad doctor not only created a female “mate” for his monster but also launched an iconic hairstyle—and a bridal hairstyle, no less—that continues as a mainstay at Halloween parties almost a century later.



In *May* (Lucky McKee, 2002), the lonely titular protagonist, constantly disappointed by the friendships she forms, resorts to a Frankensteinian assemblage of parts from different bodies to create the perfect doll-person.

In *The Stylist*, an obsession with hair could be considered something of an occupational hazard for Claire but it is also a trait stereotypically attributed to her gender. The relationship women form with their hair is almost symbiotic, which accounts for the extreme trauma female cancer survivors experience from chemotherapy-related hair loss and the loss of their identity. Women frequently change their hairstyles to celebrate a new chapter in their lives, or when attempting to write that chapter, or when they simply want to feel different to their usual selves. Claire is a hyper-exaggerated, yet scarily all-too familiar, example of the latter two instances.

While Claire may feel disempowered, her position as a stylist gives her status that she is personally unable to see. A by-product of her vocation is that of quasi-psychologist, listening to the problems of people and making them feel better by taking care of their hair. In explaining her attraction to styling, Claire tells her first victim, “You get to go in and out of peoples’ lives, you hear stories, you give life advice. It’s almost like having a family.” Ironically, as the person who dishes out advice and makes others feel better about themselves, she is nothing but a hollow vessel, constantly seeking scalps to fill that gaping void in her being and give some meaning to the person behind the name on the coffee cup. She has the power to create identity for others but is incapable of doing so for herself—*hair stylist heal thyself*.

Her status is only emphasized by the role she plays in Olivia’s wedding. When dealing with the late cancellation of her wedding hair stylist and awaiting Claire’s decision, Olivia says, “At this point, I’ll be walking down the aisle in a baseball cap and overalls.” Hair may seem trivial to some, but to a bride—and indeed to a woman—good hair is the icing that adorns any ceremonial cake. What *The Stylist* does is use these two powerfully symbolic female constructs—hair and weddings—to give substance to the horror; powerful constructs but also straightforward ones

that don’t need to be overplayed to tell a story that goes beyond what is said or displayed on the screen. These two constructs ultimately collide in the concluding sequences in a finale that, to quote an apt cliché, is not easily forgotten but also ties together all the thematic threads that have come before it—the identity crises, the psychotic urges, the uncontainable obsession, the desire to fit in.

In this age of so-called “elevated horror,” *The Stylist* achieves what so many other horror films fail to do: it eschews conceptual complexity to present a simply insightful horror tale well told that maintains its story foundations from first through to third act. For Coffee Cup Claire, it is the decisive nail in her identity coffin. Her psychopathy has hit the point of no return, where Claire, whoever she may have been, is permanently lost and the complete assumption of another identity is her only recourse. Always the bridesmaid, never the bride? She turns the tables on that old adage in the most spectacular of moves. When the Claire-Olivia amalgam finally walks down the aisle to “Here Comes the Bride,” it may not be an entirely unexpected conclusion, but it is the most fitting one and bloody satisfying at that. You’ll never look at a bad hair day in the same way again.

Emma Westwood is a film writer and broadcaster whose books include a Monster Movies compendium and monographs on The Fly and Seconds (upcoming). She is currently working on a book of essays about Bride of Frankenstein.



LOCATING SCOUTING / FINAL FILM COMPARISONS

I aspire to be a meticulous filmmaker. Every decision from set design, hairstyling, music, camera placement/movement, and everything in between must have intention and reason. Movies should be made with thought and care. I believe that is what makes film powerful, and to accomplish that you have to allow time for pre-production. It's important for me to "see" the film before we shoot. Specifically, I need to see how the shots will edit together. Typically this is done through storyboarding, but I am not an illustrator. Whenever possible I go to the film's locations and photograph the exact shots I'm envisioning instead of drawing them. On this film, I was fortunate to be able to do that with director of photography Robert Patrick Stern and production designer Sarah Sharp. Together we were able to get a head-start, not only on planning the shots themselves, but also on blocking the scenes and the set design. We started that process five months before filming and had a lot of fun along the way. I hope you enjoy this look into our journey.

JILL GEVARGIZIAN
CO-WRITER/DIRECTOR











A hand holding a pair of scissors against a red background. The scissors are positioned vertically, with the blades pointing downwards. The hand is at the top, and the handle extends downwards. The background is a solid, deep red color.

ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK - TRACK LISTING

1. The Stylist - Nicholas Elert (4:18)
2. Enough's Enough - Archway (5:41)
3. The Change - Phil Park (3:34)
4. Hammers - Savage Radley (2:09)
5. Summertime - ESAI (3:30)
6. Yokohama - Kap Kallous & Lia Mack (2:50)
7. Pull Up - Bryan Maxwell & EZ Eddie (4:55)
8. Don't Mind If I Doob - Coolaid (4:04)

ABOUT THE TRANSFER

The Stylist is presented in its original 2.39:1 aspect ratio with 5.1 sound. The High Definition master was provided by XYZ Films.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Michael Mackenzie**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Associate Producers **Mike Hewitt, Caroline Lichnewsky**
Technical Producer **James White**
Disc Production Manager **Nora Mehenni**
QC **Alan Simmons**
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**
Authoring **Bea Alcalá**
Design **Scott Saslow**
Artwork **Sara Deck**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, Sarah Sharp,
Robert Patrick Stern, Najarra Townsend
Emma Westwood, Jonathan Zaurin



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