

An Ulster Publishing special section

# Celebrations of Love

WEDDINGS, ROMANCE & BEYOND | WINTER/SPRING 2020

## *What is Love?*

FINDING LOVE &  
CELEBRATING IT!







# What is love?

By Lissa Harris

AS THE POETS TELL US, LOVE IS A perplexing state: often praised, rarely defined. For firm answers, we must turn to the hard-nosed Plato, whose text from around 385 B.C. remains the definitive one: The Symposium, a collection of

speeches on love from history's drunkest, smartest, gayest dinner party. In a fit of great-works enthusiasm in my first year of college, I signed up for a truckload of Western literature and philosophy, and found myself reading the Symposium in three different classes at once. This was a good move on several fronts. It saved me a pile of money on books, and bought me a few golden afternoons of basking in the smugness of having already done the reading.

What was really educational, though, was discovering that everyone reads it differently. Watching various professors swoon over different bits of the text was a wild ride, as formative fusty-classics dork experiences go. I posit that your choice of favorite Symposium character says something about you as a person. In fact, it makes a fine Rorschach test for analyzing the romantic personality. "Which Symposium Speaker Are You?" isn't yet a BuzzFeed quiz, as far



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as I know, but clearly it should be.

If you've met someone you'd like to spend a little quality time with, and you want to find out what sort of an experience you're in for, try having them read the Symposium and ask who among this crew of boozy Athenian blowhards they relate to most. It's likely that they won't read it at all, or that they'll call you a tool of the patriarchy for voluntarily reading the ultimate Dead White Man – but hey, that'll tell you something too.

Literary types love Aristophanes, the magnificent tap-dancing Donald O'Connor of the crew. While the rest of the speechifiers burble on about the various qualities and virtues of love, Aristophanes tells a hilarious – and oddly moving – creation story about the original humans, a round and implausible people with eight limbs and two faces. The cartwheeling proto-humans became so powerful that they threatened the gods, and Zeus split them in half for their effrontery. Now cut in two, humans must wander the earth forever, yearning to embrace their lost halves. From Aristophanes' bifurcated octopedes, we get the concept of the soulmate, a scientifically dubious theory of sexual orientation, and a terrific number in Hedwig and the Angry Inch.

Your beau having a thing for Aristophanes bodes well for making it to the third date. Maybe a little dramatic, possibly a bit extra in the feelings department, but this one's a keeper. Good comic timing? We're talking marriage material.

Philosopher and lawyer types, on the other hand, tend to zero in on Socrates, our unsentimental, straight-shooting protagonist. In his speech, he reads the dreamily poetical Agathon to filth, cheerfully eviscerates a number of cute logical errors, and extols the wisdom of listening to smart women.

The Socrates fan is a catch. Blunt but ethical,

they will treat you honestly, pay their taxes, and tell you when you've got spinach in your teeth. Go ahead and swipe right.

The other speeches are wrong, but that's okay. Agathon will tell you you're pretty. Pausanias is problematic, but means well. Go for a romantic Phaedrus type if you're broke; they'll probably pick up the check while you're in the bathroom. Eryximachus? Well, they'll have a nicely organized medicine cabinet. That's a good quality in a person.

Look out for that last one, though: Alcibiades, the rotter. The clever bastard. The flamboyant hot drunk who bursts in late, hooptiously drangled with Mardi-Gras beads and singing Cher, and insists on producing a font of purple prose on the spot.

He's also the fellow best known to Plato's contemporaries as the great traitor of Athens, the fast-talking general who switched sides about half a dozen times during the Peloponnesian War. A thoroughly corrupted youth if ever there was one. Avoid, avoid, avoid.

"Well, gentlemen, you seem to me to be pretty sober. We can't have that," Alcibiades says to all the assembled philosophers, whereupon he declares himself master of ceremonies, calls for more booze, and begins extravagantly hitting on Socrates.

I regret to inform you, O reader, that I failed the Symposium test ages ago. As the Internet might say: Tag yourself.

I'm Alcibiades. I should have warned my wife. Oh, but then again, she knows.



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# Where to tie the rural knot

Six unusual wedding places,  
five of which have barns

By Ann Hutton

HERE'S SOMETHING DISTINCTLY ROMANTIC about the Hudson Valley countryside, perhaps brought on by our culturally embedded joy at the sight of rolling fields, babbling brooks, and trees in whatever-the-season glory. A meadow can provoke nostalgia for simpler pleasures. It's no surprise that getting married at a rural address is a favorite trend.

For some reason I can't fully explain, I'm especially hooked on barn-like spaces. They perfectly capture the spirit of our ex-rural area, and they add scope and grandeur to almost any celebration..

At any rate, all five of the special venues I'll share with you here boast barns or barn-style buildings.

Check out these featured locations. Just because these and other magic wedding spaces in the region are tucked away in obscure hills and dales doesn't mean they won't get booked solid. Be sure to confirm your country wedding well in advance.

Then bring on the bonfires and hay-bale seating! Switch on the strings of twinkling lights! Pass around the herbal bug repellent, and get hitched in bucolic splendor!

Full Moon Resort on Valley View Road in Big Indian is an epitome of traditional Catskills hospitality. Owned and operated by Henry Stout and Mike Densmore, the turn-of-the-last-century resort sits on 100 idyllic acres, surrounded by tens of thousands of acres of wilderness preserve — not a bad setting for anyone wanting to get away from it all. Now entering its 21st season, Full Moon is staffed by nearly 50 year-round employees, including event planning experts, food service and catering professionals, and a crew of managers to keep it all running smoothly. It even has an in-house wedding officiant,

"We purchased the property in 2000," says Stout, "and we've been upgrading for 20 years. In the last four years we added luxury accommodations on the mountainside and our new wedding pavilion — a modern barn-styled building. It has a beautiful wood interior and French doors. It's a lovely space, a fully enclosed, heated, air-conditioned venue. Our roadhouse has a full bar, and there are other spaces, including the wedding barn, where other aspects of an event take place.

"Why do people gravitate toward barns for weddings?" asked Stout, and then answered his own question. "I think it has to do with a large open space and the feeling of wood, the contrast between rustic and sophisticated. Now we have this brand-new, cutting-edge facility — the moon-dance pavilion — contrasted with the surrounding 130-year-old traditional aesthetic

"It's a very custom experience that we offer, developed over time in an interactive way. In 2017 we embarked upon major capital improvements. By that point, we knew exactly what needed to be put in place to meet the desires of a varied demographic. Where can you bring over 100 guests to stay on location where nobody has to leave? We have a range of accommodations. We're meeting the economic needs of all the guests."

Full Moon has guest rooms with shared hallway baths in the old Valley View House, with its wrap-around sun porch, lobby, library and café. Private cottages and lodges are scattered across the landscape, and tent or yurt accommodations round out the choices.

Stout talks about bringing the top-of-the-line lighting and audio equipment — the place is big into music — together for the reception, along with a bar and wide-open space with stunning views and almost a mile of Esopus Creek frontage. It's a lot to take in.

"Plus, we're one of the premiere catering companies in the region," added Stout. "We serve exclusively for Mountain Jam and Taste of Country



PHOTOS BY JEAN KALLINA

Celebrations at Full Moon Resort.

festivals for their VIP areas, while producing up to 80 weddings a year. We have brand-new kitchen facilities on-site. All the food is prepared fresh, menus are custom-designed."

The Catskills had hotels and various types of venues when the business started in 2000, but there was nothing about destination weddings. The new owners wanted to advertise in *The Knot*, "We explained that people come and stay for the weekend and have an all-inclusive experience. *The Knot* added a bullet on their home page. Twenty years later, destination weddings are a massive industry in the region."

Imagine celebrating Friday and all day Saturday with your guests until the wee hours and waking up Sunday morning to extend your goodbyes over breakfast and drinks. To see the plethora of housing options and to check out the facilities, visit <https://fullmoonresort.com/catskills>.

Roxbury Barn and Estate, on 42 acres at 667 County Road 41 in Roxbury, was the 1850 summer house of a Mississippi boat captain. More recently, it housed two resident owners — a cauliflower and chicken farmer, and then another captain, this one who'd made his mark in World War Two. By 1999, the property had been used as a film set. Oscar-winning director Roger Ross Williams and his actor-husband Casper de Boer became enamored with it. The setting, neglected though it had become, was still stunning.

"Those trees," deBoer says about the website photos of the pine grove. "When we bought this place, they were there. We didn't have any inten-

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tion to host events. This was just a second house at the time. When we saw the trees, I thought I could just walk my dog on this property every day.

“ I knew then this is where I wanted to be. It’s mesmerizing. A lot of people, when they arrive at the top of the hill where there’s a magnificent view, wide and mountainous, they think, ‘Oh, the

ceremony’s going to be here.’ Then we walk them into this pine grove, and it’s totally different. People tend to be surprised.

“We originally thought of this as an escape from the city. And when we bought the place, the barn was very unappealing. It had been turned into a storage unit, packed with crap, and it was a chick-

en coop in the Forties. So it smelled really bad. The first seven years we lived here, we’d open the barn door once a year and be like, ‘Oh, hell no.’ In order for their chickens to lay eggs, they’d put 25 more windows in the barn, and the cupola went up at that time, which made for a ventilation system.

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"Then when we finally emptied it out, which took weeks, a friend looked around and said, 'I'm going to get married here.' Her fiancé took part of the floor out and built this balustrade, and it turned into this spectacular space. It took a lot of scrubbing for that first wedding! The wedding got publicized and the phone started ringing.

"And that's when looked at each other and asked, 'Wait. Are we doing this?' We've been hosting more professionally — you know, the first wedding was basically 32 extension cords, and we realized we were gonna professionalize it about ten or twelve years ago. Since then we've insulated it and created inner walls with heating and air-conditioning."

The open pavilion near the venue grounds is staged for greeting guests with cocktails. From here gravel pathways wind through the property to various picturesque spots where the wedding ceremony and photo shoots can take place — that pine grove has got to be the most romantic setting! But there are more extensive gardens, a lily pond, fields and woods, and a spectacular bonfire pit set up under the stars. The barn opens to a courtyard under the canopy of trees where guests can gather and be served. Lights dangle between the trees and lanterns line the path to the bonfire area.

Though the Roxbury Estate does not offer overnight lodging on-site, deBoer and Williams can recommend nearby housing. They do engage Ate O Ate, a caterer exclusive to the estate, to serve up to 80 guests. Owned and operated by husband-and-wife duo Rich and Peg Ellsworth, Ate O Ate offers seasonal menus based on regionally sourced ingredients, prepared fresh on-site in their large food truck and in catering prep areas. The bar in the barn serves up a range of craft beers and specialty drinks.

The Captain's House is Williams' and deBoer's

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ARIUS PHOTOGRAPHY

### Crested Hen Farms.



### 7 Miles to Kingston.

home. On wedding days, they open two rooms, basically half the house, where the wedding party can get ready. “At the end of the day when we turn off the lights, everyone is gone.” Feast your eyes on this venue at: <https://roxburybarnandestate.com>.

A happy couple will feel as though they’re stepping back in time at Wagar Farm, located at 541 Ulster Heights Road in Ellenville. The 1892 farmhouse on six acres is picture-perfect, including a comfy porch with rockers and a large patio overlooking the Beerkill Creek. The 3000-square-foot nineteenth-century barn is where classy tables and chairs can accommodate 100 wedding guests. There’s a smaller guest house right next door on an attached acre and a half.

“When we renovated this farmhouse, which is 4000 square feet, we did not know what we were going to do with it,” says owner Philip Coombe. “We just thought the idea of making an improvement on the road would be a good idea. When we were done, a friend said, ‘My daughter is hoping to get married in a barn.’ (Is this sounding like a trend yet?) This was 2014, and we had taken our time over three prior years to renovate the house.

“The barn was full of everything we’d moved out there. We did some major clean up, and had our first wedding — not knowing there were hundreds of pinholes in the tin roof. It rained three inches the day of the wedding! Every table that was made up with white linen and beautiful centerpieces had drips of water coming down. Everybody made the best of it. And two weeks after that, I replaced the roof.”

Coombe and his wife Patty have been hosting weddings since 2015, and they Airbnb both houses on an ongoing basis. “We host eight to ten weddings a year, by word of mouth. Our wedding packages include one or both houses, depending on what the couple needs. Our maximum guest number is 100, with parking on site. The large farmhouse can sleep eleven people, and the guest house can sleep nine to eleven.

“We do not cater. We provide the venue, and

we’re here the entire day of the event. We have a list of caterers to choose from. The same thing with a high-end trailer-style restroom facility to keep from putting stress on the house septic system. We try to take extra care in keeping it all looking good, take pride in what we do, and contribute back to the community. The response we’ve gotten from people in the community is fantastic.”

From the stone foundation that once supported a sawmill to the remaining barn that served the Wagar family’s dairy-and-egg operation for three generations until the 1950s, the original attributes of the farm and both houses take one right back in time. Coombe mentions finding postcards from city folks who came up to stay in Ellenville when the place was a boarding house. Now the circle is closed, he muses. Visitors from New York City are once again enjoying the country life. Great place for a wedding! Visit: <https://www.thewagarfarm.com/>.

Crested Hen Farm, at 607 County Road 6 in High Falls, is a working farm opened to the public for weddings and other special happenings. Frank Macagnone and his partner, Keith Eddleman, acquired the property in 2001 and turned the English dairy barn into a cavernous event space a few years ago. Having been constructed in three prolonged phases — the first in 1790 — the place has elements of a traditional Dutch barn, too. It provides an interesting example of historical building techniques. The most current transformation to reinforce the structure was done with blessings from both the Rochester town historic district and the state office for historic preservation.

Originally belonging to the local Schoonmakers, the farm essentially stayed in the family until recently. One end of the barn holds an area for music set up with a dance floor. The big doors close on chilly days, but there is no heating or air-conditioning. “That’s the chance you take with a barn wedding,” Macagnone said. “Our season starts in May and runs to October, when we have a beautiful bonfire for our guests. We do that all year, but guests really appreciate a bonfire in October. And

when the doors are shut, it warms up in here.”

An open side shelter with a jagged-edge stone floor — laid by venue manager Richie Rozzi — holds the rustic bar. Chandeliers hang down the center of the space, which can be filled with the owners’ copious collection of farm tables and mismatched chairs. Adding Macagnone’s antique china and silverware (also mismatched) to the scene provides any reception a down-home yet old-timey sophistication.

Other antiques are available as props, gleaned from his travels to auctions. “We have 20 pews that we won at auction a couple of years ago that we set up anywhere on the property that they want. Young people, they like personalization. That’s our big thing. You have a vision; you make it your own here.

“Our niche is for more creative people. They bring in their own music and caterer. Some people like to put up a tent and use the barn as a lounge. I love this generation. They’re a lot of fun. They know what they want. No two weddings here are alike.”

A neighbor grows organic veggies and provides them to caterers. You can’t get much more local. Portions of the 32-plus acres are leased out to another farmer. Macagnone currently raises about 100 particularly cocky-looking crested chickens, creatures that no doubt lend comic relief to the seriousness of a wedding ceremony. Valet parking is available to keep the fields in good condition and make guests feel welcome. <http://crestedhenfarms.com/>.

7 Miles to Kingston is a colonial stone house perched on a rise that overlooks farmland in the Hurley Flats between Kingston and Stone Ridge. Konstanze Zeller purchased the fixer-upper at 506 North Marbletown Road (Route 209) with the intention of maintaining the architectural integrity of the centuries-old structure. After mindfully restoring the main house, which welcomes up to eight guests in four bedrooms, her attention turned to one of the two the barns — a space she visualized as a small events venue.

“We renovated the barn last summer. Then the house was rented, so we couldn’t do too much, but then I hosted a few events,” says Zeller. “Now this year, I’m trying to promote it so people can find us. I realize that most couples have their wedding venues by now. I’m still getting a ton of inquiries because all the usual venues are booked. I thought I’d missed the window, and now it’s too late. But I think a lot of people made plans over the holidays to get married, and now they start looking and realize they’re late in the game for a wedding.”

7M2K can serve about 140 for a wedding, which does not include having everyone sitting in the barn. “If the weather is bad, we can put up tents. If they want to sit in the barn only, I can handle 80 to 90 people. Over that, there’s no dance floor. I think it’s better to have the dancing and music in the barn on the concrete floor. I cleaned up the waterfront so people can go down to the Esopus and have their ceremony. There are different options.”

The grassy six acres surrounding 7M2K border the Esopus Creek — swimming and fishing anyone? — and a beautiful in-ground, unheated saltwater swimming pool with the wedding barn just beyond. The property is perfect for a smallish wedding. The barn’s open beam ceiling is hung with spherical lanterns; its walls and surfaces are covered in sleek, clean materials — a contrast to the original plaster walls inside the house, where a well-appointed chef’s kitchen is filled with modern appliances, including a six-burner Viking range and dishwasher, an enormous fireplace, and a farmhouse sink.

Zeller does no catering on site, so people can bring in any licensed caterer in that they like. She has a booklet of all her favorite vendors for catering, flowers, etc. Couples also need to bring their own officiant for the ceremony.

“When there is an event like a wedding, the house is not for rent — but for a fee, the bridal party can use the house to get ready and take photos. One of the most stunning things on my property is the sunset overlooking the Catskills. You have the waterfront there and the trees. It’s total nature with this long view. And it’s still very accessible on a main street. People can get an Uber or Lyft to get back to their hotels. We have enough parking for 40 cars; if it’s bigger we need to shuttle the people.”

Originally built by an eighteenth-century cattle farmer, the property’s panoramic view is breathtaking. Sunsets over the Catskill Mountains are, indeed, particularly lovely. Check it out here: <https://www.7milestokingston.com/>.



# Celebrating relationships

By Susan Barnett

I'VE BEEN LOOKING THROUGH OLD PHOTOS. I have three generations' worth of them. They're not just photos, after all. They're stories of relationships.

One of the pictures I found is a vintage candid photo of three women. I think one of them is my great-grandmother and her mother, my great-great-grandmother. Great-grandma is pouring herself a stiff drink. Her mom's already drinking. They look quite proper, but they're definitely drinking.

They're apparently having a picnic. Great-grandpa was an avid photographer, so I bet he was behind the camera. Chances are they're in what is now Croatia.

It's fascinating. Why that particular moment? That particular picnic? Did they snap the shot, then howl with laughter? Was great-great-grandma worried she'd gone a bit too far? It was, after all, pre-1900. I wish I knew more.

I have a photo of my two uncles standing at a lookout point in New Mexico with my two young children and me, circa 1994. My five-year-old daughter and Al stand confident and separate, two brave, happy warriors looking at whatever interests them. My seven-year-old son and Charles lean into each other, my uncle hand holding his great-nephew close, as though they unconsciously recognized each other. I didn't see it at the time.

If you grew up before the 2000s, photos were special. Your mom probably has a collection of painfully contrived studio portraits of you. Olan Mills used to offer coupons that made it cheap to get studio shots every year or so. Your parents got family pictures developed at the drug store or a Photo Hut. Children of the Eighties and Nineties were the kids who got the first cellphones. Easy digital pictures were amazing, but storing them on your computer was unsatisfying.

It was social media, the new public scrapbook, that made it all fall into place.

Now we photograph everything from our pets to our lunch. Everything is a photo op. The sense of photos as something special seems gone. I'm wondering what impact our selfie and milestone-marking photo culture means for the stories and the insights we used to get from photographs.



The author's grandmother, Anne Mooney Barnett, circa 1916, Mountain Road, Rosendale.



Olga Lucic (c), circa 1890s, probably near Dubrovnik, Croatia.

BIG EVENTS ARE DIFFERENT. They're still important. But with milestone events, the pressure really heats up to be perfect, not real. Social media has a voracious appetite and it is brutally critical. Engagements have to be photographed professionally. Weddings and everything leading up to them are a banquet of stress.

Childbirth? Hours-old babies are posed in the hospital by professional photographers, while new moms shakily slather on makeup to hide the effort involved. The corny old studio photoshoots of growing kids clutching teddy bears have been replaced by glamour shots of mom, her perfect makeup and manicure, and her immaculate, adorable children. Every woman is expected to channel her inner Beyonce. It looks exhausting, and nothing like reality.

Our old family photo albums were as real as it gets. Everything was candid. Everything felt like a memory. And sometimes it caught the truth.

Do I actually remember standing in front of that old black Chevy with my dad? It doesn't matter. What is obvious is that's a kid who adored her dad. It's a photo of a relationship that was simple. In later years, when nothing about our relationship was simple, I looked at that photo to remind myself. He loved me and I loved him. That was the essential fact.

A look at old photos now, with the knowledge of the future, can show hints of what is to come; a too-wide smile, one person standing apart, a look of sadness in the eyes, sometimes an unrecognized connection that, on second viewing, is obvious to anyone.

Even professional photos can capture feelings, but real emotion can't be posed. Photos of my son's wedding are a feast for the eyes. Of course they hired a professional.

The photo of the mother-son dance is beautiful. He is so tall. I'm not. We are dancing, we are singing "Somebody To Love" at the top of our lungs, and the venue, the lighting, are perfect. But the photo I treasure is a moment before the wedding. I'm still in a tee shirt. It is most definitely not a Beyonce-perfection shot. It is a photo of my incredibly happy son and the mother who loves him. It captures the joy his happiness brings us both. It's a great picture. It captures reality.

MAYBE OUR ABILITY TO TAKE PHOTOS ANYWHERE, anytime, means we're increasing our odds of catching something real. But





Top, the writer and her son, Cullen Burnell, January 2017, New York City; above, from left, Alfred H. Mooney, MK Burnell, Susan Barnett, Charles R. Barnett, Cullen Burnell, 1994, New Mexico.

I wonder if there’s a cost we haven’t considered. If we can see so much when we look closely at photos of people we care about, does the act of taking the picture mean we miss it in the moment? Do we miss the most important moments in our lives because we’re taking so many pictures of them? And do we ever get a chance to really look, and see what we caught?

I suspect that someday, if our species survives long enough, sociologists and anthropologists will discuss the impact the cellphone had on our social relationships as well as how we think. We all know people who simply cannot turn off their phone. We’ve seen couples out to dinner who look at their phones more than they look at each other. And when groups of friends get together, there seems to be a sense of obligation to take pictures to show what a great time they’re having. What night out is complete without a Boomerang video?

We are always “on.” But I think we see, and hear, better when we’re quieter. When we can focus. We can communicate. We can relate.

When I was a kid, going through those old photo albums with my mom was a form of storytelling. Each photo led to more information about the lives of people in her family, some of whom were long dead. People I’d never know.

I watched her. I listened. I learned her story.

My dad’s mother would go through albums with me, too. I know names of old Rosendale families, people who were dead long before I was born. But

she told me the stories. and I remembered.

Photos are reminders of the past, moments frozen and captured. Professional pictures look good, but if you want to hear stories go through the candid photos. It takes time. It requires attention.



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And no one wants to sit down and scroll through pictures on a cell phone with a group of friends. I’ve seen it tried. Everyone’s attention wanders after just a few minutes.

I think we’re in a transition right now. Scrapbooks seem out of date. But we still gather to watch images on a screen. We will binge Netflix or play games for hours.

I see an opening for something new, a way to bridge that gap between the pictures we take and the satisfaction of looking at those photos again with other people, and talking about them. Maybe what’s next is scrapbook parties: showing the digital scrapbooks that are the modern equivalent of my parents’ old slide carousels. We will gather around, turn down the lights, and start the show. We can make modern magic-lantern shows and share our photos, share our stories, and maybe, just maybe, see a bit more than we thought was there.

Oh, yes, I will admit sometimes those “how I spent my summer vacation” slide shows were painfully dull. But even when they were boring, they were fun. That gave friends and family an opportunity to ration out some well-earned abuse. And that was funny.

Sharing memories, sharing a bit of your life and maybe seeing something that you missed, *sharing* – that, I think, is a celebration of relationships.



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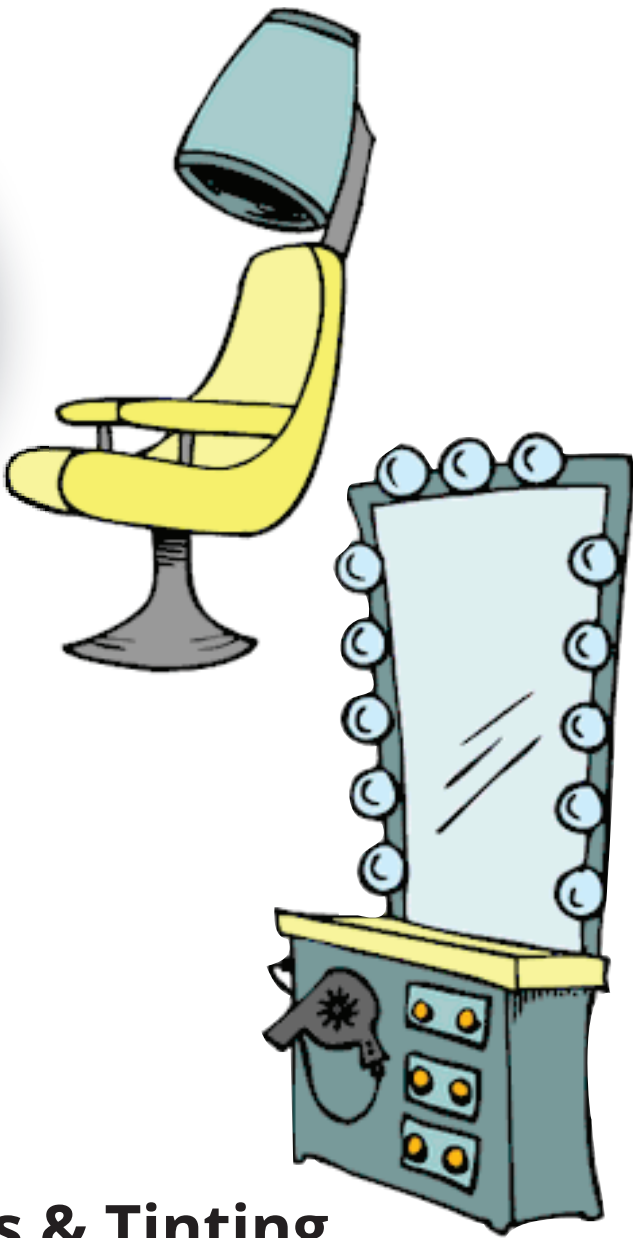
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