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## Superchic(k)

Anne Crémieux

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# Superchic(k)

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- 1 Blondes, like most things, come in all shapes and colors. There's the platinum blonde and the strawberry blonde, the classy blonde and the trashy blonde, the sunlit blonde and the ash blonde... and then of course, there's the dumb blonde.
- 2 Except that, contrary to common knowledge, blondes are not *things*, and Elle Woods is not the kind of blonde who would even bother explaining what kind she is, genuine or fake, legal or dyed, certified or certifiable. She is she, Elle, womanhood incarnate, the epitome of self-confidence who can will herself into Harvard Law, win a murder case on her acute knowledge of hair care, and trade in her prejudiced boyfriend for a sensitive, smart and successful gentleman lawyer. When he asks her how she thinks he'd look as a blond, Elle kindly smiles back and says: "I'm not sure you could handle it." Does he know that being a blonde means keeping faith in yourself despite the universal expectations of vapidity everyone delights to see you meet?
- 3 Elle Woods is more than the Bel Air, rich girl type of blonde in a single, fundamental way—she is a blonde, Bel Air rich girl set on proving everybody wrong: though she may be a figure of beauty, she is not a brainless one. If only because being stereotyped at every turn makes you smarter, stronger, and possibly in this very case, blonder.
- 4 With *Legally Blonde*, a team of hired filmmakers made the bold Hollywood bet that audiences of all backgrounds would care about this poor rich white girl who's got every thing except that rich white boy who dumps her saying that if he wants to be a Senator by the time he's thirty, he needs to marry a Jacky, not a Marilyn... The old stratagem works for one good reason: you're not supposed to feel sorry for her. You are, however, supposed to laugh at her and, quickly enough, with her, around her and through her, no matter how dark and cynical a sense of humor you might have come to the theater with.
- 5 *Legally Blonde* is a parody, a parody of political correctness standing on its head. Elle Woods is president of her Delta Nu sorority, has a fashion major that includes an advanced class in history of polka dots, and she was in a Ricky Martin video. If Harvard's dedication to diversity is more than just an empty claim, the middle-aged white men who make up the admission office committee can only accept her. And yes,

she's got the required LSAT scores to apply. But *Legally Blonde* oversteps the parodic genre by giving credence to the character's victimization, no matter how extreme her feminine behavior might seem. The assigned traits of the cheerful, voluptuous blonde are only an extension of discrimination against women. The plain, brown-haired Vivian can't help but notice that Callahan never asks the male interns to bring him coffee or fetch a file. Elle agrees, though such small offenses she quickly brushes off. But when sexual harassment ensues, she breaks down, telling her new best friend from the beauty parlor how Callahan only had one thing on his mind when he hired her... Because hair care is the true unifier of women and, for the third time in the film, the location for life-changing revelations, Professor Stromwell, who had picked Elle out to humiliate her on her very first day of class at Harvard, rises from under her perm machine and declares: "If you're going to let one stupid prick ruin your life, you're not the girl I thought you were..." All women, blonde or brunette, old and young, rich and poor, serious and frivolous, seem to unite in the film finale to win the case of another blonde, who happens to have been framed by her jealous daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law is a badly made-up brunette blinded by her father's remarriage to a woman her age. As for the perfect beau, he does not hesitate to break male solidarity and stand with the woman he loves. Maybe he could handle being a blonde after all.

- 6 Elle is a fashion expert, her "signature color" is pink, and she changes hairstyles more often than Brittany Spears. She's going to law school with one motivation: to win her cruelly ambitious boyfriend back. But somewhere along the line, she takes up to the challenge and proves that even though she did wake up one morning and decide to go to law school, she also happens to have the brains for it, and for much more. She will be everything a man with a Harvard Law degree is allowed to be, without living by any masculinist standard of feminine strength. Not driven by ambition, but by female solidarity and her own sense of self, she never submits to the male establishment, to its spirit or its style. She stands chin high, but not above her own manicurist. She competes for her boyfriend and befriends her rival. She quits rather than accept a summer internship that involves sleeping with the boss. She never denies her Delta Nu sisters in spite of courtroom cheers that are not helping her credibility. And most of all, she wins her case wearing high heels and a pink suit. Who thought Barbie dolls were ahead of their time? Elle Woods is lipstick feminism revived.
- 7 Though the theme song for *Legally Blonde* is the cheerful "Perfect Day," the credits roll on "One Girl Revolution:" "Some people see the revolution / But most only see the girl / I can lose my hard earned freedom / If my fear defines my world / I declare my independence / From the critics and their stones / I can fight my revolution / I can learn to stand alone." Female rock-'n'-roll over heart-dotted pink words has got to be the surest way to make you want for more...
- 8 Fortunately in this case, as always in Hollywood, original films that turn into an unexpected success suffer from the sequel syndrome. *Legally Blonde* has a 2: *Red, White and Blonde*, in which Elle goes to Washington to pass a bill to ban animal testing, including on cosmetics. A revolutionary plan indeed. You know you're watching a sequel when the plot shifts to revolve around the main character's pet... In *LB2*, little Bruiser the Chihuahua seeks his biological mom, falls in love with a Rottweiler, and helps his lover come out. *Red, White and Blonde* is still about being yourself, believing in what you do in spite of setbacks and treachery, and making friends in low as well as high places. The manicurist of the first film is traded in for the Senate's doorman, who

knows more about law than anyone else is willing to share with Elle. Older, harsh-looking women in power are still Elle's best allies in the end, and Elle's job is still to convince no-nonsense professional females, this time an African American woman who thinks bills concerning housing for the poor have priority over animal rights, that they are fighting for the same goals and have the same enemies: ambitious men and women who adhere to the patriarchal, corrupt functioning of society.

- 9 Where the first film excelled, the sequel partly fails, blending not-so-subtle feminism with overly broad parody. Nonetheless, the sequel is not a sole legacy in this particular case. *Legally Blonde* fueled a trend already announced by the popularity of the *Powerpuff Girls* cartoon or the *Charlie's Angels* movies: women can be super fem and super strong, making fun of macho action heroes and going for the sensitive, righteous men—you know, the kind that you marry rather than enjoy a one-night-stand with and discard. And if anyone were to call these women men-hating dykes, that would simply be a mistake, not an insult. Could feminism have found its third way, both undermining patriarchy and fighting for equal rights by just being your own strong female self? One thing at least is certain: it's a lot more fun that way...
- 10 If you missed both *Legally Blondes* in the theaters, you can still catch the latest product of this female role-model movie trend, *Freaky Friday*, a remake of the 1976 film featuring young Jodie Foster. In the 2003 version, mother and daughter live out each other's complicated lives as career woman / struggling teenager whose boyfriends / husbands have a bit of a hard time keeping up with. As for that spoiled brat of a little brother stuck in his I-hate-girls phase yet craving motherly affection, he faces his own kind of challenge when his sister starts calling him honey and his mother drops him off 200 yards from school so he can get some exercise. Though *Freaky Friday*, like *Legally Blonde*, focuses on the women, the male characters are well-rounded, intelligent beings fully included in the films. Maybe feminism is not about women after all, but about the woman in all of us females, males, Chihuahuas and Rottweilers... Elle Woods wouldn't have it any other way.
- 11 *Legally Blonde*, directed by Robert Luketic, written by Amanda Brown, Karen McCullah-Lutz, and Kristen Smith, starring Reese Witherspoon, 2001
- 12 *Legally Blonde 2: Red, White and Blonde*, directed by Charles Herman-Wurmfeld, written by Amanda Brown, Eve Ahlert, and Kate Kondell, 2003
- 13 *Freaky Friday*, directed by Mark S. Waters, written by Mary Rodgers, Heather Hach, and Leslie Dixon, starring Jamie Lee Curtis and Lindsay Lohan, 2003

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