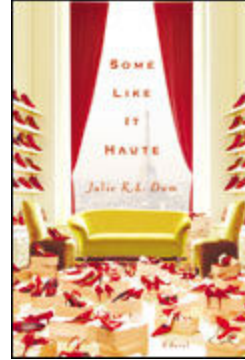


Dear Reader,

Perhaps you've been following Alex's adventures in accessorizing on this blog, or maybe you saw a blurb about *Some Like It Haute* in a newspaper or magazine. Can't wait to read more? With the arrival of *Some Like It Haute* – the book – in stores still a few weeks away, here's a sneak peek to tide you over 'til then!

Get the book from Amazon: [Some Like It Haute](#)

Read the blog: <http://www.somelikeithaute.com>



Chapter One

OH MY GOD. Oh my God. Where were those shoes? Oh God, not the Manolos!

It was Fashion Week in Paris, and if it was Tuesday, it was Chanel. And if it was Chanel, it was my new black Manolo slingbacks with the two-and-a-half-inch kitten heels, to go with the charcoal-gray tweed A-line skirt I got at the Chanel sample sale last season and the perfectly Coco-esque black boiled-wool jacket with the delicate grosgrain trim that I had slipped out of my mother's closet years ago. It said so right there on the daily wardrobe schedule I had meticulously entered into an Excel spreadsheet last week: Chanel skirt, trusty black jacket. Black La Perla bra, the one with the light padding. Matching thong. Tahitian pearl choker. Mabe ring. The black Balenciaga bag. (The brown version was slated for Thursday.) Manolo slingbacks. Only on this Tuesday morning the shoes were nowhere to be seen among the contents of the three suitcases scattered around me.

What a disaster. This would throw off my week's schedule completely. I mean, I suppose I *could* switch over to the Wednesday outfit, but then I'd be wearing vintage Yves Saint Laurent—and we're talking Monsieur Saint Laurent himself, not the Tom Ford era—to a Chanel show, and that just wouldn't do. Not given the history between Saint Laurent and Karl Lagerfeld. I'm not stupid. I know better than to do that. And forget about the Thursday outfit. God and Anna Wintour know better than to wear Stella McCartney to Kaiser Karl's show. Nope, it was Chanel or bust. And without those Manolos, I was utterly, absolutely, fabulously screwed.

Never mind missing an appointment at John Galliano's showroom or getting lost in the stampede of fashion editors in black town cars herded from Celine to Louis Vuitton. Or even accidentally leaving my goodie bag under the seat like I did that one time at Fendi in Milan. Or, heaven forbid, being seated in the third row at Prada. That—that I could just almost deal with. Forgetting my slingbacks (or, my thoughts darkened, having them filched by some shoe-connoisseur bag handler on the Eurostar!) and messing up my entire week's wardrobe: this was unacceptable.

The Chanel show was scheduled for eleven o'clock, but with all the air-kissing and gossiping, followed closely by backbiting the very same people you'd just been kissing, it wouldn't start until noon at least. And you wonder why you almost never see watches featured in runway shows? If I found it in myself to be decisive in the next, oh, fifteen minutes or so, I could probably run over to the Bon Marché a few blocks away, pick out a new pair of pointy-toed black slingbacks without too much of an ordeal, and then make

it on time to the show at the Chanel boutique next door to Coco Chanel's original *maison* on the rue Cambon. After a minute and forty-two seconds of indecision—a record low for me, I could be, well, almost sure—I gingerly tiptoed my way through the minefield that was my hotel room floor, trying not to step on the thousands of dollars' worth of Prada, Marni, Dior, and McQueen strewn here, there, everywhere.

Now, where did I put the Wednesday shoes? I slipped them on and—mortified as I was that the three-inch heels were way too high for the outfit—took one last glance at myself in the full-length mirror in the absurdly large bathroom. From the ankles up, anyway, that was one full-fledged fashionista looking back at me. Not bad for a Texas girl with big hair and blue eyeshadow in her not-so-distant past. I grabbed my scheduled Tuesday handbag and was off.

I checked myself out again in the ornate mirrors in the lobby of the old-world-posh Hôtel Ste.-Claire. Ever since my first visit to Paris just out of college, when my editorial assistant's salary made a slightly shabby (bohemian, I thought at the time) little hotel in the Latin Quarter my only option, I had loved staying on the Left Bank. It wasn't always convenient for the shows—but then again, the avant-garde designers made a point of putting on shows at locations that weren't particularly convenient to anywhere. Leave the grand hotels on the Right Bank to the tourists. I'd take the narrow cobblestoned streets, alleys really, that revealed hidden gems of boutiques to the determined shopper. Of course, it didn't hurt that a Prada boutique was also right around the corner.

Once through the doors of the Bon Marché, I could fi-

nally let out a sigh of relief. The sight of the pretty little trinkets ripe for the buying—the sparkly lipstick-size Judith Leiber handbags side by side with some delicate jet-beaded earrings I could most definitely fit into my Thursday ensemble—reminded me that I was in my element, indeed my natural habitat. Surely Marie-Claude, my favorite saleslady largely because she deigned to understand my timid French, could find something just right to replace my misplaced shoes. And surely, I reassured myself, my editor would forgive me for expensing them.

I expertly maneuvered past the busload of Japanese tourists manhandling the Vuitton bags on the ground floor, circumvented the perfume spritzers and makeover artists, and sprinted upstairs to my most favorite section of the store—of any store, anywhere. Literally anywhere. A few years back I managed to wangle a trip to Vietnam to do a story on the textiles made by a northern hill tribe that had inspired Donna Karan’s resort collection, and I scored some intricately embroidered slippers from some cobblers five villages away. (Daniel Day Lewis, eat your heart out!) My seldom-tested journalistic ingenuity kicked in when in pursuit of one thing and one thing only.

It wasn’t my fault; I inherited my weakness for shoes from my mother, who bought me my first pair of girly Mary Janes when I was two and went back to the store to buy herself a matching pair that same afternoon. And from my father, who has been known to order three pairs of the same shoe at once. I was doomed from the start. Oh, the many incarnations and variations of that most miraculous of inventions, bunions and fallen arches be damned. Dainty mules and sturdy-soled boots. Sexy stilettos and practical brogues.

Manolo makes 'em and I buy 'em. How perfectly the world turns.

Or so I thought, until I scanned the third floor and there was nary a sign of the saleswoman's severe black bob and perfect posture. Marie-Claude was missing. Just like my poor slingbacks. Disconsolate, I imagined the shoe-connoisseur bag handler stuffing his big smelly feet into my beautiful shoes and prancing around Waterloo Station in them. I shuddered.

In Marie-Claude's usual corner I spotted from behind a dark-haired man in a Savile Row pinstripe suit and what I could tell were hand-tooled Italian loafers. I perked up. A salesman wearing hand-tooled Italian loafers couldn't be half bad.

"Excusez-moi, monsieur?" I said with a nervous smile.

When he turned around, I noted how his brown hair faded to gray at his temples and how the tiny wrinkles around his cornflower-blue eyes crinkled when he smiled back at me. There was something very familiar there.

"Oui, mademoiselle?" he said. Our eyes locked for a split second, and he paused as he registered my baffled stare.

"Mr. Billings? Monsieur Jacques? Eastview High School? Sixth-period French class? 1990? What on *earth* are you doing here?"

He stared back, did that thing he did with the crinkling eyes, and then burst into a hearty laugh. "Saints alive," Mr. Billings—Monsieur Jacques to his pupils—said in his Texas drawl. "Well, if it isn't my star student, Alexandra Simons."

I cringed. Prize pupil I might have been, but I'd figured out pretty quickly my first time in Paris that all those French pop songs we sang in class didn't help much when it came

to asking a Parisian for directions to the Hermès store. But I would let Monsieur Jacques believe what he wanted to. "Oh, you're such a kidder," I said, pretending to be modest.

"Well, just look at you," he said, sizing me up and smiling appreciatively. "What a gorgeous skirt. Chanel?"

"As a matter of fact, yes," I said, certain I was blushing from head to toe. That was part of his charm. He always did notice one student's new haircut or another's favorite pair of shoes. I added hurriedly, "I haven't exactly kept in touch with anyone from back home. I didn't know y'all finally upped and moved to Paris."

I did a mental double take at myself. Did I just say *y'all*?

"Oh, well, you know, my wife and I split up last year," he said. "I was ready to start fresh, and I always did dream of livin' here, so I decided, by gum, I'd do it."

Monsieur Jacques was the most popular teacher at East-view. His class was always overbooked with besotted girls—it reminded me of that scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when the student in Harrison Ford's class had I LOVE YOU written on her eyelids. Only instead of being rough-and-tumble like Indiana Jones, Monsieur Jacques was as suave as you could ever imagine in suburban Dallas, Texas. He didn't reek of Old Spice like the other teachers, and he most certainly would never have been caught dead in the polyester pants and pocket protectors favored by our physics teacher. No, Monsieur Jacques was cosmopolitan. He wore these expensive custom-made shoes that glided down the hallways without so much as a squeak. His suits were bespoke before I knew what bespoke was. He smoked Gauloises out back behind the gym between classes. He spoke *French*, for God's sake! How he could have emerged from the primordial

ooze of Houston, I could never figure out. His only fault, in our adolescent eyes, was his beautiful, sloe-eyed painter wife who would pick him up after school in her vintage red Mustang convertible. His tie finally undone and his hair flopping in the wind, they'd speed off into the sunset, or at least to some smoky salon gathering of artists and philosophers that we had only read about in French novels (in translation, of course).

He couldn't have been older than twenty-eight or twenty-nine then, I guessed, which put him in his early forties now and, I supposed, my demographic-group peer. I had reached that awkward age when it was technically proper to call my parents' friends by their first names, and maybe even socialize with them, but I would certainly never dream of it. Same situation with Monsieur Jacques. Here we were, both grown-ups, both single. So I had a mad crush on him back then, and the thought of his touching my feet, I will confess, might have once been the subject of a daydream that spanned sixth-period French class all the way through seventh-period chemistry. But put that in the context of his helping me buy some shoes—well, it kind of broke the spell, didn't it? And now . . . and now all I could really think about was whether it would be okay to *tutoyer* him. It was just one of the many existential issues plaguing me in my beginning-adulthood crisis. And let's not even mention the fact that my parents already had two kids by the time they were my age. Of course, had I never left Texas after high school, that would've been all taken care of by now. I could've probably thrown in a divorce or two to boot.

"I'm sorry to hear about the split, Monsieur J—" I stopped myself mid-Jacques and laughed.

"You can call me Jack. Or Jacques. Conveniently interchangeable," he said.

"Well, *Jacques*," I said, "it is so good to see you here. I really do want to catch up, really . . ." I looked down at my shoddily shod feet. "But I really, *really* need a new pair of shoes. I'm fixin' to go to this fashion show"—a quick glance at my watch might have left me panicked had I not been distracted by my use of the word *fixin'*—"oh my God, in, like, twenty minutes. Could you help me, please?"

"Well, aren't you livin' the glamorous life," he said, his eyes filled with laughter and what I, momentarily regressing to my girlish crush, giddily registered as impressed approval.

"Oh, you know," I said, grinning stupidly, "it's just a job. I've been covering fashion for *The Weekly* magazine for the past couple of years. I'm based in London." And for the benefit of my parents who paid for my \$120,000 college education, I added dutifully, as was my wont, "I did hard news before. You know, earthquakes, transit strikes, the Winona Ryder trial."

I glanced at the dozen and a half marginally different variations of pointy-toed black slingbacks daintily displayed on the white Formica tables around me, and nodded at the one closest to me. "Now, do you think that Louboutin heel is too spiky for this skirt length?"

Fifteen minutes later, I left the Bon Marché with my Wednesday shoes in a shopping bag, some utterly demure black Louboutin slingbacks on my feet (I would have gone for something a little sexier, but somehow I thought that would embarrass Monsieur Jacques . . . or maybe just me).

And oh, yes, Jacques's cell phone number in my Palm. If the girls from Eastview High could see me now . . .

. . . fighting for a taxi with a little old Parisian lady. Armed with a baguette fresh from the boulangerie, she was clad in beige Chanel tweed and D'Orsay pumps, a cigarette dangling from her scarlet-painted lips. I'd spotted her from all the way down the block, and between us was a man stepping out of what seemed to be the only available taxi in the arrondissement. As he paid the driver, I made my way, as quickly as I could while still taking care not to get my new heels caught in any grates—or more likely, dog poop—that might have been in my path. I never let Chanel Lady out of my sight. Oh, I could tell that she saw me, too. Our eyes locked at twenty paces. I sped up. She sped up. I flashed her my best Intimidating American look. She shot back a Haughty Parisian. If Coco Chanel had been looking down from heaven, she would surely have been tickled to see that two women wearing clothes bearing her name were playing chicken over a taxi.

In the blink of an eye—that is, had either of us wimped out and blinked—we both lunged at the door handle, as if it were the one and only Birkin bag left at the editors' preview night of the Hermès sample sale.

Luckily, I was younger—and more desperate. I felt the weight of the bread beating against my back as I slipped into the cab and locked the door behind me. Chanel Lady—and as it turned out, I had used that word loosely—was spitting venom at me. I tried to read her lips. Did she really just call me a *putain*? I have always been convinced that the ability to curse at someone in another language was the best measure of fluency, and now I was wishing more than ever

that Monsieur Jacques had taught us something really useful. Instead, I did something almost universally understood: I stuck my tongue out at her and waved.

What a harridan, I thought to myself as I brushed the baguette's flour off my jacket. Catching my breath in *my* cab, I took a moment to contemplate how, in Paris, there really was no going gently into mumsy housedresses and early-bird specials. Women there would give up their cigarettes and red wine before they relinquished short skirts, lipstick, and heels (but no pantyhose, perish the thought). Chanel Lady, at least, had impeccable taste.

"*Numéro vingt-neuf, rue Cambon, s'il vous plaît,*" I told the driver. I could have sworn that was a lascivious look he gave me. No matter. I had become accustomed to being chatted up by taxi drivers during fashion weeks in Paris and Milan. More than one had asked me—all 5'5" of me (in three-inch heels)—if I was a model. They must figure that one day they'll hit the jackpot. Usually I just played along to practice my French or Italian. But there was no time for pleasantries today, not when the show was about to start and I was still across the Seine. "*Je suis en retard,*" I told him, trying my most flirtatiously pleading face.

He stepped on the gas. I could see his smirk in the rearview mirror. "*Et vous êtes mannequin, n'est-ce pas?*"

I tried, I really tried, not to roll my eyes and instead just gave him a tight smile. I guess my smackdown of Chanel Lady had only increased my standing in his eyes.

I avoided his gaze and just looked out the window as we weaved through the Paris streets, past the students loaded down with backpacks, the couples strolling hand in hand and the tourists with their noses in *Time Out Paris* guides,

past the pensioners braving the March chill to while away their morning over a café au lait and a brioche at a sidewalk café. They were all the sights that once filled me with *Breathless*-fueled thoughts of romance, and that I now rarely had time to notice when there were catwalks and catfights to write about.

We inched our way across the river and past the obelisk in the place de la Concorde, down the Faubourg St.-Honoré to the corner of rue Cambon. I hadn't noticed in a long time just how pretty Paris was.

I stepped out of the cab a few minutes past noon. Outside the entrance was the dramatic tableau that had become so familiar to me: A scrum of fashion students, paparazzi, wannabe modelizers and assorted other hangers-on were all pushing and grabbing at something, nothing, everything. False-alarm star sightings were met with a flurry of camera flashes until word spread that it was someone who simply *looked* like a C-list celebrity. While several beefy men, clad entirely in black and wired with those Secret Service ear-phones, handled crowd control, the far more imposing-looking PR girls did the real dirty work: checking tickets and cross-referencing the guest list.

I waved my invitation at them and they let me pass, handing me a goodie bag (No. 5 eau de toilette, I guessed) on my way in. The music—unrecognizable bubblegum pop—was thumping, too loud for me to ask for help from the ushers who were in any case too busy ogling the sprinkling of French film starlets in technicolor dresses cut down to there and up to here, who were at the show in search of a touch of class.

I had no idea where to find my seat in the maze of rooms

and doorways. One room led into another, and on and on. On either side of each room, three rows of white-satin-cushioned chairs had been tightly plotted like a zero-lot suburban subdevelopment. A narrow corridor in between the two banks of seats served as the runway, winding through a doorway and into the next room. The lack of a real catwalk—the models just strolled casually through the boutique—gave the show an impression of intimacy. A false impression, of course, considering there were probably four hundred people gathered there to see the glamazons in various stages of undress. But the setup did make for a wise seating plan: More front-row seats meant fewer miffed editors.

Dressed to kill in this season's Chanel, the usual suspects formed a murderers' row front and center. Wait a minute. What was *Moda's* editor-in-chief doing still wrapped up in her full-length fox fur, slumped in her seat? Could it be? That not only was she wearing the identical blood-orange tweed minidress, fringed jacket, and logo boots as someone else in the room—but her twin was the mere fashion editor of *Max Mode*? I would just about die if that ever happened to me, I thought, as I joined the chorus of titters in the room. Apparently the paparazzi had already had their field day when the doppelgangers—who was whose double would surely be the subject of some debate at the Valentino dinner tonight—crossed paths on their way to their seats. I could just make out the details from some stylists who were whispering nearby. Damn my replacement shoes. I couldn't believe I had missed the action.

In their place of dishonor in a cordoned-off corner of the first room, two dozen photographers were busy elbowing

each other to stake their claim to the best vantage point—the one where they might, if they were lucky, capture on film some naive new model adjusting her G-string. They'd obviously been forced to wait too long; they were starting into some World Cup soccer chants. In the back rows the newbies were poised on the very edge of their seats, soaking in every detail of the room, their neighbors, the lights, the music. This place was about to burst.

I made my way through the room, pausing here and there for an air kiss—a long-distance air kiss in some cases. Way in the back of the *maison*, I saw some camera flashes go off, and then a blur of long legs and the snap of some hundred editors' notebooks opening, pens at the ready. The show must have just started. Great. I had to hurry. I wandered through the room and paused in the doorway into the next. I checked the seating assignment written on my invitation again. What on earth did Dc2vii mean?

"Excusez-moi." "Excusez-moi." "Excusez-moi."

Crossing the threshold into the third room, I spotted my seat: second row, right in the middle. Bloody hell, I muttered. Second row? Even worse, from either side I would have to climb over at least five people. I could start from the far side of the row, and get dirty looks from the fashion editor, features and shopping, of *Harper's Bazaar*, and the associate market editor of Italian *Vogue*. (At least they didn't have any baguettes on them, I thought with great relief.) Or I could go to the near side and earn the ire of the buyer, ladies' designer sportswear, of Neiman Marcus and a couple of stylists I didn't really know.

I weighed my options for all of twelve seconds. Far better to alienate another editor, I figured, than anyone from

Neiman's, the fashion mecca of my childhood. I combed my fingers through my hair and smoothed down my jacket, straightened my back, took a step onto the makeshift runway . . . and just as I was about to attempt my most dignified shuffle down to the other side of the row, I heard the wave of gasps spread across the room, counterclockwise, and circle back to me.

And then I heard myself gasp.

Talk about making an entrance. Before I knew it—and certainly before I could do anything about it—I found myself suddenly face to left breast with a certain six-foot blonde from Latvia. Pleased to meet you, Katyarina. The season's hot new model was midstep in her peculiarly mesmerizing Monty Python gait, which her fans and sycophants described as gazelle-like. (The more reasonable might have compared her to a giraffe on acid.) And I, like a deer caught in the headlights, certainly not even a gazelle on a good day . . . whatever, I wasn't moving fast enough to get out of the way.

The gasps turned into snickers.

We veered right in unison, and then left, still perfectly aligned, as if we were doing some 1980s mirror-image dance. On the fourth parry, we collided again. Her boot's sharp stiletto heel cutting into my brand-new, beautiful slingback, we stumbled to the floor together, a tangle of splayed legs—mostly Katyarina's. The photographers couldn't believe their luck. The excited mob of arms and legs and lenses moved as one as they pounced on us. In the shock and horror of the moment my mind wandered aimlessly: *Where on earth could my left shoe be . . . I sure hope*

that's my own knee I'm grabbing . . . I think I did this move in yoga once . . .

The sounds of the shutters clicking and the laughter echoing through the room deafened me, and I felt the intense heat of their flashbulbs on my face. I closed my eyes to the white lights—God, I only wished they were the ones they say you see when you're dying.

I slowly opened my eyes to a squint just in time to catch a glimpse of Katyarina's tear-stained face, the glittery fashion-show makeup puddling in muddy gobs around her eyes and then sliding down the rivulets of tears on her cheeks. She was sixteen, seventeen tops, and yet behind the tears she looked at me not angrily, just questioningly. Call me crazy, but I could have sworn she was thinking: "I know this publicity is only going to help my career, but what's in it for you?"

At least ten publicists had rushed over to pull her up off the runway. The crowd parted, and I was left alone for a split second, totally paralyzed. The embarrassment must have been written all over my face—oh, I'll know for sure when I see it in the papers tomorrow, I realized. Lordy Lordy Lordy. This was not good. Not good at all. I feigned pride, got myself on my feet, clumsily gathered my shoes and bags, and *booked*.



Back in journalism school—the one concession to academia that I made for my father the professor after I finished college and took a job as a \$24,000-a-year editorial assistant-slash-indentured servant at *The Weekly*—we were taught

never to become part of a story. Like I said, we were *taught* that.

When I'd eventually have to write up this twisted story that I had practically wedded at center stage, at least I would be able to describe Katyarina's outfit in great detail. Black boiled-wool cropped jacket and matching A-line skirt, with an anklet composed of one humiliated fashion journalist. Consider it personally fact-checked.

Holed up an hour later at my room at the Ste.-Claire, which was now filled with white lilies and other flowers of condolence thoughtfully sent by my doubtlessly gloating peers, I wondered if I could ever overcome this public self-immolation. Or, for that matter, if I could ever leave this hotel room and face anyone again.

By the time I had escaped the lights and cameras at Chanel and scurried back to the hotel, my newly handy Balenciaga raised to shield my eyes as if it were the sunniest day in the Caribbean, there were already five phone messages and six e-mails from my editor, Roddy James. As annoyed as I was, I had to give him this: he had good sources.

He started out trying to be funny: "Hey, Alex, it's Roddy. You aren't leaving the magazine for TV, are you? Because you seemed rather telegenic on Sky News . . . your face—well, it's more like the back of your head, and your left arm somehow underneath that model's right leg, and her left foot . . . My God, it was like Twister: the Couture Edition." He laughed altogether too heartily. Almost as an afterthought, he signed off with a chipper, "Call me."

By the fourth message, he sounded plaintive. "Hey, it's Roddy again. Where *are* you? And why is your cell phone off? Now, I *know* there's no witness protection plan for fash-

ionistas. Don't do anything drastic without calling me first, won't you please?"

I didn't bother listening to the fifth one. I just erased them all and crawled into the king-size bed, still decked out in my Tuesday outfit, pulled the covers over my head, and for the first time in my thirty-one years seriously considered plastic surgery. If I could find Michael Jackson's surgeon—and if he hadn't already lost his license—I'd be positively unrecognizable. I could change my name. I could move to some place where Sky News didn't exist. Where they didn't know anything about fashion . . . Hey, maybe my parents would let me move back home to Texas.

I couldn't think of anything more depressing.

Except maybe what my life was like at this moment. Fashion Week had barely started, and there was simply no way I could withstand the stares, the whispers, the smirks. I just wasn't that brave—or stupid. Roddy would have to understand. Maybe he could get a freelancer here to finish the week . . . and I could quietly disappear for a while.

But then what? Would I ever be able to come back? As much as I joked about having the fluffiest job at the magazine, jetting around Europe covering the fashion industry was a plum assignment. (Calling it an industry somehow gave it more weight in my mind.) I had dined with Donatella and gabbed with Gabbana. And—much to my mother's awe and pride—I had met the master himself, Monsieur Saint Laurent. My friends envied me, despite how often I told them that things just weren't as glamorous as they seemed. A sane person can take only so many hour-long waits in far-flung locales for seventeen-minute splashes of bright lights, loud music, and the occasional di-

vinely cut suit. Squeeze thirty of those into one week, multiply by four cities, twice a year, and you've got one spent fashionista.

On the other hand . . . I got invited to sample sales that weren't listed in the Daily Candy. I was *this* close to getting a clothing allowance, for heaven's sake.

Now that wasn't something that was discussed in J school. The only free outfits my J school classmates could aspire to get on assignment were fatigues and gas masks. Of the ones who weren't stuck in Podunk on the overnight police beat, Tara Wright had written an award-winning exposé on salad bars in New York City delis. And Mark McIntyre had covered two civil wars in countries even non-Americans couldn't pick out on a map. I covered a different sort of hotspot: places like the bar at the Hôtel Costes. The closest I had gotten to a skirmish was a year ago when the French police shut down the big Armani gala at St.-Sulpice and forcefully evacuated the whole fashion pack, in all our finery, from the tents. My one war wound: a pair of Jimmy Choo snakeskin mules destroyed in the mud and confusion. But mostly I had written a heck of a lot about kimono sleeves and deconstructed seams. Pulitzer glory or fashion freebies: what's a girl to choose?

For a while, I convinced myself that I didn't really have to choose. I injected humor and intelligence into my stories, sometimes surprising even myself with what I remembered from my liberal-arts education. So what if I had gotten letters from readers wondering what the Russian Revolution had to do with the latest colors in lipstick? (Good thing Roddy edited out my references to Trotsky.) And so what if the Nietzsche reference in the feature I did last month on

stilettos might have been lost on most of the readers who were just looking for a new pair of shoes? But—hah!—did I not do them a service in the end?

I was good at this rationalizing thing. But I needed to think only of one thing to snap me back to my senses. There were plenty of people out there who would kill for my position—including that frighteningly ambitious new reporter Roddy had just hired straight out of Oxford—and since I had helped them out with a little career suicide, they would be clamoring at the gates. And I just couldn't let that happen.

I poked my head out from the covers and reached for the phone.

He let it ring four times before he answered.

"Roddy James speaking."

"Hello, Roddy. It's me, Alex."

"Oh, right, Alex . . . So what's new?"

"Like you have to ask."

"Now, is that any way to talk to the magnanimous editor who is going to let you keep your job?"

"Roddy, you have no idea how horrible it was." I could no longer hold back the tears that had built up from the wretchedness of the day—losing my shoes, getting clobbered by a baguette, literally crashing a show. And now, I couldn't decide which was worse: blubbering in front of my editor, or blubbering *to* my editor. "It all happened so quickly, I was just walking in and I couldn't find my seat so I was just wandering around and then I saw my seat and it was right in the middle and I couldn't quite decide how to get into that row without pissing off a bunch—"

He cut me off. "Be quiet for a minute and listen to me.

People will forget. You know how fickle fashionistas are. They'll forget you in a split second. Remember when that model, what's her name, Oona, tripped on her platform shoes and took a tumble on the runway? How long did they talk about that? A minute."

I remembered it well, actually. I was e-mailing my friends pictures of Oona's spill for weeks, updating them with every new unflattering angle I found. Damn my bad karma.

Roddy was barreling along on his lame attempt at a pep talk. It really wasn't working. I knew he didn't believe a single word he was saying, and deep down, he probably realized that I didn't either. "Sure, there are some who thrive on schadenfreude, but who needs them?" he said optimistically. "It will be a blip. You'll be able to laugh it off in no time. And knowing you, you'll be joining in when there's someone else to make fun of."

"Roddy!" I gasped. "Do you really think that of me?"

His laugh started out as a snicker, and quickly crescendoed into a full-on, eyes-watering, abs-crunching guffaw. Sixty seconds later, when he finally was able to draw breath, he broke my stewing silence. "Alex, bottom line is that we need the story. We've got four pages in the next issue slated for your Fashion Week coverage. You've got to stick it out."

"But—"

"And, no, we're not hiring a freelancer. We want you to do it. We *need* you."

Damn that Roddy James. I could never argue when I heard those three little words come out of his mouth in that confoundedly sexy British accent of his. Before hanging up, he got me to promise that I would find *something* to write about—and in exchange, he would sign my expense report,

however bloated it might become this time around. Oh, he knew where my weaknesses were . . . and I hadn't even mentioned the part my missing shoes had played in the whole ordeal.