I was last Thursday night, quarter to ten, when I had finally had it. I'd been waiting half an hour on a New York City sidewalk in the bitter cold for a fashion show that had been scheduled to start at nine o'clock. I overheard a twink whose tight jeans were tucked neatly into his tight jeans and boots, "Say the conversation with a member of the fashion elite." While packing I scoured the runway-show photos and backstage reports on Hintmag.com and Style.com just in case I found myself in a conversation with a member of the "fashion elite." While packing I cataloged all the dresses, skirts, blouses, tunics, sweaters, jackets, pants, leggings, boots, pumps, and platforms I was bringing which items went together. While unpacking at my friend's place in Brooklyn, I realized I'd forgotten all my tights. I had my roommate overnight them to me. While unpacking at my friend's apartment when a young guy with spiky hair got off and met a friend for dinner. "So my friends and I are going to Atlantic City with us." I noticed tons of Marc Jacobs and backstage reports on Gen Art Fresh Faces show, which includes up-and-coming talent, which was satisfying. Last year every designer seemed newly obsessed with volume, loose, air-filled shapes that let the body do its thing separate from the clothing. Now everyone's still doing it, and they're all doing the same shapes—the bell, the tulip, the trapeze, the tent. I went to Chelsea for the Myself by Kai Kuhn show, from a one-time member of the polyamorous design team As Four, doing the same shapes—the bell, the tulip, the trapeze, the tent. The models finally came out, and I had a hard time staying interested. Last year every designer seemed newly obsessed with volume, loose, air-filled shapes that let the body do its thing separate from the clothing. Now everyone's still doing it, and they're all doing the same shapes—the bell, the tulip, the trapeze, the tent. At New York Fashion Week: Alice Roi models backstage, a collage inside the main tent in Bryant Park, models at a Vena Cava event on February 4, the well-dressed Mr. Toast. The first thing I noticed at the Gen Art Fresh Faces show, which includes up-and-coming talent, was how the ass of a plastic-surgery victim in tight leather pants looked exactly like her lips, all shiny and stretched out. My mood lifted when I saw a dude in a polo shirt carrying a tray of Johnnie Walkers on ice, then darkened again when I realized he was serving only rows one through three. I was in row four. The Chicago Tribune was in two. The models finally came out, and I had a hard time staying interested. Last year every designer seemed newly obsessed with volume, loose, air-filled shapes that let the body do its thing separate from the clothing. Now everyone's still doing it, and they're all doing the same shapes—the bell, the tulip, the trapeze, the tent. At New York Fashion Week: Alice Roi models backstage, a collage inside the main tent in Bryant Park, models at a Vena Cava event on February 4, the well-dressed Mr. Toast.
boots—actually made me look like a hooker. Still, any other day I probably would’ve joined them. Outside Jasmin Shokrian’s show, a photographer for *Jane* magazine asked if she could take my photo for their street-style section, and I felt vindicated (though I tried to act like I didn’t care). Inside an airy, eighth-floor hair salon in the Meatpacking District, Chicago expat Shokrian presented a collection called “Phases Alighting,” which, to be honest, struck me as a little pretentious. But one jacket with material gathered and stitched down in the back, suggesting wings, made me excuse the highfalutin premise.

Next was Alice Roi, my first stop at the tents in Bryant Park, site of the official Olympus Fashion Week shows, which is to say the ones by designers your mother has heard of. Last time I was in Bryant Park, two summers ago, a pack of cops were shoving their bicycles into about a hundred people who were protesting the Republican National Convention. I was arrested and spent 50 hours in jail. Now, just a year and a half later, I was standing in line wearing six-hundred-dollar shoes. What had I become? But then British *Elle* took my picture and I was happy again.

I’ve known Alice Roi’s creative director, Liv Wildz, for several years—I even modeled and sang in her first solo show when she moved to New York from New Orleans four years ago—so I got to hang out backstage, sipping champagne and watching silent, diligent, black-shirted stylists tease teenage models’ hair under insanely hot lights.

I met one of Liv’s other friends, Poppy King, a cosmetics entrepreneur who was named Young Australian of the Year in 1995. We were both given spots in the
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standing room-only area behind all the seats. I couldn’t figure out why we didn’t get seats, and then I noticed another of Liv’s friends also standing and I figured out that standing room is even cooler than the front row because it’s filled with die-hard fans and people who actually know the designer. But when Poppy and I found some vacant third-row seats we snapped them up. Roi pulls off a pretty subtle mixture of tough and sweet that when done right makes a woman look like Edie Sedgwick and when done wrong makes her look like a midi mallrat. My favorites included a pair of tight jeans, which I’d figured out were older, was wearing all black, and had British accents. But then their coats came off and they all looked a little too comfortable, in soft cashmere sweaters and easy pants, like they were dressed for an overseas flight. A few hundred people waited around the place—and waited, and waited—for the show to begin. And once it did most of us didn’t even know it had: the models walked languidly down a flight of carpeted stairs into the main foyer wearing short flouncy dresses, cozy hooded sweaters paired with lace tap pants, and abstract animal-print tunics with leggings. There was no runway: the models sort of gathered in the middle of the ballroom and shrugged, looking lost. Then they stood and talked to each other like they were hanging out next to a water cooler.


I guess compared with the stuffiness of the tents the disorganization must’ve seemed fresh, but I’ve seen too many confused little indie shows in Chicago to be charmed by sloppiness anymore. I could not motivate myself to get out to today’s shows. Instead I slept all afternoon, ate Fritos with hummus for a late lunch, and petted Mr. Toast, the mentally retarded teacup Chihuahua the friend I was staying with was pet-sitting, then ended the night snorting morphine with friends in New Jersey. And I was still three days from hitting bottom. Tuesday, February 7: I really did mean to make it to the Heatherette show tonight in hopes that club-kid mogul Richie Rich and Traver Rains would come up with something so gloriously frivolous that it would pull me out of my funk. But I was having drinks at Beauty Bar and got to the subterranean performance space called the Glass House, where a few dozen hipsters in tight jeans and boots sat on scraps of shredded Oriental rugs, watching a lethargic, darkly folkly Greek-goddess-by-the-brook duo called Cosmic Western Mystery Tradition. Wednesday, February 8: Oops, I missed Peter Som. But I made it to Brian Reyes at the Sony Recording Studio in Midtown. More puff sleeves, more high waists, more tulip skirts, Yawn. I decided to cheer myself up by going shopping and came back with a pair of tight jeans, which I promptly tucked into boots. This would be my uniform for the rest of my trip. What’s the point of trying to stand out? All it gets you is a tiny little picture in June that will end up embarrassing you. If you’re lucky.

Thursday, February 9: Went to see Arakau, who showed supersoft, understated lingerie, muted knitwear, and classically sweet tailoring. Then I checked out Joanna Mastroianni’s show in Bryant Park. Mastroianni’s collection was full of magisterial silhouettes and satin fabrics, which makes sense because her program said she was influenced by Fabergé eggs. Here I also saw my first celebrity, if Fairuza Balk counts, which she probably doesn’t. The standing-room area at this show didn’t feel so cool. Women in Uggs carried nylon LeSportsacs; everyone looked ready to shovel some snow when they took a nap. Can people not even dress up for freaking Fashion Week? I’m used to seeing people dress for comfort—I live in Chicago, for chrissakes—but at least here people appreciate it when someone makes an effort. I’d figured New York, the fashion capital of the country, would also be the style capital. But everyone at the shows looked the same, like cookie-cutter versions of Kate Moss circa 2003, like being different meant being uncool, like we were all back in junior high again and anyone not in an oversized I.O.U. sweatshirt and Caviarice couldn’t sit with the popular girls at lunch. Then there was that last straw at Zaddy.

Friday, February 10: I’d already made up my mind that I was going to come home tonight, despite my invitations to the Jeremy Scott and Karl Lagerfeld shows—I couldn’t take one more disappointment, especially from designers whose work I covet insanely. Instead I checked their collections online, where distance restored some of the illusion of glamour. It almost made me want to be there.
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