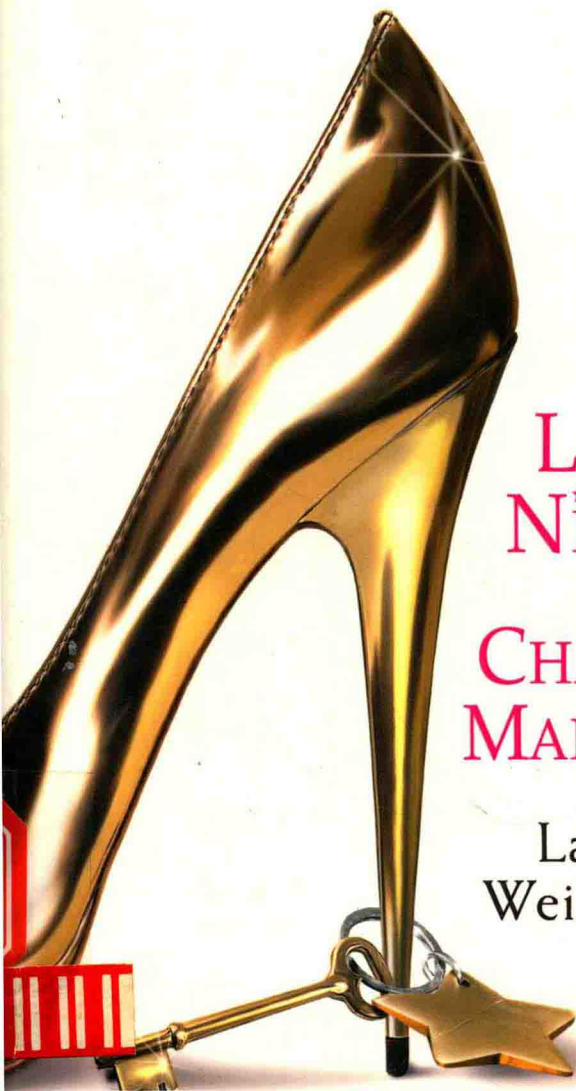


From the bestselling author of  
**THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA**



LAST  
NIGHT  
AT  
CHATEAU  
MARMONT

Lauren  
Weisberger

LAUREN WEISBERGER

LAST  
NIGHT  
AT  
CHATEAU  
MARMONT

HARPER

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An imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers  
77-85 Fulham Palace Road,  
Hammersmith, London W6 8JB

[www.harpercollins.co.uk](http://www.harpercollins.co.uk)

Special overseas edition 2010

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First published in Great Britain  
HarperCollinsPublishers 2010

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ISBN: 978 0 00 735483 2

Set in Meridien by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,  
Falkirk, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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*The Devil Wears Prada*  
*Everyone Worth Knowing*  
*Chasing Harry Winston*

*For Dana, my sister and best friend forever*

## ONE

### *Piano Man*

When the subway finally screeched into the Franklin Street station, Brooke was nearly sick with anxiety. She checked her watch for the tenth time in as many minutes and tried to remind herself that it wasn't the end of the world; her best friend, Nola, would forgive her, *had* to forgive her, even if she was inexcusably late. She pushed her way through the rush-hour throngs of commuters toward the door, instinctively holding her breath in the midst of so many bodies, and allowed herself to be pulled toward the stairwell. On autopilot now, Brooke and her fellow riders each pulled their cell phones from their purses and jacket pockets, filed silently into a straight line and, zombielike, marched like choreographed soldiers up the right side of the cement stairs while staring blankly at the tiny screens in their palms.

'Shit!' she heard an overweight woman up ahead call out, and in just a moment she knew why. The rain hit her forcefully and without warning the instant she emerged from the stairwell. What had been a chilly but decent enough March evening only twenty minutes earlier had deteriorated into a freezing, thundering

misery, where the winds whipped the rain down with driving force and made it utterly impossible to stay dry.

'Dammit!' she added to the cacophony of expletives people were shouting all around her as they struggled to pull umbrellas from their briefcases or arrange newspapers over their heads. Since she'd run home to change after work, Brooke had nothing but a tiny (and admittedly cute) silver clutch to shield herself from the onslaught. *Good-bye, hair*, she thought as she began to sprint the three blocks to the restaurant. *I'll miss you, eye makeup. Nice knowing you, gorgeous new tall suede boots that ate up half my weekly salary.*

Brooke was drenched by the time she reached Sotto, the tiny, unpretentious neighborhood joint where she and Nola met two or three times a month. The pasta wasn't the best in the city – probably not even the best on the block – and the space wasn't anything all that special, but Sotto had other charms, more important ones: reasonably priced wine by the full carafe, a killer tiramisu, and a downright hot Italian maître d' who, simply because they'd been coming for so long, always saved Brooke and Nola the most private table in the back.

'Hey, Luca.' Brooke greeted the owner as she shrugged off her wool peacoat, trying not to shake water everywhere. 'Is she here yet?'

Luca immediately put his hand over the phone receiver and pointed with a pencil over his shoulder. 'The usual. What's the occasion for the sexy dress, *cara mia*? You want to dry off first?'

She smoothed her fitted, short-sleeved black jersey dress with both palms and prayed that Luca was right, that the dress was sexy and she looked okay. She'd come to think of that dress as her Gig Uniform; paired



with either heels, sandals, or boots, depending on the weather, she wore it to nearly every one of Julian's performances.

'I'm so late already. Is she all whiny and mad?' Brooke asked, scrunching handfuls of her hair in a desperate attempt to save it from the imminent frizz attack.

'She's a half carafe in and hasn't put the mobile down yet. You better get back there.'

They exchanged a triple cheek-kiss – Brooke had protested the full three kisses in the beginning but Luca insisted – before Brooke took a deep breath and walked back to their table. Nola was tucked neatly into the banquette, her suit jacket flung across the back bench and her navy cashmere shell showing off tightly toned arms and contrasting nicely with her amazing olive skin. Her shoulder-length layered cut was stylish and sexy, her blonde highlights glowed under the restaurant's soft lights, and her makeup looked dewy and fresh. No one would ever know from looking at her that Nola had just clocked in twelve hours on a trading desk screaming into a headset.

Brooke and Nola didn't meet until second semester senior year at Cornell, although Brooke – like the rest of the student body – knew of Nola and was equal parts terrified of and fascinated by her. Compared to her hoodie-and-Ugg-wearing fellow students, the model-thin Nola favored high-heeled boots and blazers and never, *ever* tied her hair in a ponytail. She'd grown up in elite prep schools in New York, London, Hong Kong, and Dubai, places her investment banker father worked, and had enjoyed the requisite freedom that goes along with being the only child of extremely busy parents.

How she ended up at Cornell instead of Cambridge or Georgetown or the Sorbonne was anyone's guess,

but it didn't take a lot of imagination to see she wasn't particularly impressed. When the rest of them were busy rushing sororities, meeting for lunch at the Ivy Room, and getting drunk at various Collegetown bars, Nola kept to herself. There were glimpses into her life – the well-known affair with the archaeology professor, the frequent appearances of sexy, mysterious men on campus who vanished soon thereafter – but for the most part, Nola attended her classes, aced everything she took, and hightailed it back to Manhattan the moment Friday afternoon rolled around. When the two girls found themselves assigned to workshop each other's short stories in a creative writing elective their senior year, Brooke was so intimidated she could barely speak. Nola, as usual, didn't appear particularly pleased or upset, but when she returned Brooke's first submission a week later – a fictional piece on a character struggling to adapt to her Peace Corps assignment in Congo – it was filled with thoughtful, insightful commentary and suggestions. Then, on the last page, after scrawling out her lengthy and serious feedback, Nola had written, 'P.S. Consider sex scene in Congo?' and Brooke had laughed so hard she had to excuse herself from class to calm down.

After class Nola invited Brooke to a tiny little coffee place in the basement of one of the academic buildings, a place none of Brooke's friends ever hung out, and within a couple weeks Brooke was going to New York with Nola on weekends. Even after all these years, Nola was too fabulous for words, but it helped Brooke knowing that her friend sobbed during news segments featuring soldiers coming home from war, was secretly obsessed with one day having a perfect white picket fence in the suburbs despite being openly derisive about it, and had

a pathological fear of small, yappy dogs (Walter, Brooke's dog, not included).

'Perfect, perfect. No, I think sitting at the bar is just fine,' Nola said into the phone, rolling her eyes at Brooke. 'No, no need to make a reservation for dinner, let's just play it by ear. Okay, sounds good. See you then.' She clicked her phone shut and immediately grabbed the red wine, refreshing her own glass before remembering Brooke and filling hers too.

'Do you hate me?' Brooke asked as she arranged her coat on the chair next to her and tossed her dripping umbrella underneath the table. She took a long, deep drink of wine and savored the feeling of the alcohol sliding over her tongue.

'Why? Just because I've been sitting here alone for thirty minutes?'

'I know, I know, I'm really sorry. Hellish day at work. Two of the full-time nutritionists called in sick today – which if you ask me sounds suspicious – and the rest of us had to cover their rotations. Of course, if we met sometime in my neighborhood maybe I could get there on time ...'

Nola held up her hand. 'Point taken. I do appreciate you coming all the way down here. Dinner in Midtown West just isn't appealing.'

'Who were you just on with? Was that Daniel?'

'Daniel?' Nola looked baffled. She stared at the ceiling as she appeared to wrack her brain. 'Daniel, Daniel ... oh! Nah, I'm over him. I brought him to a work thing early last week and he was weird. Super awkward. No, that was setting up tomorrow's Match dot-com date. Second one this week. How did I get so pathetic?' She sighed.

'Please. You're not—'

'No, really. It's pathetic that I'm almost thirty and still think of my college boyfriend as my only "real" relationship. It is also pathetic that I belong to multiple online dating sites and date men from all of them. But what is *most* pathetic – what is bordering on inexcusable – is how willing I am to admit this to anyone who will listen.'

Brooke took another sip. 'I'm hardly "anyone who will listen."'

'You know what I mean,' Nola said. 'If you were the only one privy to my humiliation, I could live with that. But it's as though I've become so inured to the—'

'Good word.'

'Thanks. It was on my word-a-day calendar this morning. So, really, I'm so *inured* to the indignity of it all that I have no filter anymore. Just yesterday I spent a solid fifteen minutes trying to explain to one of Goldman's most senior vice presidents the difference in men on Match versus those on Nerve. It's unforgivable.'

'So, what's the story with the guy tomorrow?' Brooke asked, trying to change the subject. It was impossible to keep track of Nola's man situation from week to week. Not just which one – a challenge itself – but whether she *desperately* wanted a boyfriend to settle down with or *loathed* commitment and wanted only to be single and fabulous and sleep around. It changed on a dime, with no warning, and left Brooke constantly trying to remember whether this week's guy was 'so amazing' or 'a total disaster.'

Nola lowered her lashes and arranged her glossed lips into her signature pout, the one that managed to say, 'I'm fragile,' 'I'm sweet,' and 'I want you to ravish me' all at the same time. Clearly, she was planning a long response to this question.

'Save it for the men, my friend. Doesn't work on me,' Brooke lied. Nola wasn't traditionally pretty, but it didn't much matter. She put herself together so beautifully and emanated such confidence that men and women alike regularly fell under her spell.

'This one *sounds* promising,' she said wistfully. 'I'm sure it's only a matter of time until he reveals some sort of colossal deal breaker, but until then, I think he's perfect.'

'So, what's he like?' Brooke pressed.

'Mmm, let's see. He was on the ski racing team in college, which is why I clicked on him in the first place, and he even did two seasons as an instructor, first in Park City and then in Zermatt.'

'Perfection so far.'

Nola nodded. 'Yep. He's just about six foot, fit build – or so he claims – sandy blond hair, and green eyes. He just moved to the city a few months ago and doesn't know a lot of people.'

'You'll change that.'

'Yeah, I guess . . .' She pouted. 'But . . .'

'What's the problem?' Brooke refreshed both their glasses and nodded to the waiter when he asked if they'd both like their usual orders.

'Well, it's the job thing. He lists his profession as "artist."' She pronounced this word as though she were saying 'pornographer.'

'So?'

'So? So what the hell does that mean. *Artist?*'

'Um, I think it could mean a lot of things. Painter, sculptor, musician, actor, wri—'

Nola touched her hand to her forehead. 'Please. It can mean one thing only and we both know it: unemployed.'

'Everyone's unemployed now. It's practically chic.'

'Oh, come on. I can live with recession-related unemployment. But an *artist*? Tough to stomach.'

'Nola! That's ridiculous. There are plenty of people – loads of them, thousands, probably millions – who support themselves with their art. I mean, look at Julian. He's a musician. Should I never have gone out with *him*?'

Nola opened her mouth to say something but changed her mind. There was an awkward moment of silence.

'What were you going to say?' Brooke asked.

'Nothing, it's nothing. You're right.'

'No, really. What were you just about to say? Just say it.'

Nola twirled her wineglass by the stem and looked like she'd rather be anywhere but there. 'I'm not saying that Julian isn't really talented, but . . .'

'But what?' Brooke leaned in so close that Nola was forced to meet her eyes.

'But I'm not sure I would call him a "musician." He was someone's assistant when you met. Now *you* support him.'

'Yes, he was an *intern* when we met,' Brooke said, barely even attempting to hide her irritation. 'He was interning at Sony to learn the music industry, see how it works. And guess what? It's only because of the relationships he built there that anyone paid him any attention in the first place. If he hadn't been there every day, trying to make himself indispensable, do you think the head of A&R would've taken two hours of his time to watch him perform?'

'I know, it's just that—'

'How can you say he's not doing anything? Is that really what you think? I'm not sure if you realize this, but he has spent the last eight months locked away in a Midtown recording studio making an album. And not just some vanity project, by the way; Sony actually *signed*

him as an artist – there's that word again – and paid him an advance. If you don't think that's proper employment, I really don't know what to tell you.'

Nola held her hands up in defeat and hung her head. 'Yes, of course. You're right.'

'You don't sound convinced.' Brooke began chewing on her thumbnail. Any relief she'd felt from the wine had completely vanished.

Nola pushed her salad around with a fork. 'Well, don't they give out, like, a ton of recording contracts to anyone showing a modicum of talent, figuring it'll only take one big hit to pay for all the smaller flops?'

Brooke was surprised by her friend's knowledge of the music industry. Julian always explained that very theory when he downplayed his label deal and tried to, in his words, 'manage expectations' about what such a deal really meant. Still, coming from Nola, it somehow sounded worse.

'A "modicum of talent"? ' Brooke could only whisper the words. 'Is that what you think of him?'

'Of *course* that's not what I think of him. Don't take it so personally. It's just hard, as your friend, to watch you kill yourself working to support him for so many years now. Especially when the odds are so low that anything will come of it.'

'Well, I appreciate your concern for my well-being, but you should know it was my choice to take on the extra private school consulting work to help support us. I don't do it out of the kindness of my heart, I do it because I actually believe in him and his talent, and I know – even if no one else seems to think so – that he has a brilliant career ahead of him.'

Brooke had been ecstatic beyond description – possibly even more than Julian – when he'd called her with the

initial offer from Sony eight months earlier. Two hundred fifty thousand dollars was more than they'd collectively made in the previous five years, and Julian would have the freedom to do with it what he wanted. How could she have possibly foreseen that such a massive infusion of cash would put them in even greater debt than they already were? From that advance Julian needed to pay for studio time, hire high-priced producers and sound engineers, and cover the entire cost of his equipment, travel, and backup band? The money was gone in a few short months, long before they could use so much as a single dollar toward rent, utilities, or even a celebratory dinner. And once all those funds were being used to help Julian make a name for himself, it didn't make sense not to see the project through. They'd already spent thirty thousand dollars of their own money – the entirety of their savings that had once been earmarked for a down payment on an apartment – and they were burning through more credit every single day. The scariest part of the whole thing was what Nola had so brutally spelled out: the chances of Julian ever making good on all that time and money – even with the Sony name behind him – were almost nil.

'I just hope he knows how lucky he is to have a wife like you,' Nola said, more softly now. 'I can tell you, I sure wouldn't be so supportive. Which is probably why I'm destined to be forever single ...'

Thankfully their pasta dishes arrived and the conversation shifted to safer topics: how fattening was the meat sauce, whether or not Nola should ask for a raise at work, how much Brooke disliked her in-laws. When Brooke motioned for the check without ordering the tiramisu or even a coffee, Nola looked concerned.



'You're not upset with me, are you?' she asked, adding her credit card to the leather folder.

'No,' Brooke lied. 'I've just had a long day.'

'Where are you headed now? No après-dinner drink?'

'Julian's actually got a . . . he's performing,' Brooke said, changing her mind at the last second. She'd rather not have mentioned his gig at all, but it felt strange lying to Nola.

'Oh, fun!' Nola said brightly, draining the last of her wine. 'Want company?'

They both knew she didn't really want to go, which was okay, because Brooke didn't really want her to go. Her friend and her husband got along just fine, and that was good enough. She appreciated Nola's protectiveness and knew it came from a good place, but it was hard thinking your best friend was constantly judging your husband – and he was always coming up short.

'Trent's in town actually,' Brooke said. 'He's here on a rotation of some sort, so I'm meeting him there.'

'Ah, good old Trent. How's he liking med school?'

'He's done actually; he's an intern now. Julian says he loves L.A., which is surprising – born-and-bred New Yorkers *never* like L.A.'

Nola stood up and put her suit jacket back on. 'Is he dating anyone? If I remember correctly, he's boring as hell but perfectly cute . . .'

'He just got engaged, actually. To a fellow gastro intern, a girl named Fern. Intern Fern, the gastro specialist. I shudder to think what their conversation entails.'

Nola scrunched up her face in disgust. 'Thanks for that visual. And to think, he could've been all yours . . .'

'Mmmm.'

'I just want to make sure I still get proper credit for introducing you to your husband. If you hadn't gone