

# The Shoe Conspiracy

by Rose Margaret G. Monis

**F**or the life of me, I cannot understand why some women's shoes are designed the way they are: strapped, high-heeled, platform—all accidents waiting to happen! How can you trust something called *platform* to give you stability? Some styles immediately call up visions of dislocated ankles and fractured kneecaps. So who are the sadists behind these shoes? I loathe thinking that a kindred female spirit has anything to do with footwear synonymous to torture. Some of these shoes are so lethal that in self-defense classes, we are reminded these could be weapons!

I must confess that as a child, my senses were inundated with scenes of carnage that were my mother, aunt, and grandmother's feet. Corns, bunions, and carbuncles the size of 25 centavo coins liberally peppered the fleshy parts of their toes and insteps where they must really hurt. I could only close my eyes when I saw them poke and cut into those buggers. The culprits: Stiletto (1980s shoes that have these really, really slender and pointed 3- to 4-inch heels). I made it a personal mission to follow a different path. Comfy footwear, like sandals and sneakers, became my staples. But I also had my fair share of events that warranted high heels—weddings, proms, and graduations—ah, and my prom when I was sixteen and had a 26" waistline!

Ever the practical one, I designed my own prom gown and used leftover material that were gifts from my godmother (yes, I know, it was so





*Cinderella*). I also decided to recycle shoes I wore to a wedding a year ago (not exactly glass-slipper material, but you do what you can). Although, proms are hardly dancing events, they're just excuses to play dress-up, eat meat smothered with gravy, and *ohh* and *ahh* at chandeliers in hotel lobbies, I had my heart set on showing my best friend some of my fancy moves. I was deeply into new wave music then and had been practicing nifty footwork aimed at landing me the coveted *Belle of the Ball* title. To my chagrin, my stupid wedding shoes pinched my toes without mercy! My spirit was willing, but my flesh was weak and blistering. I was forced to sit through the fast songs.

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That was not my first brush with humiliation and high heels. During my high school graduation, while walking away from the relieved faces of school superiors who handed me a piece of rolled-up paper, shook my hand, and said what sounded to me like *Con-good-riddance-tion*, one of the heels of my black formal shoes threatened to stay behind when it got stuck in a corrugation in the stairs. Another incident happened when I was 12 years old. I almost had the first nervous breakdown of my young life then because as part of the ubiquitous May Procession, we were made to walk for two straight hours on roads pocked with potholes!

So, going back to my question, who do we hold responsible? And, why do women still go for shoes that are obviously health hazards?

For ages, men in the fashion centres of the world, like Italy and France, have had the pleasure of dictating what looks good on a woman's body. Scratch that. Men, in general, have had their say on how women should dress. Remember the wooden shoes of Japan, invented to force those delicate-looking feet to take small, mincing steps simply because it looked prettier than having them gallop side-by-side with the men? Today, women's shoes are made streamlined to train the toes to keep close together and not to splay apart like men's. Heels were designed to add stature and give swagger to the walk (and hips) for a more elegant and attractive look.

I am not advocating that women start wearing men's shoes. But it's time that women stop permitting their bodies and feet to be pushed and pinched around to fit clothes and shoes that disallow freedom of movement and circulation. These fashion hypes have made women obsessed with their bodies and competitive of each other. And, because they can sometimes be blind followers of fads, women overextend themselves to get those ridiculously priced shoes. Not many men go this way. Probably to most of them, shoes are tools that will get them painlessly from point A to point B. Fads are a second priority; comfort, fit and value are paramount. But women's shoes have to have an element of danger to them. Ask yourself this: How many times have you seen women lose their bearings, stumble, or fall flat on their face because of shoe-related mishaps? And how many times have you seen men do that? You see?

I smell a conspiracy here. I do not wish to compare, but men seem to have an easier time existing in this fashion-festooned world! All men have to do is shower, shave, clip the occasional nose hairs and dress to be able to inflict themselves on the rest of humanity. Women, on the other hand, have to shower, condition, shave from the armpits down, primp, put gunk on their faces, tweak, curl, color, polish, dress, put on stockings, wear shoes that have to compliment the rest of the ensemble before they can feel half as decent. Sure, some women may actually enjoy these rituals. Unfortunately, however, even for the rest, self-worth plummets if they fail to line their eyebrows symmetrically. The more I dwell on these thoughts, the more I am convinced that women remain objects made up to look pretty—to be seen but not heard.

Admittedly, there are designers who put function before looks, designing clothes and shoes for women that are pretty and comfortable. I salute them. Women are out there to earn their keep, busting their butts and breaking their backs maybe more so than the average man. It's about time that clothes and shoes are made appropriate and comfortable for them. And to women out there: Breaking fashion norms does not always translate to becoming a social pariah. It can actually be quite a liberating experience. ♪

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