

## An Escort For Your Shopping

Just like in the US, a private counselor assists rich clients in high fashion shopping sessions.

Paris, Friday 11 a.m. Heather arrives to pick up Briony at her 16<sup>th</sup> area apartment. They're sitting on the back seat of a Mercedes S class with a chauffeur. They are smiling, as if they had known each other forever and had just escaped from an early show.

Actually, Heather is what is called a personal shopper. She comes from Virginia, and after she's been modeling for Elite, the famous models agency, she earns money in counseling and assisting rich clients in their high fashion shopping sessions. Briony has been studying for 9 months in the American University in Paris. She is a 20-year-old blond sophisticated girl. She's the daughter of a rich industrial from Pennsylvania. Her mother is the head of several charity organizations. She's the one who chose Heather because she was sure her daughter would not be financially abused. Indeed, unlike most of the personal shoppers, her income is a fixed fee; it doesn't grow in proportion of the amount of what is actually spent with commissions from the shops. Heather's mission: help Briony find the perfect gown and accessories to match for a charity gala her mother organizes for the Pittsburgh theatre. "It will be my first real celebration, the student says. I want to be perfect for that day. Some great names will be there. I need to be considered as a grown up adult, not for a child."

### A very special day

The message is clear. Heather has already pre-selected shops and clothes. They just have one day to go shopping, no more. "My mother doesn't want me to waste my time in Paris going shopping. She says I am here to study, not to hang around with my friends. That's why she decided to offer me this special day", Briony says. It is indeed a pretty nice gift, \$5000 worth, gently offered by the kind mother. The budget includes the price of the robe plus accessories, the rent of the car, the personal shopper's salary, and lunch. Serious things actually are beginning during the lunchtime. The seats are comfy, in the very fancy Hotel Costes, and the Champagne is flowing. That's where the two Ladies could feel the best to decide what the program would be for the rest of the day. Briony is so excited and she expects to get the best from this wonderful time. She takes her favorite meal from the menu. "Crying tiger, with some salad instead of the rice, please" she orders the waiter. There's no way she gets sick from over eating (doesn't want to feel like she has a balloon in her belly) for the coming fitting. She doesn't touch the bread basket either: too damaging for her nice skinny body (38 size). As far as Heather is concerned, it will be an incredibly easy job to find her the perfect outfit. "Finding her clothes is nearly a game to me. She is a young skinny sexy person, which is not always the case. Sometimes, it is nearly too challenging to satisfy clients whose waistline is far from being ideal. They are sometimes very rigid and often quite critical of today's fashions." It's actually with her very difficult mother that she started practicing her talent.

### A well worn business

After two years of practice, Heather now masters the business. Her clients are mostly American. They can hire her not only in Paris, but also in NYC, London and Milan. It's actually in Milan that Heather first thought of this job: "by then, I was modeling, trying out

some clothes in a show room. One day a princess from Arabia arrived in the showroom that was being taken care of by a consort. Her role was to give her advice and guide her for her expenses. I immediately thought it was an incredible job, and I decided I would make it mine.” After a year and a half back to the US, Heather had set the basis of the business. Once done, this lover of Europe decided to settle in Paris, considered as the major city for fashion. Moreover, the place is free of any competition. “Very few people here even know that the job exists, whereas it is a common thing in NYC.”

### **Dressed like a princess**

After a last make up check, before leaving the restaurant, Briony sums up what she’s expecting from Heather: “I want something both colorful and sexy, but it has to remain reasonable.” It’s understood. A sign to the chauffeur, and they are on their way up the Faubourg Saint-Honoré in the car. The first stop is at Valentino’s. Heather has already noticed two potential dresses that could fit the young American. She first has her try a sumptuous long red dress. Briony is hilarious when she gets out of the cabin. She turns around, listens to the sound the tissue makes in her hands. She jumps around in a waltz, admires herself in every mirror on her way. “I feel beautiful, I love it! Men don’t even make me feel that way,» she says. Try on other shoes, some scarves? She finally prefers her princess dress without any additional accessories. The only problem is that the dress lets her umbilicus visible: “I need to get rid of that or my mother will yell.” The second one is a half calf turquoise skirt with its assorted pearled top, that doesn’t let much space for imagination. It would be perfect for a jet set party in Saint Tropez or in Ibiza, but would be certainly unfit for a charity gala.

Before the beauty gets changed, Heather takes a few pictures of her with her numerical camera. She will email them to Briony’s mother later. No expense is to be done without her agreeing. This causes the daughter to do a little bit of auto censorship: “I must deal with both my tastes and hers. But I think we’ll agree, the two of us are so close to each other.” Over that time, Heather deals with the last formalities: note the reference of the models that have been tried on, and above all their price. Just when they were about to leave the shop, the blond American starts crying when she reads a message on her mobile phone. Everyone gets mobilized around her, even the saleswomen. A boyfriend she doesn’t often get to see just called her from Asia. Nothing more. Heather is very comprehensive and especially behaves in a very professional way. She immediately gives her a hug to calm her tears down. She recognizes that this kind of unexpected behavior makes the job so complicated. Briony realizes how ridiculous the situation was and she justifies herself: “I don’t always behave like that, but this day is a very special day. It’s really too many thrills for me.”

Next step: the very fancy Givenchy shop. There, the student is very fond of this very fluid over sexy little dress. It’s blazing red, high up the leg, and lightly transparent. Briony loves it but she is afraid of her mother’s reaction. The delicate salesman wears a nice impeccable suit. He says that it is possible to add a lining to it. Heather won’t forget the information. Just after trying on a second dress, a fuchsia one this time, and a make up check, it is time to go to Lanvin.

### **Ready for anything**

Just like Julia Roberts playing in *Pretty Woman*, Briony transforms herself along with the trying on, and frenetically roams the fancy shops. But here stops the comparison: her own

Richard Gere is a professional buyer, and she was unlikely found in the street. Plus the Gold credit card is mommies.

Finally, the American girl finds what she likes the most at Lolita Lempicka. Assorted to her water green eyes, the very refreshing ensemble includes a skirt and a corset, with ruban and English garnishments. She is completely charmed: "It's so romantic, and so French, anyone can tell I had bought it in Paris." She says. Heather agrees taking into account that \$2600 for the whole thing lets her enough to afford some accessories, a pair of shoes at least. What's more, she already has in mind a very elegant pair of pale green leather sandals she saw the day before at Maria Luisa's. A sign to the driver, and they're on their way to rue Cambon, aiming to go there to make sure the harmony is perfect with the Lolita Lempicka ensemble the student is found of. Unfortunately, Briony's size is unavailable, but Heather doesn't even allow her the time to be disappointed. She gets the fax number of some other shops abroad that could still have some. She promises to order them from London or in Italy as soon as she gets home. Ready for anything to satisfy her client.

The afternoon is ending and the two girls are tired but happy when they come out of the shop. Briony's happiness comes from the fact she thinks she found the perfect ensemble, and also she loved to play the princess the whole day. Heather is glad she nearly has fulfilled her mission. They get back into the car, hand in hand. They have a few commentaries about the day and focuses, but it is already time for the two friends of one day to split.

It is also time for the rich American student to get back to her studies. She doesn't even expect them to give her a job when she finishes: "I don't plan to work one day, or only in the entertainment field, she confesses. I principally hope I will become a good bride, a good mother, and organize charity events to help others..." It's time for Heather to settle the score and go on in the personal shopper business. Ripe and full of promise.