



Me and My Stalker

THIS WOMAN'S **FASHION CLONE**
WILL NOT BE IGNORED.
MARIA BELL EVADES HER BUNNY BOILER.

Nothing will stop her until she owns what I own. Wears what I wear. She is frighteningly clever. Cagney. Resourceful. She follows every clue, badgers every salesperson. She noisily sucks up my style like an eager 6-year-old with a frozen hot chocolate at Serendipity 3. Don't mind the brain freeze... she's gotta have it. Now. She's my fashion stalker.

What makes a businesslike, brunet, Audrey Hepburn-ish size 0 want to dress like a bohemian, blond, Bridget Jones-ish size 6? Why would she want her tiny size-5 feet to be shod identically to my size-9's? I'm younger and curvier; she's shaped like an exclamation point, and all her sentences end in one. Why does she want everything I've got?

My affair with "Joan" began innocently. She loved that dress, those shoes, that bag. She wanted to know where they came from. Flattered, I cheerily volunteered. Later, I'd revisit stores to find she'd been calling, ordering and insisting on overnight delivery. Every time I shopped, the greeting became, "Welcome back, and how's Joan?" They'd never met her, but they'd certainly heard from her. Now a saleswoman at my favorite store shudders when Joan barks, "Has she been in?" With dual talents for research and torture, my stalker "friend" manages to discover what I've reserved for next season and wears the stuff before I do. She's good.

Joan recently regaled me with photos of her birthday celebration in Europe. At her big party,

she wore the same dress I'd worn to my 40th the year before. She's lounging in the Marni tunic I special-ordered years ago. Hey, is that my favorite Marc Jacobs jacket? As I was overcome by creepiness, she noticed the new Tuleh dress I had on. It came from a small store in Colorado called Distractions, which in my own distracted state I allowed her to drag out of me. Joan called me the next day, annoyed, and said, "There is no Distracting in Aspen!" A day or two of dogged resourcefulness revealed her mistake. Before I could sport the dress again, my Tuleh resided in Joan's wardrobe — ordered, altered and thoroughly shown off all over town. Maybe I need to start wearing vintage.

My stalker is flagrantly abusing the subtle shopping-with-friends rules that most women graciously observe. It's O.K. to buy the same \$20 flip-flops as your pal, but not the same \$7,000 fur coat. Get these great jeans, but not my custom-made ball gown.

I've now learned that many chic women are victimized by the covetous. One stylish New Yorker was indignant when her snakeskin Prada trench was snapped up by her fashion clone. She was chagrined when "her" coat appeared at every cocktail party last spring having more fun than she did. One fashion eccentric was perplexed when her two stalkers cashed in their frequent-flier miles to travel the world on a hunt for her accessories. Still another thought it odd when a friend began referring to the bag she carried or the jacket she wore as "ours." When the acquaintance started claiming joint ownership of this woman's friends and then her husband, the lady knew she was consorting with a psychopath. A stylish mother had a "Hand That Rocks the Cradle" tale of a nanny who first dressed in outfits identical to hers and then moved to dyeing her hair the same shade of blond and asking the children to call her Mommy. Today more fatal attractions start over Birkin bags (red matte croc!) than your job, your kids or your spouse.

A dear friend once said: "There are some women I talk to about philosophy, spirituality and psychology. And others just want to talk about the goods." To Joan, I've got the goods. Compared with some of these lifestyle and identity thieves, it's harmless. She's a little scary, but, hey, without makeup, who isn't?

A week ago, my phone rang. It was my stalker friend. "Bought anything lately?" My negative reply was greeted with profound disappointment, as though I had somehow failed her. "Too bad," she said. "You know I consider you my personal shopper." It's so nice to feel needed. Love thy stalker. Oh, who am I kidding? When this is published, I'll be in real peril. God willing, I won't be found in an alley behind Barneys, bludgeoned to death with a black American Express card. ■