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Opening extract from

Threads: Sequins, Stars and Spotlights

Written by

Sophia Bennett

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From The Chicken House

Sophia, no! This can't be the end of the trilogy. We'll miss the girls too much!

I never thought it would end like *that* – but I *loved* it all and your readers will love it too.

Barry Cunningham
Publisher

Sequins, Stars & Spotlights

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To my mother, Marie, who tells the best stories

Chapter 1

I'm sitting in the back row of a mega-tent in Paris, surrounded by fashion students, buyers, editors and movie stars, and watching THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CATWALK SHOW I WILL EVER SEE IN MY LIFE.

It doesn't matter that it's hot in here. It doesn't matter that everyone around me looks so unbelievably chic I might as well have shown up in my pyjamas (actually, the kimono I'm wearing does have a hint of pyjamas about it). It doesn't matter that beside me a fifteen-year-old in a serious afro is jiggling with excitement and making her chair wobble.

It's just good to be here. Dior Haute Couture. John Galliano at his most incredible best. Skirts and jackets that are so huge and theatrical they're almost impossible to wear, but so exquisite you want to spend the next year examining every inch of them. Fabrics that burst with colour and drape like magic. Shoes that are perfect pieces of sculpture in their own right and belong in a museum.

Hair that . . . Well, you get the picture. Galliano didn't exactly skimp on this one. And we've only seen ten outfits so far. We're not even halfway through.

My friend Crow – the girl in the afro beside me – is a designer. She's constantly thinking up new ideas for beautiful clothes, and drawing them, and making them. She's been doing it for years and has a queue of people who want to wear her outfits. But she is a teenager. She does most of it from a workroom in the basement of my house in Kensington, in between GCSE classes and remedial maths. She doesn't have a building full of seamstresses on tap, like they do at Dior. Or access to the best makeup artist, hairdresser, DJ and set designer in the world, like John Galliano does. Actually, she does have access to the best DJ, or one of them. He happens to be my brother. But that's beside the point.

What I mean is that my friend makes clothes in a spare room and here we are, witnessing the absolute height of fashion. This is as bold and creative and luxurious and EXPENSIVE as it can possibly get. It's the toughest ticket to get hold of in the fashion world, and when my brother said he could wangle two of them for us, we practically fell over. Now, sitting in the middle of it all, surrounded by models, lights, photographers, music and fashionistas, I'm still recovering from shock.

The outfits keep on coming. Galliano seems to have hired pretty much every supermodel in the world to wear them. And the skirts are getting bigger and longer. As we

reach the eveningwear section, the trains are long enough to cover half the catwalk. Wear one of those on a red carpet, and you'd have half of Hollywood standing on the silk embroidery. I assume that Dior's clients will have them adapted to make them more realistic, but right now the spectacle has us all sighing with fashion happiness.

Finally, Crow stops bouncing for a minute and grabs my sleeve.

'This is it,' she whispers. 'The bride.'

I'm not sure whether she's been counting the outfits or whether she can just tell that we've reached the show-stopper moment, but she's right. I know this because the music suddenly changes from Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus' to 'Zadok the Priest'. My brother Harry doesn't exactly do chart tunes for major fashion shows. This is his biggest gig as a DJ and he's been practising for weeks. Also, the supermodel who will be wearing the bride's dress happens to be his girlfriend, so he wants to get the music right.

I don't want to give the impression that I spend my life surrounded by supermodels. I really don't. Although Harry does. My brother is, in many ways, a very normal person. His room is slightly pongy and he doesn't wash his tee-shirts enough. His hair looks like he cuts it over the bathroom basin (which he sometimes does). But he has a cool vibe and VERY HIGH expectations in terms of a girlfriend. He likes them long, leggy and gorgeous. And if they happen to be the most beautiful girl in the world

right now, that's fine by him. As Isabelle Carruthers is his second supermodel in a row, it's obviously fine by them, too.

Harry's been going out with Isabelle since the summer and it's now January. Last night she was round at my dad's apartment scoffing pasta and now here she is, on the Dior catwalk, in a gold wedding dress decorated with crystals, pearls and quite possibly diamonds, and looking so stunning that Crow has to use my sleeve to wipe away her tears.

After a final walk-through by all the models, Isabelle is joined on the catwalk by Galliano himself and we all jump up and down and clap so hard that I really think our tiny gilt chairs are going to give way any minute. Everyone's applauding. Very Famous Magazine Editors who are never knowingly seen to smile are suddenly grinning all over their faces.

All the models cluster round. Or as closely as they can with trains the size of a small country. Galliano kisses Isabelle's fingers and comes forward to accept an enormous bouquet of roses. I watch him closely. He is quite simply a fashion god, and has been for years and years. But once upon a time, he was just a student from south London, studying at Central St Martins, hanging around with his mates and dreaming of being a designer one day.

Not every St Martins student gets their graduate collection displayed in the windows of Browns – the chicest boutique in London – and becomes an overnight

sensation, but even after this happened to Galliano, he still struggled. His most famous collection was made in two weeks, out of bits of black silk because that's all he could afford, and he drove it to Paris himself in a friend's Mini and got the best girls to model for him as a favour. This is why I love Galliano so much. Not because of where he is now, but because he came so far and never gave up, and just when you thought it was all going to go horribly pear-shaped, he made something amazing happen.

Do I sound like I could give classes on The History of Galliano? I probably could. Such a pity it's not an A-level subject. Anyway, I'm busy daydreaming about him driving that Mini to Paris all those years ago when I suddenly realise there's a shushing sound in the air and something strange is happening.

Galliano has handed the roses to Isabelle and whispered something to her, before turning to leave the catwalk. However, you can't whisper in front of that many telephoto lenses without somebody working out what you just said. Another whisper is making its way around the tent as everyone struggles to get in on the secret.

'What?' everyone's asking. 'What did he say?'

It takes ages to reach the back row. By the time it gets to us it sounds as though he's just congratulated Isabelle on getting engaged in real life. But that can't be right. Because if Isabelle's engaged, there can be only one person

she can possibly be engaged to, and that person is my big brother. Which would make me the future sister-in-law of the most beautiful girl in the world.

Crow looks at me, confused. She's probably wondering if the future sister-in-law had the faintest idea this was about to happen.

I didn't. I'm in shock. I'm staring at the spot where Isabelle was just standing: a stunning vision in a Dior gold dress, cradling a bouquet of roses and holding hands with a fashion icon. Who, by the way, was dressed in doublet and hose, thigh boots, two silk sashes and a cloak.

I simply have to be dreaming.