

Looks to die from

Make sure you don't dress like a fashion victim

By Rochelle Chadkoff

During a recent all-night campaign to meet a deadline, I took home some Chinese food. Of course, I opened the fortune cookie first. There it was — in plain pink and black — a bit of inspiration: "Simplicity and clarity should be your theme in dress." Ah, Confucius, fashion can indeed be confusing. I debated about whether to pin these wise words on my closet, mirror or bulletin board. Or should I make copies and hand it out when I spot someone with a wayward wardrobe? I could use this sage strip as a Band-Aid to help those who have become fashion victims.

apart from others. And indeed, these new clothes do reveal the inner man.

For a not so long-ago and far-away example of a fashion victim, let's tune in to "I Love Lucy." In most episodes of this TV series, Lucille Ball dressed like a stylish housewife, who occasionally became the victim of fashion. I'm not talking about the time she got a loving cup stuck on her head, or pretended she was going to cut a mink coat into a stole or defied Ricky and bought another new hat. Lucy's haute couture hysteria occurred in Paris. Do you remember when Ricky's band was touring Europe and Lucy was determined to bring home a Paris origi-

signer sees Lucy's outfit and copies it for his own models.

It's amazing that you can think an outfit looks good in the dressing room or bedroom and then hate the way it looks when you go public.



PETER FALK and Emily Lloyd star as a hot-tempered father and daughter who manage to stay one step ahead of both the mob and the law in "Cookie," a new comedy from director Susan Seidelman.

Fashion victim. While this expression may only be used within hearing range of New York City's garment district, the symptoms are known in every town. The first time I heard it, I was in a swank department store and overheard a saleswoman's comment to a colleague: "Dial 911, here comes another fashion victim!" So I looked quickly at the saleswoman diagnosing the case (no fashion plate, she wore an outfit that kept a safe distance from the cutting edge) then to the so-called fashion victim, a walking display for recent fads. OK. But something was wrong, something didn't match or maybe it was just overkill. What looked good in a magazine layout, or even on five separate pages did not look "au courant" put together on this woman on this day.

Perhaps the quintessential fashion victim was the Emperor, in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Emperor's New Clothes." An adult who wants to appear important has a special outfit fabricated to set him

na! The rage that season was not the shirtwaist dress but one with dropped waist and slightly bloused top, a look that Ricky deemed as appealing as a potato sack. To teach Lucy a lesson, he had a tailor turn a burlap sack into the latest style. Ricky also decided that a horse's feed bag would make the perfect hat for his stylish wife. After bravely promenading this "designer original" at an elegant cafe, Lucy quickly learns that she has become a fashion victim. Loyal fans will recall that Lucy gets the last laugh — a de-

In real life, today's touted outfit can quickly become yesterday's *poof*. The cure for this syndrome can be found at chez Chanel. Coco Chanel truly suited herself. Rather than becoming a slave to fashion, she mastered style. This prescription doesn't require buying a Chanel suit, a quilted bag or strands of pearls. Just keep in mind that you want people to remember you, not your clothes. The other night I watched a TV show featuring a singer. She was in fine voice, but she could have refined her outfit. She wore her hair up in a high bun, huge earrings, a shawl draped over a leather jacket and a miniskirt. It was the latest stuff and it was a bit much. Instead of listening to her, I was too busy looking because each detail demanded attention.

Prevention is a fashion victim's best home remedy. Be honest when you look in the mirror. Do you need to add that accessory? Should you be

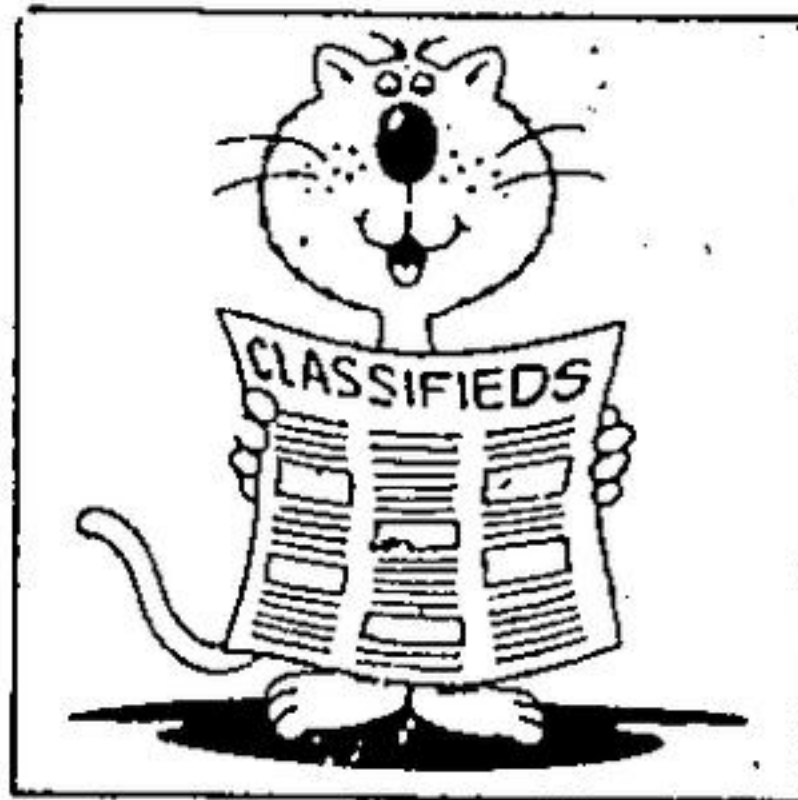
wearing a miniskirt? Are your stretch pants expanded a bit more than Spandex should? At an art show, a friend pointed out a woman "who looked like a python after it swallowed a beach ball." I saw a plump woman in a figure-hugging, flowered bodysuit, which would have been hard for even the model Paulina to carry off. The woman had curled into a chair and looked miserable. I knew that syndrome: It's amazing that you can think an outfit looks so good in the dressing room or your bedroom and then hate the way it looks when you go public.

While fantasy is a large part of fashion, be realistic in your choices. Buy what wears well and what you can wear well. And make sure your outfit suits the situation. Every wedding has a fashion victim. Usually an eccentric aunt waltzes away with the "too dressed up award." The "too undressed award" goes to the new girlfriend of a man who just dumped a bridesmaid. Keep the knock-out dress for intimate dinners or for the Oscars.

Maybe being fashionable requires a critical eye and a good sense of balance. It seems appropriate to give the last word here to the late Diana Vree-

land, who redefined fashion and style for over 50 years as an editor of Harper's Bazaar, Vogue and as co-sultant to the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Vreeland, who was in her late 80s when she died on Aug. 22, once observed that "bad taste has a certain vitality." But this woman, considered to be the high priestess of fashion, also advised, "A new dress doesn't get you anywhere; it's the living in the dress and the sort of life you had lived before and what you will do in it later."

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