

EDITOR: SARAH BROWN

HIGH-HEEL HIATUS

FLAT SANDALS WERE UBIQUITOUS ON SPRING RUNWAYS. LAURA REGENSDORF GETS THE LOWDOWN ON WHAT THEY MEAN FOR OUR WARDROBES—AND OUR FEET.

CHANGE IS IN THE AIR
ARIZONA MUSE WEARS MANOLO BLAHNIK FOR VICTORIA BECKHAM FLATS AND A CHANEL DRESS.

Cocktail hour was winding down at the Met gala when reality struck—painfully. The instruments of my exquisite torture: silver strappy Alexander Wang sandals, nearly five inches tall and on my feet for as many

hours. It was—unwisely, I admit—their maiden voyage, and the seas were rough indeed. All that kept me from careening into Donatella or Kanye at the museum's sculpture-filled Petrie Court was a few deep breaths and a fellow guest's stealthily proffered arm.

Suffering in the name of fashion is a

long-standing tradition. In sixteenth-century Venice, noblewomen braved the streets in platforms called chopines, which stretched up to a Gaga-esque 20 inches; a pair of servants ensured safe passage to the waiting gondola. A witty eighteenth-century couplet made light of the perils faced by

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COLIN DODGSON, FASHION EDITOR; SARA MOONVES, HAIR; TINA OUTEN, MAKEUP; LAUREN PARSONS, PRODUCED BY LAURA HOLMES PRODUCTION; PHOTOGRAPHED IN THE ROYAL SUITE AT THE SAVOY, LONDON. DETAILS, SEE IN THIS ISSUE.

women in well-heeled Paris: “Mount on French heels when you go to a ball. It now is the fashion to totter and fall.” In 1868, the Victorian magazine *The Ladies’ Treasury* declared high-heel boots “universal,” even though one of the downsides was “lameness at an early age.”

Such a grim fate! Fortunately, an antidote appears to be upon us. Céline laid the groundwork with last spring’s controversially clunky mink-tufted slides (“Furkenstocks,” in Internet parlance), spotted on fearlessly It girls from Stella Tennant to Vanessa Traina Snow. (Meret Oppenheim, the Surrealist artist famous for her fur-lined tea set, would surely have approved.) At this spring’s shows, fashion’s refreshing—and at first almost shocking—reign of comfort moved into full swing, with legions of designers suggesting flat-soled silhouettes to go with everything from cropped pants to ankle-length pleated skirts and even evening clothes.

Looking for something sporty that can carry you all the way to dinner? Miuccia Prada decorated her Velcro-strapped athletic sandals with Gobstopper-size gemstones; Consuelo Castiglioni at Marni pumped up the humble flip-flop with a cushioned geisha platform. For hard-edge glamour with a soupçon of orthopedic chic, try Proenza Schouler’s buckled huaraches in woven silver leather. Slipping into something, ahem, more comfortable? At Rochas, Marco Zanini festooned the bedroom slipper with a fluffy spray of floor-dusting, courtesan-worthy ostrich feathers. For day—or night—Marc Jacobs proposed his own (embroidered) version of skateboard-ready Vans.

“It’s a trend: ‘I want healthy feet,’” sums up Park Avenue podiatrist Suzanne Levine, D.P.M. I am sitting in her exam room, seeking help for my recurring big-toe pain. I gesture toward my kitten heels, accusatorily. “But those aren’t your usual shoes, right?” Levine asks, a bit perplexed by the mere two-inch heels. After a visit to the X-ray room (where a poster of a stiletto-shod Marilyn Monroe hangs on the wall), she suggests I have early signs of hallux limitus, or limited range of motion in the big toe. (In addition to heels, a decade in

pointe shoes takes a toll, it turns out.)

So what does the good doctor make of the season’s flats? “Someone has answered my prayers for lovely post-operative shoes,” Levine beams, looking over images of another Marni design from spring (this one a fanciful take on a surgical walking boot) and a sandal at Victoria Beckham (seemingly styled after an Ace bandage). “This is the year for everyone to get their bunions done!” Not that she’s anti-stiletto; after all, there are suede Louboutins and sequined Manolos prominently displayed

she’s wearing Cole Haan wedges with Nike Air cushioning. (For those whose fat pads are severely diminished, Levine has devised Pillows for Your Feet, a procedure whereby she injects the filler Sculptra—commonly used by derms to fill laugh lines—to temporarily plump up the balls of the feet.)

Still, high-heel devotees planning to downshift into flats shouldn’t go about it cold turkey, emphasize both podiatrists—otherwise it can put too much stress on tight muscles and tendons. “It’s almost like getting off a drug,” says Levine. “Start by easing off them. If you’ve been living in five-inch heels, you have to lower the heel height.” (In which case you might begin with Céline’s sensibly heeled slingbacks before slipping into the label’s flat lace-up gladiators.)

In fact, regularly alternating between different types of shoes might be the best thing you could do for your feet. It’s not simply a story of heroes (flats) versus villains (heels). Levine takes care to note that some flats, like slides, lack ankle support, and can eventually cause the toes to curl and grip, while platforms that distort one’s natural gait can affect the knees and hips over time. “If you have a high arch, you won’t do well with a very flat shoe,” she says. A slight heel or wedge actually encourages the arch to lift; it’s also the type of shoe often recommended for people with plantar fasciitis, a common condition in which the sole of the foot is inflamed.

And with spring’s myriad new options—Tabitha Simmons’s pointy snakeskin-tipped loafers for Creatures of the Wind have my vote—I can actually look forward to retiring my heels to the back of the closet. At least for now.

“We all know fashion is cyclical,” says Lisa Small, a curator at the Brooklyn Museum who is organizing an exhibition on high heels slated to open in August. “Almost from their inception they were denigrated and associated with ostentation, frivolity, and health risks—the same litany you hear today.”

Before we hang up, I tell Small I plan to wear a pair of the season’s new flats when I visit the show this summer. To which she replies, “More power to you.” □

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FOOTLOOSE
SASHA PIVOVAROVA IN
JIMMY CHOO POINTY
FLATS, *VOGUE*, 2013.

behind glass in the waiting area. “The key is moderation—and planning your day,” she says, noting that heels of the sky-high variety are best as “limousine shoes” rather than for long walks.

Put enough miles on those killer heels and there are bound to be consequences, as Chicago podiatrist Megan Leahy, D.P.M., tells me. “There have been recent studies about permanent shortening of the calf and Achilles tendon,” she says. Plus, extra elevation redirects the pressure onto the ball of the foot. “Those bones aren’t meant to bear all the weight of walking, and the protective fat pad that we’re born with in the bottom of our feet can start to deteriorate,” Leahy cautions. Which is why