



# ONE TO WATCH

A NOVEL

Kate  
Stayman-  
London

“Relatable,  
incredibly smart . . .  
an extraordinary debut.”  
—New York Times bestselling  
author **JASMINE GUILLORY**

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# PROLOGUE

*Paris, France*

*Ten years ago*

The flea market at Clignancourt was at the far northern edge of the city, a few blocks past the final stop on the number 4 Métro, where the Parisian architecture grew more simple, more mundane—a reminder that not all of the city was steeped in centuries of history and romance. Some of it was just where people went to work and took their kids to school and bought their bread in plain old supermarkets instead of quaint boulangeries.

Bea had come to the flea market in search of gifts for her family—maybe some lace for her mother or vintage records for her brother Duncan—but she also hoped she might find some etchings for herself, or, even better, some children's books with hand-tipped illustrations to read with her stepfather to her new baby nephew. Her friends in her study-abroad program had raved about their flea-market finds, so Bea thought it was worth a trip, even if there was no chance of buying chic vintage clothes like the ones they had modeled for her. It was

hard enough for Bea to shop in America, let alone here in Paris, where it was almost unthinkable to see a woman on the street who couldn't be described as "bird-boned."

After years of practice, Bea thought she'd mastered the art of being large and invisible at the same time—the dark, baggy clothes, the quiet manner, the downward gaze. When she arrived as a freshman at UCLA and found herself surrounded by lithe, toned Californians, she was afraid she'd stand out like a bulbous blemish on a glassy complexion, but the L.A. culture of self-obsession made it easier than she expected to slip by unseen.

In Paris, though, she felt eyes everywhere she went. The city was so beautiful, Bea's favorite place she'd ever been—yet she couldn't shake the feeling that the entire population was noticing her, judging her, preferring, silently, that she would leave. Waiters and booksellers in cramped cafés and shops, narrow aisles stuffed with tables and wares, Bea stepping carefully sideways to avoid toppling someone else's plate of pain au chocolat, salivating at the sound of those crunchy, buttery pastries that waiflike Parisians relished each morning without a second thought. Whenever Bea stepped into a patisserie to order something for herself, there were ripples of sideward glances, even occasional bald stares, the accusation always implied: *It's your own fault you look like this.*

It was easier when she got farther out from the center of the city, into the diverse neighborhoods by the canal where the streets were wider and the pace was slower, where groups of students laughed and drank wine from paper cups on big concrete blocks by the water. It was similar at Clignancourt, Bea thought as she made her way down the few blocks from the Métro to the flea market while people hurried by, too focused on their own lives to pause to sneer at her.

Bea couldn't tell what the flea market was like from the outside—for a solid block she could see only the back walls of the stalls, dark slabs of plywood and plasterboard, and she started to feel skeptical that this market could possibly be as extraordinary as her friends had insisted. But once she found the entrance, she understood: It was like stepping through Alice's looking glass into an entirely other place where everything was wonderful and strange.

The market was a maze, with pathways that cut at haphazard diagonals—whichever way Bea turned, she never seemed to pass the same stalls twice, each new alley bringing untold bins of brass knobs and walls of antique oil paintings and spools of silken ribbon. The stalls themselves didn't feel makeshift—some were covered in ivy or string lights, others had stucco walls and wooden shelves piled high with leather-bound books so dusty Bea imagined they'd been there for decades. Wandering the market's aisles, Bea felt a sense of belonging she'd never experienced anywhere else in Paris. Or maybe, she considered, it was just that everything there was so lovely and bizarre that nothing and no one could be out of place.

Before Bea realized how much time had passed, the sun was starting to set, so she made her way toward the edge of the market as proprietors packed up their stalls. Bea hadn't stopped by a single clothing purveyor, but near the market's exit, one stall caught her eye: It was filled exclusively with capes—racks and racks of heavy brocades and soft furs and embroidered silks.

Bea cast the stall a longing glance, but it wasn't any use. She was sure that no cape in the place was big enough to cover her body, that instead of cocooning her in luxury, the capes would simply hang off her back like a child playing dress-up

with a beach towel fastened at the neck. But the shopkeeper, a reedy, androgynous Frenchwoman in her sixties in oversized black glasses, saw Bea looking and took a step toward her.

“*Vous désirez?*” she asked with a quick flick of her eyebrow; her voice was deep and throaty.

“*Non,*” Bea apologized in her muddy accent. “*Merci.*”

“Ah, American.” She switched to English immediately—Parisians always did. “What is your name?”

“Beatrice”—Bea pronounced it the French way, *Bay-ah-treeez*—“but everyone calls me Bea.”

“*Enchantée,* Bea. I am Jeanne.” Jeanne took her hand and clasped it firmly, and Bea immediately warmed to her; she smelled like spiced wine. “Tell me, Bea, who is the woman whose style you most admire?”

Bea’s mind went immediately to the black-and-white movies she’d spent hours watching as a kid on basic cable in her family’s rec room. She’d taken a couple of film classes at UCLA, and she was thrilled to discover that Paris had dozens of single-screen cinemas with little paper tickets and red velvet seats that showed classic American movies (with French subtitles, of course) every night of the week. Bea frequented these theaters whenever she had a free evening, delighting in the escape of elegant starlets and breakneck banter. As she considered Jeanne’s question, she thought of the different actresses she revered: She could never be twee like Audrey Hepburn, nor statuesque like Katharine. In her wildest fantasies, she imagined herself more like a femme fatale of film noir—a mixture of soft and hard, of danger and intense vulnerability. In Bea’s opinion, there was one actress whose style embodied that ideal more than any other, who effortlessly combined sensual laces and silks with angular sunglasses and sharp-shouldered blazers.

“Maybe this is silly”—Bea ducked her head—“but I think I would choose Barbara Stanwyck?”

Jeanne smiled knowingly, her whole face creasing in fond crinkles. “*D’accord—un moment.*”

She disappeared among the racks, a few moments of rustling and the jangle of sliding hangers before she emerged with a floor-length cape fashioned in plush velvet, a dark forest green. It was hooded, lined with silk, and clasped at the neck with a silver brooch fashioned to look like lilies of the valley, with clusters of tiny freshwater pearls where the flowers would be.

“Oh,” Bea breathed as Jeanne draped the cape over her shoulders, the fabric gently cascading.

Jeanne led her to a floor-length mirror, smoky with age, and Bea felt a sharp twist in her chest—it was like looking at a glamorous stranger. Bea never had a sweet-sixteen dress, never went to prom, convinced her parents to let her wear jeans to graduation (since, she argued, she’d be covered up by her cap and gown anyway, tentlike and maroon), and reluctantly shoved herself into a series of appalling bridesmaids’ dresses for her brothers’ weddings. In her entire life, no garment Bea had put on her body had ever made her feel like this.

“How much is it?” she heard herself asking, her voice choked and small.

“It is two hundred,” Jeanne offered, but she paused when she saw the look of panic cross Bea’s face.

“How much do you have?” she asked kindly.

Bea opened her wallet—she had forty euros and change, which was also her money to eat for the next week. She’d already spent too much at the flea market, and the credit card from her parents was only for emergencies. Two hundred euros was an unthinkable sum.



"I'm so sorry," Bea whispered, and reached to take off the cape, but Jeanne put a hand on her shoulder.

"Perhaps," she said, "there can be an arrangement."

Bea didn't understand what she meant. "Arrangement?"

"I will make you a gift of this cape, and in return, you will wear it all over Paris, and you will tell everyone you meet about my shop, yes?"

"What? No, I couldn't possibly accept—"

"*Bien sûr*, of course you can." Jeanne deftly snatched the cape from Bea's shoulders and removed its handwritten tag.

"You would like a bag, or you will wear it now?"

Bea's face flushed, and she looked down.

"I don't understand why you're doing this," she mumbled.

Jeanne tenderly placed the cape around Bea's shoulders.

"The way you dress, the way you hang your head? I think perhaps you are hiding," she said quietly. "But in this cape?"

Bea looked up to meet her eye. "In this cape, what?"

Jeanne's lips curled at the corners, the barest hint of a grin.

"You will be someone who everyone must see."



# AGREEMENT

*Los Angeles, California*

## ONE TO WATCH: FASHION BLOGGER BEA SCHUMACHER

*by Toni Santo, TheCut.com*

The Internet was ablaze this week when pop star Trish Kelly took to Twitter to complain that multiple designers refused to dress her for the Grammys—because she’s a size 8! Bea Schumacher is all too familiar with this conundrum: With more than half a million Instagram followers and a blog (OMBea.com, a play on OMG) that logs millions of visitors each month, Bea is one of today’s most popular fashion bloggers—but because she’s plus-size, almost no high-end designers make clothes that fit her.

For this week’s edition of “One to Watch,” we caught up with Schumacher to chat about her thriving career, enviable travel schedule, and hottest tips for rocking a red carpet, no matter your size:

**TS:** How did you get started as a fashion blogger? Have you always loved fashion?

**Bea:** *(laughs)* God, no. When I was in high school, I wore ex-



clusively baggy black pants and T-shirts and sweaters. I didn't want to stand out; I didn't even want anyone to look at me.

**TS:** When did that change?

**Bea:** Junior year in college, I spent a semester abroad in Paris—that's where my fashion addiction began. I was totally broke at the time, I spent the semester digging through vintage shops looking for treasures. I found so many great things that my friends encouraged me to blog about them, a little fashion travel diary. My best friend in my program was a photography major, and she took pictures of me in flowing dresses and floppy hats drinking wine by the Seine. I didn't know the first thing about launching a website, so I just made a preformatted blog on Tumblr—that was the first iteration of OMBea. At first, I just posted pictures, but then I started writing more about my life and the challenges of searching for great clothes as a plus-size woman; it became a really important outlet for me, particularly after I moved back to Los Angeles with its totally monolithic beauty standards.

**TS:** Was the blog an overnight sensation?

**Bea:** Hardly! In the early days, it was really only for people I knew. After college, I went to work at a Hollywood agency; I thought maybe I would be a stylist for movies and TV shows one day, and it seemed like a good way to learn the ropes of the industry. I was an assistant there, and one of my boss's clients was a really famous actress who always loved my outfits. We got to talking about my blog, and she tweeted about it—that's when things really blew up. I got tons of new followers, and I started being included in magazine roundups of who to follow, things like that. Once my reader numbers started getting big, I was able to pound the pavement to find sponsors and advertisers.

**TS:** All while you were working a full-time job?

**Bea:** Yeah, it was pretty nuts. But after a year of hard work, it really paid off: I was able to quit my assistant job and become a full-time blogger, and I've never looked back. It's been more fun than I could have dreamed.

**TS:** Tell us more! What's a typical day like in the life of Bea Schumacher?

**Bea:** It's always different—that's one of the things I love about my job. I might be meeting with a plus-size brand about a potential collaboration, or heading off to a fashion party in London or New York, or doing a photo shoot in my own backyard to show readers how I'm planning to style new looks for summer.

**TS:** But you don't just write about clothes—you also write about the experience of being a plus-size person who loves fashion.

**Bea:** I think it would be dishonest not to. It's only very recently that a lot of companies have begun to make clothes that fit me—and especially when it comes to high-end designers, many brands that do claim to offer “plus-size” clothes only go up to a size 16! Which I find ridiculous, because size 16 is essentially *average* for women in America. Within the plus-size community, I identify as “medium fat,” so I still have a lot of privilege when it comes to finding clothing options. It's much harder for women just a few sizes larger than I am, which is infuriating, not to mention senseless from a business perspective. I want to shake designers and say, *Hey, do you guys hate fat women so much that you're willing to cut out two-thirds of your potential customers? Do you really see our bodies as so unworthy of wearing your clothes?* But the hard truth is that a lot of people in the fashion world would really prefer that I weren't in it.