

Book Club Kit



a novel



"Smart, sensitive,
and incredibly
satisfying....
Count me as
Jane L. Rosen's
biggest fan."
—Elin Hilderbrand

Shoe Story



JANE L. ROSEN

author of Nine Women, One Dress and Eliza Starts a Rumor



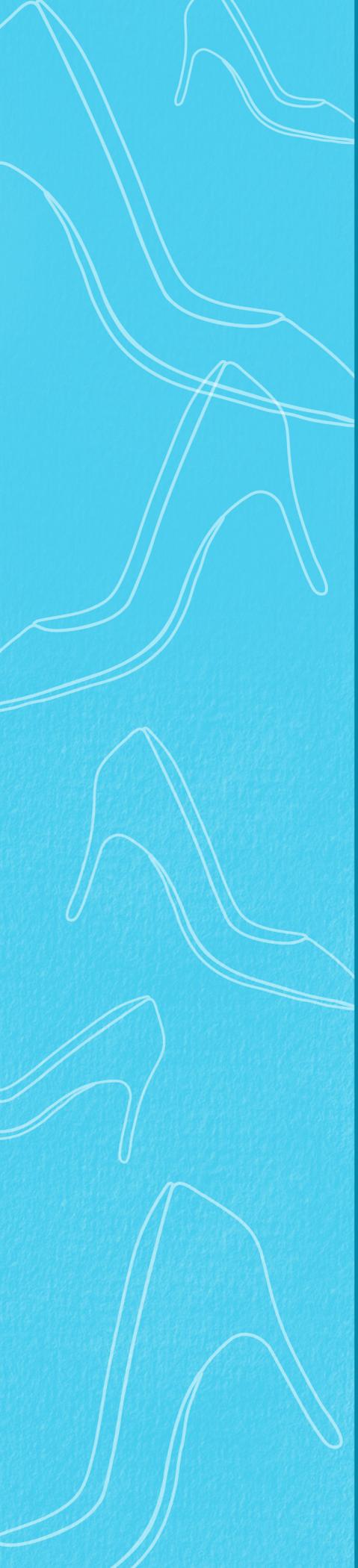
Reader's Guide

People often ask if there is a lot of “me” in my characters and until now the answer has really been, no. Of course there is always some transference between the author and their protagonist, but while Esme and my life stories are very different, a lot of her personality and experiences can be traced right back to me. While I grew up on Long Island and spent a lot of time in Manhattan, it was far different from actually living there. That young girl eating sushi in the village and realizing that she could actually live in Manhattan was all me. I also felt a lot of the same awe and excitement that Esme did when moving into my first NYC apartment a few weeks after college graduation. It was that fake-it-til-you-make-it, anything-is-possible time in life, and I loved it.

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The camp boyfriend dumping Esme before Thanksgiving—all me. Her first time quietly exiting a frat house just to be outed through the window—me. The quote at the start of the book—from the NYC cab driver—precipitated by me.

As a writer and a general yenta, as Sy would say, I have always had an affinity for talking to taxi drivers. When I'm nervous, I tend to spill my current anxieties as if the cabbie has an advanced degree in psychology or what-not (it often feels like they do!). Between COVID and the advent of Uber, taxi confessions feel like a lost practice, but after a



lifetime in the backseat of NYC cabs I have quite the collection of tales. This time, I was late for a meeting at Little, Brown and my driver was an older man with a French accent from Senegal.

“Is traffic very bad?” I asked. “I’m late for an interview.” It wasn’t really an interview, but it felt like one. I was meeting the editor of the Gossip Girl series regarding a young adult book I was working on. So, it felt like someone deciding whether or not they would work with me, ergo, an interview –ergo, my nervousness.

“It’s not so bad,” he responded.

“Ok good. I’m nervous—and my feet hurt already.”

I was wearing my black patent Lanvin Mary Jane heels (Chapter 5) and they pinched at the instep. Anyone who owns them is probably well aware of my sacrifice. And that’s when he shot back with,

“I hope you’re not wearing those shoes with the red bottoms, they won’t think you’re hungry enough!” I laughed at his spot-on advice and his surprising knowledge of designer shoes. But I wasn’t really that surprised. I knew that the narrative of the red-bottomed shoe ran deep.

There was a famous ad campaign for the furrier Blackglama back in the 70’s with the slogan “What Becomes a Legend Most?” It featured a host of feminine icons including Sophia Loren, Diahann Carroll, Julie Andrews, Judy, Liza and even Barbra—all wrapped in mink. If that ad campaign had been created a decade later I have no doubt we would have all been looking down at their feet.

By the nineties it was all about the shoes.

When bringing up my now-grown daughters on the Upper East Side, like many moms, my days were bookended by school drop off and pick-up. In between I would fit in exercising (usually yoga



I had come down with designer shoe fever

or walking the reservoir with a friend.) writing (screenplays at the time), household stuff, and errands. For the errands I wouldn't stray far from a ten-block radius, Madison Avenue between 86th street and 96th street, familiarly known as Carnegie Hill. One day, while conquering my to-do list, I met a lonely old man. I have no memory of how we met, but after we did it was as if he was always there when I left the house. His wife had recently died, and his sons lived in other cities, so he liked to be outside, amongst the living. His palpable loneliness and my tendency to feel responsible for the world collided and soon he was accompanying me on nearly all my errands.

At the time, I had come down with designer shoe fever—albeit a mild case when compared to my Upper East Side neighbors'—and had treated myself to a few choice pairs. My foray began with black satin Louboutin sling-backs whose bottoms I happily scuffed on the dance floor of every black-tie event I was invited to, a pair of denim Gucci loafers which I am still annoyed that I gave away, and a pair of Prada black ballet flats with mesh inserts and a rubber bottom. The Prada flats were my absolute favorites—I lived in them, until one day when I made the mistake of kicking them off at a garden party, where they met a new puppy and an early demise. I would say I was devastated, but I don't want you to find me shallow . . . let's just say I was very upset.

But, just like Sy, my new-old friend had the answer. He took me over to a little shop called Berger's Shoe Repair that I had never even noticed, right down the block. Like many of the old narrow storefronts on Madison, it's not there anymore. Mrs. Berger assured me she would make them as good as new. And she did. It was a real treat going to Berger's, and just like the cobbler in *A Shoe Story*, she was filled with unsolicited, but welcome advice on a host



of non-shoe related subjects. I used any excuse to visit, and my shoes benefitted immensely—they never looked better.

So, as you can see, the famous words of Nora Ephron’s mother, “Everything is copy,” really ring true on the pages of *A Shoe Story*. I hope you enjoyed the read and that we can get together in person or on-line and chat about it one day soon. And please, don’t forget to wear your favorite shoes. I will be wearing mine!

—Jane

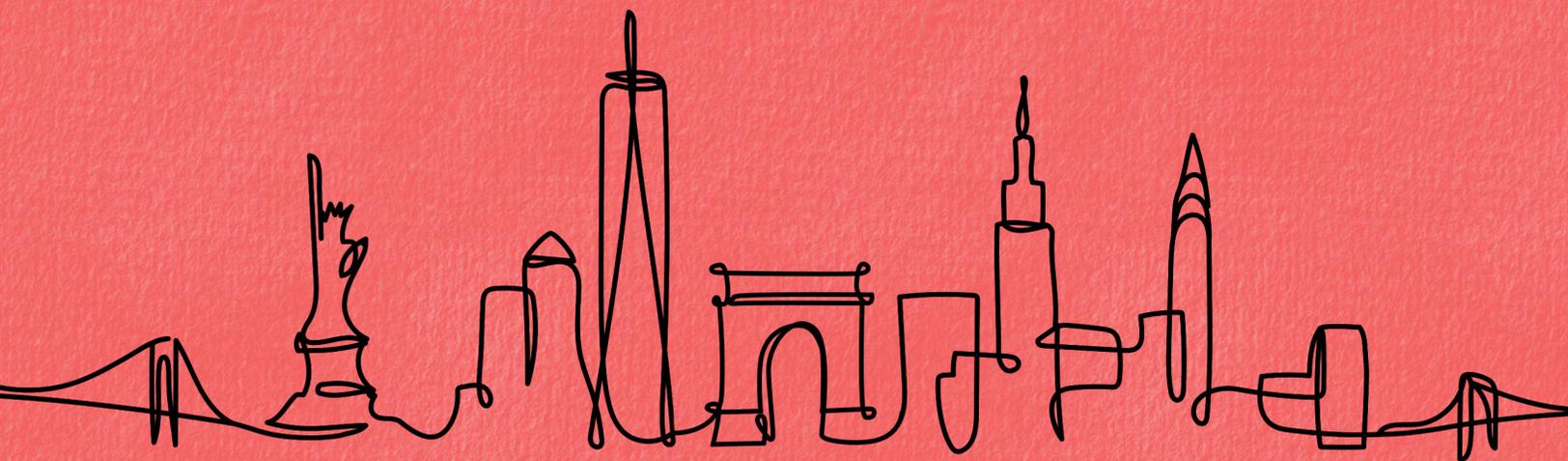
P.S. There are many organizations nationwide that facilitate partnering with older adults for companionship and to combat loneliness. My family and I volunteered for an organization called Dorot in NYC for many years and always found it be a beautiful and rewarding experience for all. If you are interested in making a friend like Sy check out dorotusa.org, NCOA.org, VOA.org. or your just google “volunteer to visit local elderly near me”. I promise you will be glad you did.

Discussion Questions

1. Esme makes a choice to care for her dad instead of following her dreams. Have you ever made a choice that changed the course of your life? Do you think it was the right choice?
2. Liam was Esme's first love and Lena was Sy's. All four admitted that they never really stopped loving the other. Can you pinpoint your first real love? Do you still think about them?
3. Did you have a favorite between Zach and Liam? Who would you have chosen? Did you think Esme would end up with Zach or Liam or on her own?
4. There is a lot of talk in the book about matching thought bubbles. Do you think it's better to think similarly or differently than a partner?
5. Some people spend a lot of time thinking about the past and what could have been while others never look back. Which camp are you in and how does it effect your life?



6. When reading a book with multiple stories many prefer reading one over the other. Whose story were you more excited to see on the page, Esme's or Sy's? And how come?
7. Zach and Liam look at the world and NYC quite differently. Whose NYC would you fit into? Why would you choose it?
8. We all face regrets when it comes to love. Have you ever lost a love and then encountered them again? If not, do you wish you had? What does that conversation look like to you?
9. What did your 21 year old self think is important that you don't think is important now?
10. The shoes in this book are a metaphor for trying on new lives. What life would you try on for size if you could?
11. What was your guiltiest shoe purchase? How did those shoes make you feel?
12. Do you remember your first special pair of shoes?



Yiddish Glossary

I worked for a coat designer in Manhattan's garment center after graduating college. The pattern maker had survived the Holocaust by joining a group of freedom fighters and living in the woods. I asked him to teach me a new Yiddish word every week. So I learned a *bisl*. Here are some that I included in *A Shoe Story*—so maybe you will learn a *bisl* too!

A bisl

A little bit

Yenta

A gossip or busy-body

Shidduch

An arranged date with the hope of finding a spouse

Schmear

A generous slathering of cream cheese on a bagel

Oy Vey

Short for *oy veys mir*, it is used to express dismay or worry

Shadchan

A matchmaker

Schmoozing

Excessive chatting

Emmes

Truth, but with a "would I lie to you?" intonation

Shayna Punim

Shayna is pretty, punim is face.
Or, if you were lucky, what your
bubbie called you!

Bubbe

Grandma

Zei gezunt

Be healthy, be well. Sometimes
said when someone sneezes (like
gezundheit) when saying goodbye,
and sometimes for a hard stop to
a long phone call

Tsuris

Troubles, worries, grief

Shtetl

A small Jewish town in Eastern or
Central Europe, pre World War II

Don't Hock my chinick

This literally means "don't bang
my tea kettle." Or when someone
is obsessively bothering you about
something—to the point where
they are giving you a headache

Meshugana

Crazy

Maven

An expert on anything

Kvelling

Bursting with pride

Bashert

Soul mate

