

I was given only a location, a simple street address for what was described as an “exclusive dinner party” in the valley. Me, making a deliberate effort to get out more decided that this was a no-brainer, an event I couldn’t turn down.

I had dedicated the entire day to getting ready: nails, hair, full body exfoliation, eating my fruit and drinking my water. The word of the week was “intention”. In the days leading up, my diet consisted only of whole, clean foods - I wanted to fit comfortably and confidently into my little red dress, sans shapewear.

Before embarking on my journey of errands, I stood in front of the mirror, wearing only a sports bra and pyjama shorts, “stomach on flat-flaaat”, I proudly rap-whispered to myself. I then threw on a t-shirt and a pair of sweats before making my way over to the local coffee shop. I ordered a vanilla cold brew with milk. The barista stopped to clarify if I wanted “cow’s milk”, I sensed an undertone of reconnaissance, so I opted for oat milk against my better judgment. It tasted awful. I popped my airpods back in and continued to sip as I walked to the nail salon.

It took just under an hour and a half for my mani/pedi. French tips on the toes and hands. Short, square, chefs kiss, they get it right every time. Once I stepped into my apartment, I lit a candle and turned on some music, setting a vibe. It was time to tackle the hair: wash, deep condition, steam, blowdry, straighten, and style.

3 hours later...

I sat on the couch, curls pinned up. One thing led to another, and I fell asleep. What can I say? The past few weeks had been exhausting. I woke up from my slumber an hour before the party was set to begin. There are few things I hate more than being late. At that moment, it was either makeup or shower, one of them had to go. It was the shower. So I rushed over to my sink, wet a rag with warm water and hit all of the hot spots in a matter of seconds.

As far as makeup was concerned, I opted for simple but clean. The strip lashes took longer than they should have. I quickly slipped on my dress, awkwardly reached behind my back for the zipper, grabbed my bag, lip gloss, gum, keys, and my "driving crocs" before rushing out of the door. According to Google maps, it would take about an hour to arrive, which meant I was still on decent timing. I put on the “True Canadian Crime” podcast and took a deep sigh of relief, everything was going to be fine.

As I approached the address, I was impressed. A beautiful home with adequate outdoor lighting, a roundabout, and hired help to valet the cars. I graciously pulled up, and the valet opened my door: chivalry. I told him that I needed just a minute to change out of my driving shoes, and it was at that moment that I realized, “shit, I forgot my heels”.

I stared down at my crocs, disappointed in myself for fumbling my entire outfit. I couldn’t *not* go inside. I hadn’t come this far, just to come this far. So, I walked through the double doors with

my head held high. Picture it: a fitted red dress, beat face, buss down middle part, elongated waves spiraling down my back, skin glistening, and navy blue crocs (in sport mode).

I gently tucked my hair behind my ear, took a deep breath and started inside. There were tons of people, already congregated in small groups, engaged in conversation and inside jokes. I fit in, but at the same time, I didn't. There wasn't a familiar face in sight, so I posted up in a corner near the kitchen, trying my best not to use my phone as a distraction. A wait staff then approached me, offering heure d'oeuvres, "don't mind if I do", I thankfully said, reaching for two. After she walked away, I took a bite and instantly spat that shit back into the napkin. I caught the woman to my left looking me up and down before rolling her eyes and walking away. Talk about a bad first impression.

Suddenly, I had a purpose: find a garbage can. I took a step forward, heard a loud bang, and felt warm liquid splatter all over the bottom of my legs. Looking down, all I saw was red. You were on the floor... with a pot of chili, feverishly attempting to clean the mess you had made. Oddly, you weren't at all embarrassed. I crouched down to help shovel the chili back into the pot. Locking eyes, we both jokingly referenced the episode of "The Office" where Kevin spills chili.

You apologized for making a mess of my crocs, took my hand and led me into the kitchen to get cleaned up. The way navigated the space with ease, raised a few questions.

"Do you work here", I asked

"No, it's my place. This event is part of my rebrand as a celebrity chef. Not to be confused with a chef that cooks for celebrities".

I nodded my head as you reached for a towel to wipe the chili from my legs. I could tell that you wanted to say something. You complimented my quads. I thanked you and returned the gesture, referencing your lips.

"Too bad nobody will get to taste the chili", I said softly.

"Well, that doesn't have to be true", you responded, looking deep into my eyes, then down at my legs. I bit the side of my bottom lip. You sat me up on the countertop, took a beat, and asked if you could taste.