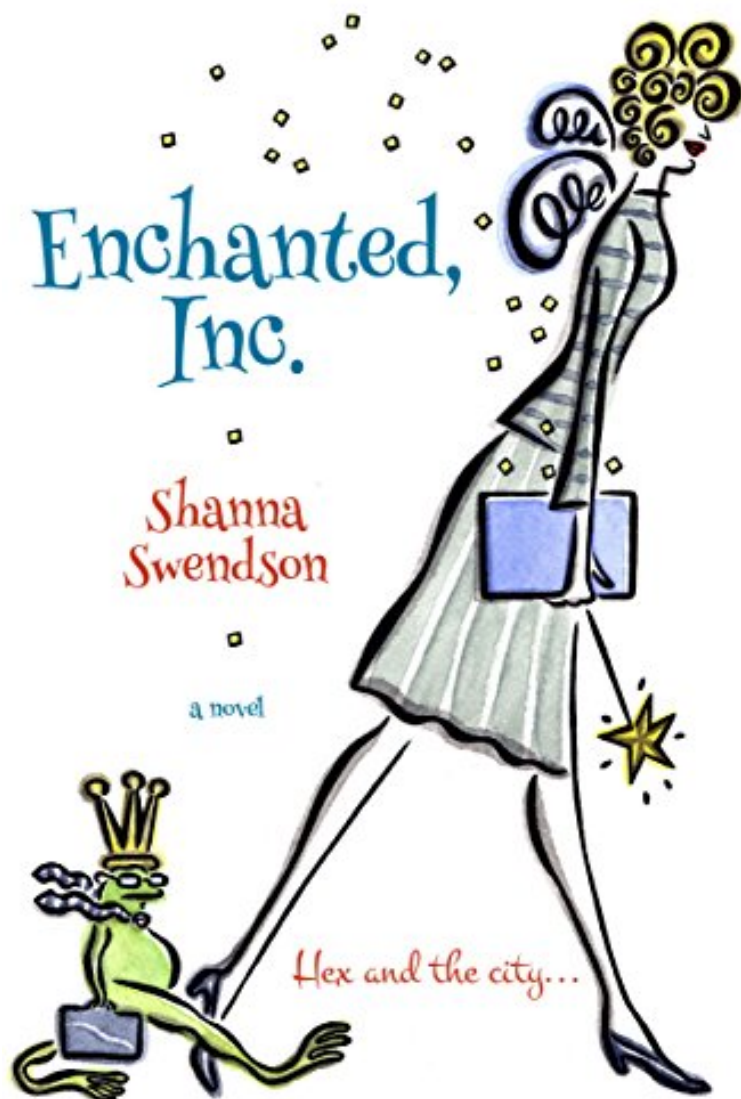


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Enchanted, Inc. (English Edition)



Par Shanna Swendson

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIt was an offer she couldn't believe...Small town native Katie Chandler is ready to dump New York City, her horrid boss, and awful job to head back home to Texas. Before she can make this fateful decision, she receives a mysterious job offer from a company called Magic, Spells, and Illusions, Inc.

She's always thought of herself as ordinary, but according to people claiming to be wizards, she is so ordinary that she's extraordinary -- she is one of the rare people so utterly without magic as to be immune to it. And therefore perfect to be MSI Inc.'s secret weapon. Now she's finding her way in a magical world where the boss can be a real ogre and kissing frogs is one way to get a date. The cutest guy in the company is powerful enough to blow up the city with a wave of his hand, but he can't talk to Katie without blushing furiously. Suddenly New York is her kind of city! Now Katie's biggest challenge may be dragging this

ancient company into the twenty-first century in time to face competition from an evil mastermind producing dangerous spells. Extrait I always heard that New York City was weird, but I had no idea just how weird until I got here. Before I left Texas to move here, my family tried to talk me out of it, telling me all sorts of urban legends about the strange and horrible things that happened in the big bad city. Even my college friends who'd been living in New York for a while told me stories about the weird and wonderful things they'd seen that didn't cause the natives to so much as blink. My friends joked that an alien from outer space could walk down Broadway without anyone looking twice. I used to think they were exaggerating. But now, after having survived a year in the city, I still saw things every day that shocked and amazed me but didn't cause anyone else to so much as raise an eyebrow. Nearly naked street performers, people doing tap-dance routines on the sidewalk, and full-scale film productions complete with celebrities weren't worth a second glance to the locals, while I couldn't help but gawk. It made me feel like such a hick, no matter how hard I tried to act sophisticated. Take this morning, for instance. The girl ahead of me on the sidewalk was wearing wing-those strap-on fairy wings people wear as part of a Halloween costume. Halloween was more than a month away, and while I couldn't afford designer fashions, I read enough fashion magazines to know that fairy wings were not a current fashion statement. She must be some neobohebian trendsetter from NYU, I thought, or maybe in the costume design program. She'd done a really good job on the wings because the straps were invisible, making it look like she had real wings. They even fluttered slightly, but that was probably just the wind currents from walking. I forced my attention away from Miss Airy Fairy to check my watch, then groaned. There was no way I'd make it to work on time if I walked, and my boss was usually lying in wait for me on Monday mornings, so I didn't dare come in even a minute late. I'd have to take the subway to work, even though it would take a precious two dollars off my MetroCard. I'd make up for it by walking home, I promised myself. When I reached the Union Square station, I was surprised to see Miss Airy Fairy head down into the subway ahead of me instead of continuing toward the university. People who work downtown tend not to dress like that for work. As I followed her down the stairs, I noticed that she wore what must have been platform shoes with Lucite soles, which gave her the appearance of floating a couple of inches off the ground. She moved remarkably gracefully for someone wearing what had to be pretty clunky shoes. As usual, no one on the platform gave her a second glance. I'd been here a year, and I'd yet to exchange one of those knowing only in New York glances with anyone. How could everyone be so jaded? Surely there were people around who were newer to the city than I was, and then there were the tourists, who were supposed to stare at everything. But then I noticed a guy looking at Miss Airy Fairy. He didn't seem shocked or surprised, though. Instead, he smiled at her like he knew her. That in and of itself was odd because he didn't seem the type to spend his weekends wearing a cape and playing Middle Earth in Central Park. He looked like a typical Wall Street type, wearing a well-tailored dark suit and carrying a briefcase the kind of Mr. Right that just about every career girl in New York hopes to snag. I'd guess he was a few years older than I was, and he was quite good-looking, even if he was a little shorter than average. Mr. Right (if he wasn't mine, he had to be somebody's) glanced at his watch, then up the tunnel, like he was looking for the next train. He muttered something under his breath probably something like Where is that train? or I'm going to be late. He twitched his wrist, and next thing I knew, I heard the rumble that signaled an approaching train. If I didn't know better, I would have thought he summoned it. I wasn't complaining because I needed the train myself. The waiting passengers shoved their way onto the train, then the conductor's voice came over the PA system, saying, Attention passengers. Due to a one-time situation, this Brooklyn-bound N train will stop next at City Hall. If you need stops prior to this, please exit the train here and board an R train or another N train. Thank you. There was a chorus of mutters and groans as passengers poured out of the train. I took a now-empty seat and looked at my watch. At this rate I'd be early to work. This wasn't a bad way to start the week. Mr. Right was still on board, as was Miss Airy Fairy. Mr. Right exchanged a grin with the guy sitting next to me. I turned to look at that guy and then wondered if there was a polite way I could move to another seat without it being obvious that I was avoiding him. He looked like the kind of guy who spends his lifetime defending against sexual harassment charges, the kind who thinks of himself as so irresistible that he can't imagine his advances being unwanted. Unfortunately, that type is never as attractive as he'd like to think. This one wasn't exactly hideous. With a little effort and the right person-ality he might not have been so bad. Unfortunately, he made no effort at all, so that his hair was poorly styled and greasy, while his skin would have made my mother, the Mary Kay representative, faint in horror. But he acted like he thought every woman on that train should be drooling over him, which made him even more unattractive to me. The funny thing was, all the women on the train were looking at him over the tops of their books and newspapers like

they thought Pierce Brosnan had joined us on the subway car, and he grinned at them like he was totally used to that kind of attention. Maybe they could tell he was particularly well-endowed. Or maybe he was a famous rock star I didnt recognize. I wasnt hip enough to know what most rock stars looked like. He had the kind of smug slickness youd expect from a famous rock star who didnt have to do anything to make women fall at his feet. As for me, Id rather look at Mr. Right, who was getting his fair share of admiring glances but who looked shy about it, not like he expected the attention. That made him infinitely cuter in my book. On your way to work? Slick asked. It wasnt among the top five pickup lines Id ever heard. Not that I heard a lot of them. Actually, I just like being crammed like sardines in an underground tin can to head to lower Manhattan in the morning, I said. He stretched his arm out along the back of the seat, like he was angling to put his arm around me. Im from a part of the world that still has drive-in movies, so I recognized the move and edged away as subtly as I could. Youre obviously not a native New Yorker, he said, oozing charm like my dads old tractor oozes oil. I love your accent. Little did he know, but he wasnt paying me a compliment. As effective as the steel magnolia routine could be when I was asking for something or trying to get my way, it was a liability at work, where everyone seemed to think my Texas drawl meant I was dumber and less educated than they were. Id been trying to lose my accent, but it kept slipping out when I was being particularly sarcastic. I guess I inwardly thought the drawl took the sting out of whatever ugly thing Id just said. In this case, it seemed to have worked, just when I didnt want it to. I wished Id brought a book to bury my face in, but Id planned to walk to and from work when I left the apartment, so I hadnt brought anything to read. In fact, the only things in my oh-so- professional-looking briefcase were my sack lunch and my dressier shoes for the office. Instead, I just gave Slick a glare and turned my attention to Mr. Right. Maybe hed have a Galahad complex and feel compelled to rescue me from the subway stalker. Then I noticed that Slick was looking at Mr. Right as well, and suddenly his face was totally serious. Mr. Right, also serious, nodded his head slightly. Miss Airy Fairy was also staring at me. Now I couldnt help but wonder if this was a conspiracy. Were they going to rob me or try to scam me? Goodness knows, I might as well have been wearing a big yellow button saying Hick from Out of Town! Please Take Advantage of Me! Just then the door between cars opened and a giant chicken entered our car. To be more precise, it was a bored-looking man in a chicken suit and how sad was it that he was more bored than embarrassed to be wearing that costume in public? I added to my mental list of jobs that were worse than mine. He shook a little plastic box in his left hand, and clucking sounds came out of it. I felt a pang of homesickness, for I used to have one like it on my desk back in Texas. I wouldnt dare put it on my desk here. It would only reinforce the hick stereotype. At the clucking sound, everyone looked up, reacted with mild amusement, then immediately went back to reading or avoiding eye contact. The chicken man then tried to hand flyers to everyone in the car. I hadnt yet learned the technique for avoiding flyers that most New Yorkers seem to have honed, so I took one from him. A new fried-chicken restaurant was opening, which gave me another moment of homesickness as I remembered family Sunday dinners. I tucked the flyer into my briefcase. This incident didnt do much toward helping me understand New Yorkers. Fairy wings on the subway werent worth noticing, but a guy in a chicken suit got a slight reaction. Both outfits involved wings. Why was one humdrum while the other was at least a little bit amusing? I noticed that Mr. Right had also taken a flyer. He was smiling and staring at the chicken man, which made me like him even more. Or, it would have if he didnt seem to be in cahoots with the other two, who were still looking at me funny. I forgot about the giant chicken as I remembered why I felt ill at ease. The train screeched its way to a stop. City Hall, the conductor said. I wondered if I should get off now and get away from these people. The walk from there to my office would make me late for work, but better late than dead or robbed. But before I could get to my feet, I noticed that the three weirdos were congregating around the door. I relaxed with a sigh. They were all getting off here, which meant I was being paranoid about them being out to get me. I still had too many New York scare stories in my head from my family, and they crept to the surface at awkward moments, even though Id never been mugged or even seen a mugging in my whole time in New York. Besides, I had plenty to worry about without concocting subway conspiracy theories. It wasnt like this mornings events were all that extraordinary in my life. Weird stuff like this always happened to me, or at least, it had ever since I moved to New York. I was always seeing things that shouldnt be there, like people in fairy wings or pointed ears, people who appeared to pop in and out of existence, and things appearing in strange places. I knew it was likely the result of an overactive imagination and my familys scare stories about New York, but it was almost enough to worry me. I figured if I still noticed strange things that no one else seemed to find odd after another six months in the city, I might have to talk to someone about it. In the meantime, I had to get to work

and survive the day. Fortunately, due to the trains timely arrival and the unexpected express nature of the trip, I was ahead of schedule. To add to my run of good luck, the up escalator at the Whitehall station was actually working. I emerged topside among the soulless modern glass skyscrapers, went into the lobby of my building, and paused to change into my work shoes. Then I put on my employee ID badge, got cleared by the lobby security guard, and headed for the elevator bank that served my floor. I was seven minutes early when I stepped off the elevator into our lobby, and I was five minutes early when I reached my cubicle, but my boss Mimi was already lurking. I wondered which Mimi had shown up for work today, the best buddy or the evil beast from hell that would rip me apart with her hairy-knuckled hands. Mimi was about as stable as

Dr. Jekyll. Okay, so I'm exaggerating a little bit. Even on her bad days, her knuckles weren't all that hairy. Morning, Katie! she called out as I neared my cubicle. How was your weekend? It looked like the good Mimi had shown up for work today. There was no telling how long it would last, so I kept a safe distance and looked for something heavy to use for self-defense, just in case. It was great. And yours? She sighed blissfully. Fabulous. Werner and I spent the weekend at his place in the Hamptons. Werner was her richer-than-God (and almost as old) boyfriend. She leaned toward me and added in a whisper, I think he's getting ready to propose. Wow, really? I said, faking enthusiasm as I edged past her and got to my desk. You never know. See you at the staff meeting. I sat down at my desk and turned on my computer. I'd hoped for a Mimi-free morning before I had to deal with her at the torture exercise we called the Monday staff meeting, but my luck for the day had apparently run out, even if that encounter had been fairly benign. I sincerely wished that

Good Mimi was still around when the staff meeting started in fifteen minutes. Otherwise, I might find myself wishing the trio of oddballs in the subway had kidnapped me. Whatever they might do to me would likely be more pleasant than Mimi at her worst. Although Mimi was my boss, she wasn't that much older than

I was. While I'd been running the business affairs of my family's feed-and-seed store in a small town in Texas, she'd been earning her MBA at some fancy upper-crust school. I'd learned very quickly after getting to

New York that the degree and related credentials and contacts counted for a lot more than real-world experience, especially the kind of real-world experience I had. A BBA from a public university in Texas and a few years actually running a small business didn't get me much credit in the New York business world. In

fact, I wouldn't even have this job as assistant to the marketing director (in other words, Mimi's personal slave) if one of my roommates hadn't worked her own business network on my behalf. I'd looked at this job as a temporary fix to tide me over until I found something better, but I was still here a year later. I suspected

I'd have to gnaw my own arm off to get out of this trap. My computer finally finished booting up, and I checked my e-mail. The top message, received just minutes ago, said, Excellent Opportunity for Kathleen Chandler. Excellent opportunities were few and far between, and they seldom came in e-mail. I suspected that, in spite of the seemingly personalized subject line (which probably came from my e-mail address, anyway), it had something to do with enlarging a body part I didn't have. I deleted the message and scrolled down to find the message I always had waiting for me on Monday mornings: Mimi's staff meeting agenda. I

fixed the typos, printed it out, then skimmed over it while I walked to the copier. This one didn't seem to have too many minefields in it, just the usual status reports. I might survive, after all. I made copies of the agenda and returned to my office. There was a new e-mail waiting for me, probably a revised agenda from Mimi. But when I clicked over to my e-mail program, it was just another great opportunity spam, this time adding the words don't delete! to the subject line. With a sense of perverse satisfaction, I deleted it. It was probably the only act of rebellion I'd get away with all day. I knew better than to be late for one of Mimi's meetings, so I put the agendas inside my notepad, got my pen, coffee mug, and lunch, and headed for the

kitchen. There, I put my lunch in the communal refrigerator and poured myself a cup of coffee before going to the conference room. I reminded myself that after surviving the meeting, the rest of the day should be

easy. I wasn't the only one who looked like I was attending my own execution. April, the advertising manager, was already in the conference room, and her face was an ashy shade of white. Leah, the public relations manager, looked serene, but I knew that was just because she was taking prescription tranquilizers.

Janice, the events manager, had a nervous tic. The only person who didn't look stressed or medicated was Joel, the sales liaison, but that was only because he didn't report directly to Mimi. It was the last Monday of the month, so it was just a manager's meeting instead of the whole staff, or else the room would have been full of a lot more anxious bodies. I was, by far, the lowest person on the totem pole, but I was there in my capacity as Mimi's brain. Apparently, when you have an expensive MBA, you lose the ability to take notes for yourself in meetings and remember what was discussed. I handed agendas to everyone at the table. We didn't talk to one another while we waited. That was too risky. You never knew when Mimi would make her

grand entrance and hear something out of context that would set her off. Nobody wanted to be responsible for bringing out Evil Mimi. Instead, we all studied our agendas, looking for potential trouble spots. As usual, Mimi was ten minutes late for her own meeting. I knew enough about nonverbal communication to know she was sending us a not-so-subtle signal that her time was more valuable than ours. She opened both of the conference rooms double doors, then paused like she was a talk-show guest waiting for the studio audiences applause to die down before she took her seat on Oprah's couch. Good morning, Mimi, I said, even though we exchanged morning greetings not all that long ago. But she would have stood there all day waiting for someone to acknowledge her presence, and as her assistant, one of my unwritten duties was to make her feel special. The others all mumbled greetings. She finally closed the doors behind her, then swept to her usual seat at the head of the table. I handed her a copy of the agenda, which she studied like she wasn't the one who'd written it, before she looked up and addressed the group. Well keep this short because we all have a busy week with a lot to get done, she said brusquely. Her tone was different enough from her earlier chatty friendliness that I grew nervous. First item on the agenda is departmental reports. April? April went a shade paler. Even her lips were white. We have a meeting with the agency later this week to discuss their ideas for the next campaign and review their suggested media buy. Is that meeting on my calendar? Yes, it is, I told her, trying to give April a break. Remember, I checked with you about that last week? As soon as I said it, I knew it was a huge mistake. Everyone else in the room tensed. They all knew how badly I'd goofed. Mimi couldn't handle being questioned or criticized, not even something as mild as pointing out something she'd forgotten. I got even more nervous when she didn't immediately turn into Evil Mimi. Instead, she just nodded and said, Okay. Be sure to send me a reminder. Leah? In her drugged calm tone, Leah said, We should get last week's clips from the agency by close of business today. And we'll get the first draft of the new product release tomorrow. Mimi nodded. I want to see those as soon as you get them. I made a note of Leah's report and the action item as Mimi turned to Janice, who visibly flinched. Any news from events? Mimi asked. Janice had been on her hit list for a long time, thus the nervous tic and the fact that Mimi never called her by name. None of us, not even Janice, was sure what Janice had done wrong. We're still getting estimates on locations for the product launch. There isn't much within our budget that's large enough but still nice. Mimi turned to the rest of us. Does anyone here have any ideas for the launch? The events staff needs all the help it can get. I had an idea, but I hated to get Janice in trouble by bringing up something when she didn't have any ideas. Still, in this department it was every man for himself. I had no doubt that every one of these people would be willing to throw me to the wolves to keep Mimi off their backs. I think I may have something, I said. Every head snapped toward me, and I had second thoughts about speaking up. Technically, I wasn't even present at this meeting other than as a note taker. Fortunately, Mimi didn't look displeased at my breach of protocol. Yes, Katie? she said. I suspected she was enjoying Janice looking bad more than she was mad at me. I took a deep breath and forced myself to be conscious of my accent. One hint of drawl and my idea would be shot down like a clay pigeon. I've found that if you try to do something too fancy-looking without the budget that goes with it, you just end up looking cheap. Let's face it, serving low-budget shrimp puffs is just asking for food poisoning. What if we do something that's supposed to look cheap? Instead of doing a ritzy cocktail party, have a picnic or cookout. Grill hot dogs and serve beer and have a few nostalgic picnic-type activities, like sack races or bobbing for apples. Adults get a real kick out of an excuse to act like kids, and you can give a lot of people a good time they'll remember without spending much money. We've done customer appreciation days like that at the store, but I knew better than to mention the store. It might be real-world experience, but it would detract from my credibility. They all stared at me in silence when I was through. Finally, Mimi said in her most acid tone, That may work down in Grover's Corners, or wherever it is you're from, but we have different standards in New York. I knew now wasn't the time to point out that the play she'd referred to took place in New Hampshire, not Texas, or that my idea would probably be even more successful in New York than in Texas. Why else do so many easterners pay outrageous sums of money to vacation at dude ranches? It must be a huge relief to take a break from trying so hard to be jaded and sophisticated. I glanced around the table to see if I had any support, but they were all rolling their eyes or snickering. Once again I'd branded myself as a hick who was totally out of touch with the New York business world. I silently prayed for a surprise fire drill, but the meeting went on as if I hadn't said anything. Joel had the final report. The sales force met last week to prep for the launch. We've got our collateral printed and ready to go. We'll just need to see the news release so we'll know what the press will be seeing. Mimi fixed him with a killer glare. Why wasn't I at that meeting? And why didn't I get sign-off of the collateral? Joel stared her down. Because last time you were invited to one of our meetings you said it was a

waste of time and told us to leave you out from here on. As for collateral, that's not your responsibility. The rest of us looked for cover. I wouldn't have been at all surprised if Mimi's eyes had turned red, her skin had turned green, and little horns popped out of the top of her head. Collateral was a sore spot with her. In most companies it fell under the responsibility of the marketing director, but ever since she signed off on a brochure that misspelled the company's name and the product name on the cover, that responsibility had been transferred to Sales. She had never recovered from the slight. I don't have time for your little sales meetings, anyway, she said stiffly before abruptly dismissing the meeting. She was out the door before the rest of us could collect our wits and make our own escapes. Nice going, Janice muttered to Joel as we trooped out of the conference room. You just had to stir her up, didn't you? It's funny when her eyes pop out like that, he said with a grin. Janice twitched. I'll have to see how many excuses I can find to send her down to Sales today, I said. They all looked at me with a combination of pity and scorn, making me feel like I'd have to stretch to reach a grasshopper's knees. I didn't expect them to stand up for me in front of Mimi, but I'd hoped they'd acknowledge the value of my idea behind her back. No such luck. I dreaded the rest of the day. Mimi was already ticked at me for reminding her that she'd okayed the meeting she was ready to grill April about; I'd put my foot in my mouth by daring to offer a suggestion; and then Joel had set her off. I'd be stuck with Evil Mimi for an indefinite period of time. When I got back to my cube, I noticed her office door was shut. With any luck, she'd spend the next half hour on the phone with Werner, sobbing about how horrible her day had been so far and how her terrible staff was so mean and nasty to her. I put my notepad next to my computer and sank into my desk chair, trying to remember why I put up with this job. At first it hadn't seemed so bad.

Mimi had greeted me like a long-lost sister and gave every impression that she would be a mentor who would ease my way into the business world, as well as a best friend and soul mate. Then I made the mistake of correcting the horrendous spelling and grammar on a memo she'd written and running it back by her to approve my changes. That was the first time I saw Evil Mimi. Since then I found that on good days she was as friendly as I could hope. But the moment she was revealed to be less than perfect, she went nuts. I learned to just correct the memos before sending them and not let her know I was cleaning up her mess. Why did I want this job? Oh yeah, that six hundred bucks a month for my share of the rent on a one-bedroom apartment that three of us shared. Not to mention several levels of income taxes, my share of utilities, food, transportation, and all the other little expenses that added up to consume my meager paycheck. I was barely getting by on my salary. Without a salary, my roommates were sure to get rid of me, even if we had been friends since college, and I'd have to go home to Texas, proving to my parents that I couldn't make it in the big city after all. There were even days like today when I had to remind myself why that would be so bad. It wasn't as though I'd been unhappy at home. I'd just felt like I wanted something more. I didn't know what, not yet. I hoped there was something big out there with my name on it that would never have found me while I stayed in that little town. If I went back to Texas on anything other than my own terms, with some kind of business or personal success under my belt, I'd look like a failure. Worse, I'd feel like a failure. Mimi was a small price to pay to avoid that. But it wouldn't hurt to start looking for another job, now that I had some non-feed-and-seed experience under my belt. It would be easier to hide my roots at the next job because they wouldn't have known me when I was straight out of Texas. That would have to make things better. The new mail indicator was blinking on my computer. I clicked on my e-mail program and saw a message saying, Job opportunity. I knew it was probably spam, offering me the chance to work at home stuffing envelopes or something lame like that, but given the day I'd already had, I opened it. Dear Kathleen Chandler, it said, Your experience and work ethic have come to our attention, and we believe you would be the perfect fit for our firm. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity you can't afford to pass up. I can promise you'll never receive a comparable offer, in New York City or anywhere else. Please reply via e-mail or call at your earliest convenience to schedule an interview. It was signed, Rodney A. Gwaltney, director of personnel, MSI, Inc. A Manhattan phone number was under his name. I stared at the e-mail for a good, long time. It was very, very tempting, and it might not hurt to find out more, but one thing I'd learned in my small-town business experience was that if things sound too good to be true, they probably are. I couldn't think of any reason anyone outside my company would have the slightest idea who I was or know anything about my experience and work ethic. With a disappointed sigh, I deleted the e-mail. The last thing I needed was for Mimi to accidentally see a job offer open on my computer screen. I promised myself that I'd borrow my roommate Marcia's computer that evening to search the online job listings and get myself out of this loony bin as soon as humanly possible. I would have walked home from work that day even if I hadn't been desperately trying to save money. On bad days the long walk up Broadway lets me blow off some steam, while the

varied sights, sounds, and smells provide enough transition between work and home that work seems like it belongs to another lifetime by the time I get home. If I just go belowground after leaving the office and emerge aboveground at home, I'm still in work mode when I get home, and I hate subjecting my roommates to that. Cringing isn't a good look for me, and I didn't want them knowing just how bad things were. The last thing I needed was them sending me home because they were worried about me not being cut out for New York after all. I was still muttering curses at Mimi under my breath as I changed shoes in the building lobby.

Then I stepped outside, cut across to Broadway and began the long hike. The day had only gone downhill after the staff meeting, and more than once I'd been tempted to retrieve that job offer from deleted mail, even if I knew it had to be a scam. A nineteenth-century sweatshop seemed like a saner working environment than laboring under La Diva Mimi. I'd calmed down a lot by the time I crossed Houston Street. Now I could see the spire of Grace Church ahead of me and I knew I was almost home. I cut across to Fourth Avenue one street before the church because there was sometimes a gargoyle on that church that really wiggled me out. It wasn't the gargoyle itself that gave me the creeps. It was the sometimes part that unnerved me. Gargoyles are carved of stone and should be part of the building. If one is there, you should see it all the time, not just on an occasional basis. This church didn't usually have gargoyles at all, just carved faces. But every so often there was a classic winged, clawed gargoyle sitting over a doorway or on a roof ridge, and I always felt like it was looking at me. I knew that wasn't one of those weird New York things that everyone talks about, so I preferred to avoid the situation entirely. A couple of blocks up Fourth, I noticed a costume shop next to a magic and fantasy shop, and I had to laugh at myself. That explained the girl with the wings. She must have been an employee, doing a little advertising by showing the wares around town. It didn't explain why she seemed to know those two men on the train, but then again, Mr. Right had got on at the same station, so maybe he lived in the neighborhood. They must have been neighbors. And the magic shop may have had something to do with the gargoyle. It was an illusion, or maybe a prop, put on the church as a practical joke and removed before anyone in authority caught on. I felt much less like I was going crazy when I reached my building and unlocked the front door. By the time I made it up the stairs to my apartment, I'd managed to put both work and the weirdness of the day out of my mind. I'd barely had time to get the windows open so the place could air out when my roommate Gemma came home. She worked longer hours than I did, but she'd never do anything so crazy as walk home from work. Not in the shoes she usually wore. She kicked off her high-heeled sandals inside the front door and stretched out her calves. Is that what you're wearing? she asked. Huh? You must not have seen the e-mail I sent. Nope, sorry. Every time I tried to log on, Mimi stuck her head in my cube to demand something. I used a Web-based e-mail service for personal mail at work, since I knew getting personal e-mail on the company system would be asking for trouble from Mimi. Better safe than give her an excuse to yell. You have got to get another job. I know, I moaned as she went into the kitchen and took a bottle of water out of the refrigerator. For a moment I considered telling her about the e-mailed job offer, but I knew she'd just laugh at me. So, what's going on and what should I be wearing? *Revue de presse* A totally captivating, hilarious and clever look on the magical kingdom of Manhattan, where kissing frogs has never been this fun. Melissa de la Cruz, author of *The Au Pairs*