

-Heather Siegel (Published in *The Haven*, 2017)

Shants

It's hard to remember the days when my husband trusted me — those times when he sought my opinion, and, as unfathomable as it seems now, even took my advice. If I were to draw a comic strip to illustrate us “before,” Panel One would show him driving and me pointing left. Panel Two: him following my directions and cutting the wheel. Panel Three: us flying off a cliff. But I'm jumping ahead.

We were newlyweds, and it was spring. Optimism was in the air and also being advertised on the mammoth windows of Old Navy: **SPRING FORWARD WITH 30 PERCENT OFF ALL NEW FASHIONS.**

“How about this place?” I suggested, pulling the steel handle and stepping into the air-conditioned, concrete space. He caught the door, having all but resigned himself. The question was, why hadn't I?

How many more stores would it take before I accepted what he'd been telling me since we'd met? Shopping off the racks didn't work for a 6' 6" man who weighed 250 pounds — a fact he'd accepted since 7th grade when his arms stretched to 42" in length, his inseam to 36".

It would take more than the six stores we'd visited. For one, surrender was not in the repertoire of this creative soul who'd as a teenager constructed headbands from underwear, and later fashioned TV entertainment centers from milk crates and silver spray paint. For another, this tall problem was still new to me, so I was in denial.

It couldn't really be true that not one mainstream retail outfit, besides Big & Tall, with their tenty, golf-collared shirts and boring, short-sleeve button ups, didn't stock a variety of Tall XXL's.

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Even newer to me was the role of wife, and I took in seriously, not so much traditionally, as charitably. How could I *not* lend my fashion expertise and benevolence to one in such need? Besides, who else *but* me would confiscate this man's holey underwear and toss them into the trash, or steal at midnight to his sock drawer and release those threadbare souls to their afterlife, or suggest, while sifting through his drawers, that while the concept of appreciation worked well in real estate and fine wine, it didn't necessarily apply to clothes?

Looking ahead to our upcoming trip, I wanted to replace some of what I'd tossed, especially since we were headed to the Caribbean, where the trip would include hotelier work on his part, as he planned to pitch potential investors. Imagining him in his frayed hem jeans (pre-frayed era) and tiresome striped button up shirts, I worried for his success.

Chin up, I walked us towards the men's department of Old Navy and gathered up several plain, V-neck t-shirts in basic colors of white, cream and black—stealthily returning the Santa red wares towards which he'd gravitated. From there, I snagged cargo shorts in basic colors, and added two white linen button ups for variety. A pair of good sandals or flip-flops, maybe an edgy set of engraved military tags, and a high-end pair of shades, and stylish hotelier daywear would be accomplished.

My husband held the piles of clothes, dubiously inspecting their Extra Large tags—nowhere did they say XXL, and nowhere Tall — but he listened to my theory that this store's sizes ran big, which happened to be true. While I was a size eight everywhere else in the universe, in there, I was a six, sometimes a four. And I hadn't been a true four since I was ten years old.

He emerged from the dressing room wearing outfit number one: Khaki cargo shorts with a white v neck. Not only did it look great, it fit!

“Who would have known? Old Navy, huh?” He slid his hand down his chest to admire his side view in the mirror. “I should take a look at their slacks.”

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“Those probably won’t fit,” I said, remembering his inseam problem.

“They *won’t*?” His lips down-turned, not unlike a kid whose ice cream scoop has catapulted off its cone and plopped to the ground.

What choice did I have but to lead the way to the back to the pants department, his hope on my leash? Finding the right waist measurement, as had been the case for the shorts, was easy. It was that damn 36” inseam that was the problem. I flipped through the piles. 34, 34, 34. A mere matter of two inches. I wondered if we couldn’t bring them to a tailor to undo their hem. I pulled up an ankle and turned out its cuff. No such luck. The pants were sown to the edge of the fabric. Two measly inches that would make all the difference... if only. If *only*. The lightbulb turned on. Wait a minute. What if those two inches went in the opposite direction?

“J,” I said, the image crystallizing in my mind. “What about Capris?”

He stopped shuffling pants. “Capris?”

“Yes, Capris.” Conviction bubbled up. Hadn’t I seen Brad Pitt wearing them—where was it, People Magazine? Also, when we were in Williamsburg last weekend, hadn’t I also seen a guy in Capris walking his dog? I think *so*.

He looked at me, wanting to believe. I looked at him, wanting him to believe.

“All the celebrities are wearing them,” I continued, aware that I was now embellishing. Brad Pitt—if he had been wearing them—hardly constituted all of Hollywood. But I was a body in motion, heading us towards a cliff, I mean a fresh pile of cargo pants, sureness strengthening with each clack of my heels.

Seriously though, cargo pants had drawstring bottoms, and with drawstring bottoms, the pants would not just bell out midway, they would look tailored. How

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could you go wrong? I pulled out a few styles, and we headed back toward the dressing room.

“Capris,” I heard him say behind me, like hmmph.

It was true, as we made our way toward the curtain, that there were no poster images of men wearing this style; nor any real life men inside the store sporting it.

But there were plenty of women.

He emerged from the dressing room wearing a pair of pants not two inches too short but eight inches too short, falling as they did to the bottom of his calf muscle.

They looked like Capris all right. I bent down and tied the drawstring.

He turned side to side in the mirror, then threw his eyes my way. Was I sure about this?

“I like them,” I said.

“They are really soft.” He pulled up the price tag. “And practically free... Is this right? \$19.99?” At Big and Tall, the socks had cost more than that. Consideration spread across his face. And something else I can only describe as bliss. Buying off the rack. It was like a dream come true. And I, creative fashionista— and wiferly heroine — was responsible for granting him that dream.

I hedged, only for a moment, when out of the corner of the mirror, I saw an Old Navy clerk, returning from re-stocking, glance at my husband’s legs disappearing into the dressing room. She blinked twice, the way one does if she can’t quite tell if

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what she's seen is real or imagined. *Is that a grown man wearing pants up to his calves?*

He bought seven pairs, one in every color. We added some more V-necks, gathered up the cargo shorts and headed home to pack.

The first day with investors, he took them out on a boat ride—and I tagged along for fun. My husband wore the white v neck and khaki cargo shorts. With his Ray bans, he looked fantastic. I noticed that two of the male investors had on golf shirts, but my husband's line of "another hard day at the office" as we skirted across turquoise waters paired well with his relaxed look. The site viewing went well; interested, the group agreed to have dinner that night.

"Almost ready?" my husband called to me. I popped in my earrings and walked into the living area of our hotel suite.

"You look great," he said, admiring my casual sundress. I wanted to return the favor, but honestly, I was stunned. It had been a few days since the dressing room, and seeing him standing there in those Capris was, in a word, shocking. Had Brad Pitt really been wearing them?

"We're late," he said, and pulled us out the door— becoming, in my mind now, the true hero of this tale.

Luckily, there was alcohol in abundance at dinner, as I'd not only been second-guessing his wares, but my spaghetti strap dress and heels, wondering if flats wouldn't have been a better choice, and about my fashion sense generally - about wives and husbands generally, remembering a survey I'd come across, showing that most husbands regularly deferred to their wives for fashion advice.

Well, who put us in charge, anyway? Especially when there were far worthier humanitarian causes we could worry about.

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By cocktail number two, however, I began to relax. After all, no one had so much as given a second glance to J's pants, let alone remarked about them. If anything, they seemed in total admiration of him.

If Brad Pitt hadn't been wearing those Capris, I decided, he soon would be-- as perhaps would these investors. Imagine, I started a trend?

I hadn't started anything, of course— though it would take until recently to know that while Capris had been ebbing and flowing through mens' fashion for decades, they had mostly been ebbing; and at that moment in time, if there was a magazine advertising them, it would likely have been something like *Mountain Climber Man*, touting the benefits of knee coverage while still allowing for a breezy ankle.

Still, we *were* getting away with it-- which is all that really mattered, right? That, and standing by my man in solidarity.

We said our goodbyes in the parking lot—all ten of us—and having partook in a festive dinner, we hugged goodbye.

“You are the man,” Collared Shirt Number One said to my husband. “We will totally be in touch.” And he kept his word. A week later, term sheets were exchanged with the promise of a return trip.

Does one get used to the absurd? I got used to seeing those pants as J wore them the rest of the trip, and on the plane home-- as months passed and he wore them to the movies, and out to dinner for Wednesday Chinese with his kids. Emily was nine, Eddie 14. And neither of them had grown used to anything.

“Dad, what the *hell* are you wearing?” Emily asked.

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“Capris,” J said. And I quickly came to his defense.

“They look ridiculous,” Emily cut me off, while Eddie eyed me. Sadly, I had already lost his trust one afternoon when I insisted a cocktail of apple cider vinegar, hot water and honey might help clear up a rash on his hand. Unfortunately, I’d gotten the ratio of water to vinegar wrong, and he ended up drinking a glass of salad dressing.

“Those are not Capris,” Eddie said, “They’re Shants.”

“Shants?” J asked.

“Not shorts and not pants. Shants. And thou *shan*’t wear them ever again.”

“I’m not giving these up,” J said.

“Dad. Just stop,” Emily said.

But he didn’t stop.

Gassing the pedal, he remarked on how comfortable these newfound Shants were, and how much easier they made travel. Who even needed shorts anymore? Or pants? Now, for the boat rides and dinner, he could alternate his Shants.

The term sheets were signed with the investors. Again the drinks flowed—this time in celebration— and again hugs were exchanged in the parking lot.

“So now that we are partners,” Collared Shirt said to my husband, clamping a hand on his shoulder, “I’ve been meaning to ask you: *Dude*, what’s with the pants?”