

Runway Ready (Fashion Academy)

By Sheryl Berk, Carrie Berk

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Project Runway meets *Fame* in a trendy new series from the authors of *The Cupcake Club*

1. Balloons
2. Spaghetti
3. Rainbows

If you were to ask Mickey Williams, these would not be her top points of inspiration for designing a party dress. But in fashion, the client is always right...and Mickey's client happens to be fashion legend Victoria Vanderweil's five-year-old granddaughter. Even though it's the toughest assignment Mickey's gotten during her time at the Fashion Academy of Brooklyn, she can't pass up the opportunity to impress a top designer like Victoria.

But when Cordy turns out to be a tiny terror with non-stop demands, the assignment goes from hard to impossible. Not only that, but Victoria wants Mickey to babysit Cordy during NYC Fashion Week! Can Mickey pull off her project and pass, or will it fall apart at the seams?

See how it all began in *The Fashion Academy*!

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Editorial Review

About the Author

New York Times bestselling co-author of *Soul Surfer*, SHERYL BERK is the founding editor in chief of *Life & Style Weekly* as well as a contributor to *InStyle*, *Martha Stewart*, and other publications.

Her daughter, CARRIE, a cupcake connoisseur, cooked up the idea for the Cupcake Club series in second grade. Together, they have invented dozens of crazy cupcake recipes in their NYC kitchen (can you say Purple Velvet?) and have the frosting stains on the ceiling to prove it. Carrie maintains her own cupcake blog, featuring reviews, photos and recipes of her culinary adventures.

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Chapter 1

Mackenzie "Mickey" Williams was having a dream-her favorite one. In it, she was showing her very first collection under the tents at Lincoln Center during New York Fashion Week. The lights flashed and the music pulsed as supermodels strutted down the runway dressed in her elaborate, colorful designs. There was Gigi Hadid, wearing a black-velvet strapless jumpsuit and gold fringed poncho! There was Kendall Jenner, posing in a sapphire-blue pleather romper! There was Karlie Kloss, looking fierce in a red neoprene minidress and matching scuba jacket!

As each look appeared onstage, the crowd of celebrities and fashion magazine editors oohed and aahed and applauded enthusiastically. At the end of the show, Mickey walked down the runway and bowed dramatically as the crowd leaped to their feet and cheered.

Backstage, Mickey was suddenly mobbed by models, fans, and press, all eager to tell her how much they loved her collection. They handed her bouquets of roses, so many she couldn't hold them all in her arms.

"Mickey, darling, you have outdone yourself!" gushed Vogue editor Anna Wintour. "What a stellar debut!"

"Aww, it was nothing," Mickey replied in her dream.

"Oh, but it is!" Legendary designer Karl Lagerfeld reached over to shake her hand. He was wearing his sunglasses as always, and his snowy white hair was pulled back in a ponytail. "It's divine."

"Oh, Karl, that means so much to me coming from you!" Mickey exclaimed. "You're one of my idols."

"Who's Karl?" A high-pitched, nasal voice shattered the beautiful moment. "Mackenzie, do you know it's seven forty-five? You're going to miss the school bus."

Mickey bolted up in bed. "Aunt Olive, I was talking to Karl Lagerfeld!" She moaned, stretching her hands over her head. "You know, the head designer for the House of Chanel? It was the best dream ever."

Her aunt handed her a glass of green sludge. "Have your kale shake. It'll wake you right up."

"I don't wanna wake up." Mickey groaned. "I want to go back to my dream. I wish it was true."

Olive patted her on the arm. "Well, if you keep wowing them at that fashion school of yours, it'll happen one day. But not if you're late!"

• • •

Mickey made the bus with only seconds to spare. She settled into a seat and rested her head against the cold glass window, watching as the city streets whizzed by. Her first day at the Fashion Academy of Brooklyn-a.k.a. FAB-seemed like a lifetime ago. But it had been just five months since she left her mom and best friend, Annabelle, in Philly and moved in with Aunt Olive in NYC so she could attend the middle school for budding fashion designers.

It wasn't easy. Besides Mickey missing her mom and friend terribly, in the beginning, nobody at FAB quite "got" her fashion sense. She thought it was perfectly acceptable to mix clashing patterns, sew lace on a leather motorcycle jacket, wear two different-colored shoes, or streak her hair with colored chalk. It was exciting and innovative, and if there was one thing Mickey loved, it was thinking outside the box.

Ever since she was a little girl, she had created one-of-a-kind outfits for her dolls and, later, for herself. For five dollars at the flea market, she could find a sad, abandoned old dress, riddled with stains or holes, and transform it into something chic, sleek, and unique. She felt like a fashion superhero with magical powers!

• • •

According to Mickey, fashion was all about forging your own vision and not letting anyone dictate your personal style. "Whatever you wear," she'd instructed her friend Annabelle over winter break, "you should make it your own."

"Bella Thorne says pastel is in for spring," Annabelle had pointed out, waving a Teen Vogue in Mickey's face.

"Boring...and predictable," Mickey said, glancing at the photo of the fashionista in a buttercup-yellow sweater and white jeans. "I'd cut that sweater into a crop top and pair it with something graphic-like an ikat-print wrap skirt."

Annabelle looked confused. "What's an ikat? Is that like an iPad?"

Mickey giggled. When it came to fashion lingo, Anna was kind of clueless. "It's a dyeing technique used to pattern textiles," she explained to her friend.

Annabelle shook her head. "I still don't get it. But I'm sure if you designed for Bella, she'd look amazing."

If only! Mickey desperately wanted to have her own fashion label one day, one that stars begged to wear on the red carpet. It was the reason she'd jumped at the chance to attend FAB, even if her mom hadn't been enthusiastic about the idea.

"You're eleven," her mother had protested when the acceptance letter came. "I don't know how I feel about

you living in New York City."

"It's not like I'll be living on Jupiter," Mickey had pointed out. "It's just a train ride away and I'll come home every weekend. Besides, I'll be staying with Aunt Olive."

Her mom's sister wasn't an easy egg to crack, but Mickey had won her over-and even helped her come out of her shell. Aunt Olive had recently traded in her severe business suits and sensible shoes for a purple wool trapeze jacket and leather boots.

"You like it?" she'd asked Mickey as she modeled it in their living room.

"It's so cool." Mickey applauded her. "The color is very bold and regal, and those boots are fierce."

"Is that good?" Olive asked, scratching her head. "Do I want to be fierce?"

"You do!" Mickey chuckled. "Especially in the workplace. You want to show your bosses you're not afraid of hard work. You can handle anything."

"And my clothes say that?"

"They speak volumes," Mickey assured her. "That's what's so incredible about fashion. It can talk for you and about you."

"Well, then," Olive said, checking her look one more time in the mirror. "My look is saying, 'Olive, better get a move on! You've got a legal brief due in less than an hour!'"

The students at FAB were a whole other story. When an assignment called for an original design for a World Hunger T-shirt, of course Mickey decided to adorn hers with real food. The only problem was that it spoiled overnight.

"They think I'm a freak," she had complained during her first weeks to her one confidant, JC. He knew a thing or two about how to navigate the social scene at FAB. He was a year older and a seventh-grader, not to mention a brilliant designer of canine couture.

"Well, you do smell like cabbage," he pointed out. "And your hair looks like you dipped it in creamed spinach."

"I thought everyone at FAB would be creative and edgy," Mickey said with a sigh. "I've always had my own sense of style. I thought here it would be welcome."

JC nodded. "I get it. You like to stand out. But this"-he pointed to her neon-yellow combat boots and green-plaid leggings with ripped knees-"this might be taking it a bit too far. Unless you're Lady Gaga, that is."

He gave her an extreme makeover so that the kids at FAB wouldn't be so distracted by her outward appearance that they couldn't appreciate her talent.

He instructed her to wash the green highlights out of her hair, then gave her a new name (Kenzie Wills), a new identity (daughter of a famous Finnish designer), and a streamlined new look. "Less is more," he taught her. "No more hair chalk highlights. Lose the neon sneakers and ditch the crazy hats."

As Kenzie, Mickey's popularity soared. Even Jade Lee, the school's reigning queen bee, was curious. Mickey loved the attention and the acceptance, but hated pretending to be someone she wasn't. When she was chosen

as a finalist for FAB's first-semester Runway Showdown, her mission was clear: "I gotta be me!" Her Cinderella-inspired ball gown with a rainbow tulle underlayer stopped the show.

• • •

So here she was at the start of her second semester, back to being just Mickey. Thanks to the Showdown, she'd finally earned respect for her designs-even if she did come in second place to Jade.

Jade held court in the FAB hallway every morning. Mickey had to admit that the girl was chic. Today, she wore a petal-pink, long-sleeved DVF wrap dress and knee-high suede boots, and her long, shiny black hair was swept back into a rhinestone headband. She could have easily stepped out of the pages of a magazine-a walking, talking mannequin! Did she ever have a bad hair day? Were her clothes ever wrinkled?

Her twin brother, Jake, was equally dapper. Mickey noted his red Ralph Lauren cashmere sweater and the black Prada messenger bag slung over his shoulder. Of course, it didn't hurt that their mother was Bridget Lee, designer to Hollywood's biggest stars. Thanks to Mommy, the duo not only got to wear any designer duds their hearts desired, but also had unlimited access to the red carpet and got to rub elbows with celebrities. When she was watching Extra with Aunt Olive, Mickey was sure she had spotted Jade looming behind Jennifer Lawrence at an NYC movie. Of course she was! Her mom had designed JLaw's stunning silver lamé gown.

Jade shot Mickey a dirty look as she passed by. "You know what they say about second place," she said loudly so Mickey wouldn't miss a word. "It's the first one to lose." Though several weeks and winter break has passed since that day, Jade was never going to let Mickey live down the fact that she'd lost to her at the Runway Showdown.

Let her gloat, Mickey thought to herself. Winning isn't everything. She had learned a lot about herself in creating that collection and was even featured on a famous fashion blogger's site. So what if Jade beat her? There would be many more fashion challenges and chances to show Jade-and all of FAB-that she was a fashion force to be reckoned with.

"Don't pay any attention to her." Mickey's classmate South East ran to catch up with her. "She's just sore that your collection rocked." At least South was on her side!

"So," her friend continued, "do I call you Mickey or Kenzie? I think it's cool you have two names. You know musicians change theirs all the time-like Diddy was once Puff Daddy, P. Diddy, and before that Sean Combs."

Mickey nodded. "I'm just Mickey. Kenzie Wills will be the name of my design house."

"Cool," South replied, then quickly changed the subject. "Did you have a great winter break? I did! My dad took me to Hollywood where he's recording his new album. We hung out with J. T. and Pharrell-"

Mickey cut her off. She knew if she didn't, South would chew her ear off with endless stories of her fabulous rap-star dad Laser East. Mickey was anxious to get to class and see what Mr. Kaye had up his sleeve today for them to design.

"Yeah, break was fun. Lots of time back home in Philly with the family. Gotta go!" she said. "See you in Apparel Arts!"

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