

LISA URLESS [LBD]

FIRST PLACE AETNA UNDERGRADUATE CREATIVE NON-FICTION AWARD

I started with black lace undergarments, a matching set. Next I put on some old-fashioned silk stockings with the seams up the back and attached them to the garters. I pulled the black silk dress over my head and snapped my bra straps in place so they wouldn't show. Hair came next: I put it up into a simple chignon. I applied eyeliner, shadow, mascara, and dark pink lipstick. I fastened my pearls around my neck and put the matching earrings in. I sprayed Obsession in all of the right spots. I slipped on my Nine West sling-backs, and grabbed my beaded evening bag.

I looked good. The simple A-line shape of the dress gave me curves I didn't know I had, while the v-neck elongated my neck and made me look more graceful. The hem of the skirt just brushed the tops of my kneecaps: long enough to be classy, but still short enough to show off my legs. The dull sheen of the dress set off my skin and hair perfectly. Just as I was finishing admiring myself, the doorbell rang. It was my final accessory, and the best one: Fernando, a delightful young man I'd met in my ballroom dancing class.

When preparing for one's ex-boyfriend's wedding, it is absolutely essential to get things just right. Above all, one must be classy and elegant. One can absolutely not wear bright red or a "bridesmaid wannabe" dress. One cannot appear to be in any way jealous of the happy couple. One must always be smiling, happy, and utterly relieved to be rid of the groom. One must be absolutely breathtaking in looks, personality, and escort.

Of course, most of this is feigned. If I was over Dave, I certainly wouldn't be going to his wedding. I'd have ignored the invitation, and the inserted registry information, in favor of going out dancing or just staying in and renting a movie. I wouldn't care about whether or not everyone thought I was over him, because knowing that I was would be enough for me. However, as I was not in fact over him, I felt every need to prove that I was to all of our old friends.

So I went all out. I bought new clothes that I could just barely afford. I bought a gift that I could definitely not afford. I went to Fernando and his boyfriend Tyrone and begged one of them to take me to the

wedding. I read up on my Emily Post, refined my table manners, and practiced saying, "Oh, no, of course I don't mind. Don't they make such a lovely couple?"

Everything I did, I did for spite. I wanted Dave to take one look at me and fall back in love. I wanted him to proposition me just so I could kindly, patronizingly reject him. I wanted to go to Laura in the guise of a friend, just to warn her that this marriage thing was perhaps not the best idea. I wanted everyone to look at me and Fernando, and think that Dave was crazy for giving me up. I wanted everyone to see the beautiful, confident, self-assured woman that I wasn't

I went to the wedding with only the worst of intentions. I wanted to be the bad guy who looked like the good guy. But somehow, between the receiving line and the reception, I stopped acting like the confident, self-assured woman, and became her. It must have been the outfit. I suppose it could have been other things as well. Things like Dave's new pot belly, or the terrified look in his eyes. Perhaps Laura's red-rimmed eyes or mousy brown roots did it. Mostly, however, I think it was the outfit.

There is something absolutely wonderful about finding the perfect dress. It is tailored perfectly to fit one. The movement of one's hips sends the fabric of the skirt swishing this way and that. The hem flares provocatively when one dances with one's deliciously young Latino date. One always feels sexy, no matter whether one is having one's period, or at one's ex's wedding. I felt sexy.

Fernando and I danced nearly every dance. We mingled with all my old friends. They were impressed with him, but I just smiled coolly and told them we were just friends: amazingly, the truth. Several times, I felt Dave's eyes on me, but I didn't care. The wedding had stopped being about showing everyone else how over him I was, and more about showing myself the same. When I looked at him and Laura, I felt a little sad that it was all over, but no regret. I'd finally let myself let him go, and it felt good. When Fernando and I left to make a relatively early night of it, Dave kissed my cheek in farewell, as Laura glared at him from across the hall. He said, "You've changed."

I replied, "No, it's just the dress," and walked away without looking back.