

With Her Boots On

Lisa Dow

“Mother of Pearl.” This cannot be right. I am standing in the oversized change room at the Bedazzled Beauty Bridal Boutique wearing what can only be described as “the ugliest dress known to man”—or woman; especially this woman. I turn to Kit for support but can see she is shaking in silent laughter and wiping her tear-filled eyes.

“KIT!” I hiss in my strongest quiet voice because the dressing room has only a curtain separating us from the outside world. Kit looks up with a jolt and tries to pull herself together; she is so not helping at this point.

“Seriously, just one picture? On my cellphone, just one! Please?!” Kit pays no attention to my voice. She asked this same question a few moments ago and she knows the answer. I give her my steeliest “I’m not impressed” stare. We’ve been best friends since before kindergarten; you’d think she’d know me better by now.

“Okay, whatever! Fine.” Kit starts to speak again but stops and looks down as the silent laughter starts again.

“Kathryn Jennings, you standing there laughing is really not helpful. Can you get the copy of the email out of my bag?” I should probably be laughing as well, but since it’s me wearing the dress it hardly seems like a time for levity.

“Okay. Okay.” Kit reaches into my Prada bag and finds the email. I love my Prada bag. It’s beautiful, classic and streamlined. The dress I’m currently wearing cannot be described as any of those things. There are no words in the English language to describe what I am wearing.

Having a vocation seems to finally slow Kit's laughter. "Okay." Kit is scanning the page and starts to read, "Manufacturer number 4414, dress number 666096, colour 'Sunset Desire,'" Kit looks up at me, "and that's what the tag says."

"Well, check it again, there is no way this colour could ever be described as 'Sunset Desire' and this cannot be the dress." Kit starts to dig in the billows of fabric encasing my upper arm, searching for the tag affixed to the armpit seam.

"No. Sadly, this is the dress. Number 666096, 'Sunset Desire.'"

"Six-six-six, indeed," is all I can mutter turning back to the mirror. "Didn't Sam say in the email she likes the dress?"

"She loves the dress actually." Kit scans the paper she is still holding in her hand. "Here," she points at the page and starts to read, "Mel, it's perfect. It's the colour the sky was on my first date with your brother. I knew the second I saw it that I had to have this dress in my wedding." Kit looks up and we make eye contact in the mirror. Kit is finally able to control her laughter. The situation is losing its humour quickly. I may be expected to actually wear this dress in public—forget Kit wanting one picture; there will be hundreds of pictures to prove it.

"Is Sam colour-blind? Deranged? Delusional?" I ask Kit sarcastically. A part of me hopes any of these things might be true. I'm standing in the change room on the little platform-thingy wearing a dress with massive three-quarter-length billowing sleeves, a three-inch-wide empire waistband covered in incandescent sequins, and a skirt that contains enough fabric to cover two sofas, even if one of them is a sectional. The yards of fabric that make up the skirt begin mid-ribcage, gathered under the sequined empire waist, and A-lines out to end mid-calf with a

diameter of no less than four feet. The small portion of my calves, visible below the volumes of fabric, look like toothpicks, and my feet look too small to hold the dress up. The scoop neckline is edged with ruffles. I have determined that this is indeed a double ruffle, so the top ruffle sticks straight up in clown-outfit fashion and tickles my chin. I can't resist the urge to blow downwards and try to get it away from my skin, and have done so several times. Sadly, all of these elements, as bad as they are, are only accentuated by the fact that the dress can only be described as "Construction Cone Orange." You know, the plastic type used to indicate roadwork and film sites. Yes, I look like a common road pylon!

"Surely, this dress is a different dye lot than the one Sam saw in Georgia." Kit is trying to be hopeful. No subtle dye lot change is going to improve this little number, and I use the term "little" loosely. The underlying colour of this eyesore is orange.

"I can't be seen in public in this," I state. "The closest I've ever come to wearing orange is my tangerine handbag, and I don't wear it and it's not orange. It's tangerine." I turn to get a side view. "I can't do it. I can't!" The truth of the matter is that I look short and fat. I'm not exactly a willowy giant but I do have a nice figure—size four, well proportioned—and I don't want to run around at my brother's wedding looking like a pylon or, worse, a pumpkin. "I look like a sumo wrestler dressed in a clown suit."

"No. It's not that bad," Kit tries to downplay the dismal situation.

"Really? Would you want to wear this thing in public?" I retort, my voice dripping in sarcasm.

Kit visibly shudders at the thought of donning the Sunset Disaster before she tries to change the subject. “How many attendants are in the wedding?” Kit asks, and I realize she has jumped ahead to visualize how more than one person, wearing this particular dress, will look standing together. Worse, standing together for photos to be taken of us.

“Six. There are going to be six of these dresses in one place. Planes will start landing around us.”

“Well, that’s not likely.” Kit tries to be pragmatic but immediately starts to giggle. She will soon be back in silent laughter mode again. Even I have to admit a single-engine Cessna landing between the photographer and six versions of this dress would be funny.

I hate my brother. I know the word “hate” is bad and I’m not supposed to use it unless in the most dire of circumstances, but I have to say, right now, standing here in a horrible orange dress, this might indeed be one of those dire circumstances. I hate my brother. Mike, who has avoided all adult dating badly by marrying his university sweetheart, is now giving our wedding-obsessed-mother the wedding of her dreams—beating me to the punch— and is also going to manage to completely humiliate me in front of friends and family. Samantha, his fiancée, who I actually quite like, is showing a remarkable lack of fashion sense and is making me wonder if she isn’t perhaps a little “off.” Samantha is a redhead; why on earth would she want Construction Cone Orange attendants’ dresses? My mind is reeling as I stare at my reflection in the oversized mirror.

“Kit...” I turn to my best friend, who is currently crouching in the corner wiping her tear-filled eyes again. I know she is about to fall into another laughing fit so I must get her help sooner than later. In answer, Kit looks up and the laughter starts all over again.

“KIT!” I have to hiss again because her laughter might get me started and this is no time for a fit of giggles. “Okay, you can take a picture. One picture. On my phone. I have to email Sam and get to the bottom of this. There is no way this is right.” Kit, who has been rendered fairly useless up to this point, manages to pull herself together for a photo shoot and digs the cellphone out of my bag.

“I can’t get the whole thing in,” Kit states from the corner she is in and starts to move around me, pushing the skirt out of the way so she can walk past it, looking at the phone screen. I notice a laughter-tear still wet on her cheek. When Kit gets to the door of the change room—the curtain—she pushes it aside and steps out, backing up a few feet. “Okay, I’ve got most of it, but not the full skirt, it’s going off the screen on both sides.”

“Whatever. Just so I can email Sam and she can confirm but hopefully deny this fashion atrocity.”

“Got it!” Kit sounds triumphant. “But you’re right. There must be some mix-up. There is no way Samantha wants to have this dress in her wedding.” Kit hands me the phone and I look at the photo on the screen and want to cry. The dress, if it is indeed possible, looks more orange in the photo than in the mirror. This outfit cannot be in my future. I manage to stop dwelling on my impending doom long

enough to text off a quick email to soon-to-be sister-in-law, Sam, attaching the godawful photo.

SAM, ATTACHED IS A PHOTO OF THE DRESS MATCHING THE DETAILS YOU GAVE PLEASE CONFIRM/DENY
THIS IS INDEED THE DRESS WE STILL NEED TO TALK SHOES

“There. All we can do now is wait for Sam’s reply.” I know waiting for this answer is going to seem interminably long, but the relief I will feel when I hear this is not the dress will be worth the wait.

“Well, let’s get you out of this thing.” Kit finally says something welcome and starts to close the door she had to open for the photo shoot. Just before the door closes, the overly helpful saleslady who found the abominable dress when we first arrived—how could she miss it really, it’s the only orange dress in the store—pops her head into my change area.

“Oh, it’s absolutely lovely on you! But wait, you don’t have a crinoline! Let me run and get you one!” she offers with way too much enthusiasm, and leaves to retrieve the only remaining element that can make this particular creation more hideous.

Kit and I make eye contact. There is a crinoline.

“Mother of Pearl,” we both say in unison.