

Ugly Dress

Chapter 2

Bella

Ariella offered to help me get ready, which was a relief considering my complete lack of fashion sense. I couldn't help but feel grateful to have her in my life, knowing I'd be lost without her guidance.

"Is this really what you're planning to wear to the party?" Ariella scrutinized the black dress with a disdainful expression, as if it pained her just to look at it.

I hesitated, then replied, "Well, I thought it looked nice..."

Ariella shook her head firmly. "No, Bella. This won't do at all. Trust me, I know your style, and this dress is just not you." With a dismissive gesture, she tossed the dress onto the bed and turned to face me.

Placing a reassuring hand on my shoulder, she said, "Thank goodness you have me, Bella. Otherwise, I don't know what you'd do. With that, she headed to my closet and pulled out a long yellow dress that I had once loved but had begun to feel didn't quite suit me. It had a prim and proper vibe that seemed more suited to a church function than a party.

"This dress, on the other hand, suits you perfectly," Ariella declared as she handed it to me. "You look like Belle from 'Beauty and the Beast' in this. Trust me, forget about the black one and wear this instead."

I hesitated, feeling torn. "But I've worn this dress several times already, and my mom bought it specially for this party..."

Ariella looked at me with disappointment. "Bella, this is your first party with your first boyfriend. Don't you want to make a good impression? Trust me, I've been to plenty of these events. Just relax and put this on. We're running late."

Reluctantly, I took the dress from her, giving the black dress one last wistful glance before changing into the yellow one. But even as I put it on, I couldn't shake the feeling that it just didn't quite capture the spark I was hoping for.

As I emerged from the changing room, I saw Ariella standing there, wearing the very dress she had rejected for me.

"Doesn't it look fantastic on me?" she exclaimed, twirling to show it off. "It's like it was made for me. Oh, I love it!" She glanced at my feet. "You must have black heels to go with it, right? Can I borrow them, along with this dress?"

Confused, I pointed out, "But you said this dress wasn't suitable for a party..."

Ariella laughed. "Oh, Bella, I meant it wasn't right for you. It doesn't match your style, but it's perfect for me. The dress I was going to wear got ruined when I accidentally spilled coffee on it. See?" She showed me the stained garment.

Ariella was already almost ready, her makeup flawlessly applied, her hair styled to perfection. She looked stunning, even more so than usual. Perhaps she was right; maybe the dress truly was meant for her.

"Okay, you can have it," I conceded, looking at myself in the mirror once more.

"Great! Now, grab those heels for me and sit down so I can finish your makeup and hair," Ariella instructed, clapping her hands excitedly.

Ari helped me get ready. She was a prodigy in makeup and styling, so I felt confident that she could make me look beautiful. I trusted her and her skills implicitly.

"Close your eyes," she instructed, and I complied obediently. I could feel her expert hands at work, and after what felt like ages, she finally told me I could open my eyes. But when I did, my smile faded.

I looked... different, but not in a good way. The beige lipstick on my lips clashed with the orange eyeshadow. The bright pink blush seemed garish against my cheeks, and the eyeliner didn't flatter my face shape. My hair was pulled back into a lackluster ponytail.

"Tada! Do you like it?" Ari asked hopefully, but I couldn't muster a genuine smile as I looked at my reflection.

"Of course, you do. Now, come on, we're already late. Is Marcus coming to pick you up?" she inquired as she slipped into the black heels I had lent her.

"Ari, I think... the makeup isn't suiting me. Could you please fix it a little?" I requested, my smile faltering.

"I know you're nervous, Bella, but let me assure you, you look beautiful. But if you're still not satisfied, we can start over again. However, it will take a lot of time, and we wouldn't want to keep your boyfriend waiting, would we?" she reasoned, just as my phone rang.

My smile brightened as I saw Marcus's caller ID. "Hi Marcus. Yes, I'm almost ready," I answered, glancing at Ari, who gave me a thumbs-up. "You want to pick me up? Sure! I'll send you my location, and Ari is with me too. When will you be here? In ten minutes? Alright, see you."

Marcus hung up, and I saw Ari fixing herself in the mirror. "So, still want to change? I don't think I can finish in ten minutes," she remarked.

I looked at myself in the mirror one last time, making a decision. I released my hair from its tie, fixing it as I wiped off the beige lipstick and applied a cherry shade with lip gloss.

"Can you at least curl my hair into beachy waves?" I asked, handing her the curler. "I know it might not suit me, but I want to try. I want to try new things."

Ari sighed but relented. "Fine. Sit straight," she said, and I obliged. "Just do them like yours."

Ten minutes flew by, and I was finally satisfied with my hair. It looked nice, and I was glad I had made the change.

"Thanks, Ari," I said, finally offering her a genuine smile, which she returned.

My heart thumped loudly in my chest as I opened the door, revealing Marcus standing there, as handsome as ever. His gaze met mine, and I couldn't help but feel a flutter of nerves.

"Bella, you—we're going to a party, Bella, not..." He trailed off, looking away from me with a heavy sigh.

He hated it. He hated how I looked.

The sound of high heels approaching caught our attention. "Oh hi Marcus, you look handsome as always," Ari greeted him with a side-hug, and I noticed Marcus checking her out.

Meeting my eyes, Marcus walked over to me and took my hand. "You look good, Bella. Now, let's leave. We're already late for the party," he said, guiding me towards the car and placing his hand on my back.

As I settled into the shotgun seat, Ari's voice chimed in. "Are these for Bella?" she asked, and Marcus confirmed. "Yeah, can you hand them over?"

Taking the bouquet from Ari, Marcus passed it to me. "These are for you," he said, causing me to blush as I took in the scent of fresh roses. It felt so nice.

"You're so lucky, Bella," Ari remarked, taking the flowers from me. "Let me keep them in the back for you."

As Marcus started the car, he asked, "Would you girls like some music?" We both agreed, and soon we were on our way.

Throughout the ride, Marcus and Ariella engaged in lively conversation, and I chimed in occasionally. Ariella had been instrumental in facilitating our first conversation, and I was grateful for her presence.

Arriving at Steven's place, we were greeted by booming music and vibrant RGB lights illuminating the house. Marcus held my hand as he led me inside, where I spotted many of our classmates dancing and drinking.

In no time, Marcus and Ariella were surrounded by their friends, leaving me feeling somewhat out of place. Marcus had asked me to keep our relationship under wraps for now, which made me uneasy. I had already confided in Ariella about us, but Marcus assured me he had a surprise in store.

"Guys, I want you all to meet someone," Marcus announced, motioning for me to join him. As I stepped forward, he declared, "Meet my girlfriend, Bella."

As I stepped into the circle, excitement zizzled within me, only to be replaced by a sinking feeling as I noticed the subtle glances exchanged by Marcus's friends. Their whispers, barely audible but laced with mockery, sent a chill down my spine. I tried to brush it off, but their stifled laughter hung heavy in the air, suffocating me.

"Hello, everyone," I greeted and no one bothered to reply back.

I forced a laugh, pretending to find something amusing, but inside, my composure crumbled. I could feel their eyes dissecting me, judging my appearance. I could sense the disapproval in their eyes.

With each passing moment, their gaze and whispers grew louder in my mind, drowning out the music and laughter around me. I felt exposed, vulnerable, and painfully aware of every imperfection of mine. In that moment, I couldn't help but wonder if they were right—if I really did look as ridiculous as they seemed to think with Marcus?

Marcus kissed my cheek, asking, "Are you happy now?" I fought to conceal the tears welling up in my eyes, forcing a smile that felt more like a grimace. Marcus's words pierced through me, a painful reminder of how far from happiness I truly felt.

Never before had I felt so utterly ugly, so exposed and vulnerable in my own skin. The weight of their silent judgment, coupled with the sting of their laughter, had left me feeling raw and inadequate.

"I'll be right back with drinks," Marcus announced.

"But Marcus, it's illegal. We're underage," I interjected, stopping him from leaving.

He shook off my grip, looking annoyed. "Oh, don't be a buzzkill, Bella. Stay right here, I'll be back. Don't go anywhere," he insisted before striding off.

As Marcus left, I scanned the room and spotted Ariella dancing energetically with her friends. Several boys ogled her, including her ex-boyfriend, who seemed smitten despite their past. Ariella received numerous compliments on her outfit and style as she moved gracefully.

Spotting me, Ariella made her way over. "Where's your boyfriend?" she inquired, scanning the room.

"He went to get us some drinks," I replied.

"Ah, little Bella is going to drink tonight. That's something new," Ariella remarked teasingly.

"I don't want to," I confessed. "I ha---" She didn't let me finish.

"Then don't," she advised, biting her lip. "But what if he takes it to heart? This is the initial stage of your relationship, Bella, and this stage is considered a sensitive one. Honestly, do what you think is right for you."

I hate it here.

Marcus returned with the drinks, thrusting one towards me. "Here, gulp it down in one go, Bella," he urged, already drinking himself and watching me intently. I hesitated, staring at the liquid in the red cup.

Just as I was about to take a sip, Ariella snatched the drink from my hand, causing it to spill on my dress, and downed it herself in one go.

"That was for Bella, Ariella!" Marcus exclaimed, his voice edged with anger.

Ariella licked her lips. "She looked like she didn't want it."

Marcus turned his furious gaze towards me. Had I made a mistake?

"Let's dance, guys!" Ariella announced, grabbing both mine and Marcus's hands.

"My dress is ruined, Ariella. It has alcohol spilled on it," I protested, turning to Marcus. "Where's the restroom?"

His lips tightened, "First door, second room. Go and get yourself cleaned up. I'll take Ariella to her friends," he instructed before leading her away.

In the dimly lit bathroom, I faced my reflection in the mirror, and what stared back at me was a distorted version of myself. The layers of poorly applied makeup seemed to mock me, accentuating every flaw and insecurity.

With trembling hands, I reached for the soap, desperate to rid myself of the facade that had caused me so much anguish. I scrubbed at my face relentlessly, the harsh friction of my fingers against my skin bordering on painful.

Tears mingled with the suds as I scrubbed, the sting of the soap serving as a painful reminder of my vulnerability.

I knew I wasn't beautiful, but I've seen makeup work wonders for girls like us who aren't conventionally pretty. But I felt like a lost cause; even makeup couldn't make me look any better. I couldn't shake the feeling that I was nothing but an ugly duckling.

Tonight was far from the magical evening I had envisioned, where I hoped for my first kiss with Marcus. With a sigh, I ran my hand through my hair in frustration and headed downstairs. Ariella and Marcus were nowhere in sight. I searched for them in vain, trying to call them, but there was no response.

I approached Ariella's friends, asking about her whereabouts. Some laughed, while others ignored me. Half an hour passed, and there was still no sign of either Ariella or Marcus. Feeling abandoned and alone, tears stung my eyes as I contemplated leaving the party.

Just then, a message from Marcus lit up my phone.

Marcus: "Ariella got sick so I took her to the hospital. She is fine now."

"Where are you guys? Which hospital? I'm coming."

Marcus sent another message: "I have handled the situation. It will take me some time here, and then I need to drop Ariella off too. You go back home, Bella."

"Ok. Take care of her."

At least they were here.

Leaving Steven's house, I booked a cab and waited. My brows furrowed when I noticed Marcus's car still in the parking lot. Hadn't he taken Ariella to the hospital? And if he did, why leave his car behind?

I walked back inside and approached Steven. "Steven?"

He turned to me with confusion. "Who are you?"

"Bella Harrington. Your classmate? Marcus's girlfriend," I replied incredulously. How could he not recognize me? We had been in the same class for two years.

His eyebrows shot up. "Of course, I know you. I was just kidding."

"Where is Marcus? His car is parked outside, but he's not here," I pressed.

Steven glanced around briefly. "Uh, yeah, he took mine. He had some emergency, I don't know what, and I gave him the keys. The rest, I'm not sure. Now, if you'll excuse me."

With that, he left, and I departed the house once more, feeling foolish. I sent another text to Ari as I sat in the cab: "Get well soon."

Arriving back home, I cleaned myself up and sat on the bed. Tonight hadn't gone as planned but I convinced myself that there would be other chances in the future.