

A woman in a grey blazer and skirt is walking past a stone planter filled with pink flowers. The scene is outdoors, and the woman is looking down at something in her hands. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the garden or park setting.

Dress and the Life That Happens in Between

By
Jeanie Castillo

Dress and the Life That Happens in Between

By

Jeanie Castillo

Foreword

Fashion has played a major role in the relationship Jeanie Castillo and I have had from the beginning. As Jeanie's boyfriend of many years, I have always known her to be quite the fashionista who takes pride in her own sense of style, regardless of trends and "rules." Through her dress she expresses her feelings and the wide spectrum of where her emotions can go. She has worn pieces that have stood out in my mind that I will never forget.

A little red dress that cinched in at her small waist and flared out making her look breathtakingly beautiful stands out vividly. A beautiful evening out to eat with my love, remained engrained in my mind so much that she became associated with the red dressed dancing emoji on her contact. Jeanie takes her time getting ready before leaving her house. Whether it be in comfy jeans and sneakers with a subtle matching oversized t shirt, or to a brunch event where she donned a monochromatic look from head to toe. This was after a recent haircut which made her look lovely as it accentuated her collarbone and displayed her cheekbones.

The way she manages to envision looks and piece them together always amazes me, so much so that I constantly seek her advice and approval. I appreciate her vision and aim to look my best because of her. I do my best to remind her of her creativity as it shows in her fashion, drawings, paintings and styling. She has an amazing eye and is someone I trust as a creative.

Christopher Vargas

Table of Content

Prologue	pg. VII
Dedication	pg. IX
Saddle Shoes	pg. 1
Favorite Overalls	pg. 4
1 st Communion Dress.....	pg. 7
J.Lo Tank T.....	pg. 10
Lily Tattoo	pg. 13
Denim Mini Dress	pg. 16
Prom Dress	pg. 20
Aviator Coat	pg. 23
Romper	pg. 26
My Sister's Little Black Dress	pg. 29
Cropped Turtleneck	pg. 32
Suede Moto Jacket	pg. 35
Pussy Bow Blouse	pg. 38
New Hair, Who this?	pg. 41
Sequin Midi Skirt	pg. 44
About the Author	pg. 48

Prologue

Despite the events that might transpire, *dress* has always been a way to remember all the special moments, as well as the horrific ones. Without *dress*, the events and situations Jeanie experienced in that moment might not have been remembered, the feelings could possibly have been forgotten and the emotions might not have meant as much. They are the reasons that make you feel alive.

The older Jeanie has gotten, the more she has realized that *dress* is something that you do for yourself and not for anyone else. You should *modify* your body in whatever manner pleases you and enjoy whatever *supplements* light up your soul.

*To my future self,
continue to be true to yourself, exude confidence
and f*%k what everyone else thinks*

Saddle Shoes

It was my first day attending P.S.8 Luis Belliard, located on 456 W 167thSt, New York, NY 10032. The school was brand new; nothing had ever been sat on, written on or touched. It was conveniently located across the street from my house which made the commute extremely speedy. I had just turned seven and was entering the second grade.

My mother wanted me to look my best, so she decided that I wear my sister's old saddle shoes with my new school uniform. I DESPISED THOSE SHOES!! They were black and white and had a perforated outline along the edges. They appeared to be brand new, not a single scuff on them. My sister had slender feet in comparison to mine, so as soon as I slid my foot inside the shoe, the pinching had commenced. They were too long, so it felt as though I was flopping around in clown shoes. The fact that they were my sister's hand me downs made it worse, I hated dressing like her, everyone said that we looked a lot alike, but I could not see it.

The uniform was made up of a midnight navy jumper skirt and a canary yellow peter pan collared shirt. The skirt was made out of wool which made it super itchy when it touched my skin, especially in the blazing summer heat. The shirt was super thin, I was forced to wear an undershirt. It made everything look lumpy and unpolished which was exactly what my mother was trying to avoid but forced me to wear regardless. My mother parted my hair to the side and placed a hairclip to keep my hair from falling into my eyes throughout the day.

As we were about to leave, I could hear my future classmates' screams and I felt my heart begin to pound out of my chest and my stomach begin to tie up in knots. The thought of going to a new school with a whole group of people I did not know terrified me. I took each step as slowly as possible to delay the inevitable. I heard

the clacking from the wooden soles of the shoes on the marble steps. My mom got impatient with me and grabbed my hand. I tried to hold on to the banister, but my grip just wasn't strong enough. We quickly exited the building and I felt the scorching sun on my skin, I had to immediately close my eyes to avoid "going blind" from the sun, as my mother would say.

She dropped me off in the entrance and I was escorted to my new classroom. The day was progressing rather quickly, it was finally time for lunch. We lined up in two single file lines and made our way down to the cafeteria. As the class quickly rushed inside, I noticed that the flooring was slightly slippery compared to the rest of the school and the wooden soles from the shoes was making it quite difficult for me to walk. I was slipping and sliding my way to the lunch line. I knew that I had to be as careful as possible walking towards a table. I gathered my lunch and began my most dreaded walk. I felt like Bambi taking his first steps.

As soon as I made it to the middle of the cafeteria, I experienced my worst nightmare, I slipped and landed on my bum in front of everyone. My lunch tray clashed onto the floor and the milk spilled everywhere, I was mortified. I kept my eyes tightly shut and prayed that no one noticed but unfortunately, the deafening laughter began creeping in through my paralyzing fear. I opened my eyes and the first thing I saw were those hideous saddle shoes. I quickly stood up and with tears streaming down my face and slowly walked out. I vowed to never wear those horrible saddle shoes, EVER AGAIN!



Favorite Overalls

It was a nice fall day, the sun was blinding but there was a wintery breeze, the kind that gave you goosebumps and made your arm hair stand up. I was in third grade and was finally allowed to dress myself. I looked inside my drawer and surprise, surprise I decided to wear my favorite pair of oversized medium wash denim overalls. I remember begging my mother to buy them for me, but she had refused because they were extremely oversized. One day, to my surprise she came home with them and I felt joy course through my body.

As I slipped them on, the soft cotton fabric glided along my skin so smoothly, I instantly felt confident, empowered and overall, stylish. It was the mid-nineties and oversized denim overalls were everywhere. I desperately wanted to emulate Destiny's child and T.L.C. They were popular all girl R&B groups from that time. They radiated a tough, edgy, do not f%\$k with me vibe, something that I wanted desperately to portray. I paired the overalls with a cropped raspberry long sleeved t-shirt. I looked in the mirror and instantly knew I had nailed the look I was going for.

I was on my way to P.S.8 Luis Belliard, 456 W 167thSt, New York, NY 10032. The day had finally arrived! I was allowed to miss out on class lecture and use the computer for an hour. I had been waiting for this day since the beginning of the school year. It was my first time using a computer, they were new to the school and I did not have one at home.

I walked into the classroom and instantly felt the freezing cold coming from the air conditioner. It was the beginning of fall and it did not make sense to have it on and as usual, I had forgotten to bring my jacket. This had become a regular occurrence for me. I sat in class shivering as I anxiously stared at the clock. Out of nowhere, I felt a sharp stab on my shoulder, it was finally my turn! I ran to the

computer, quickly sat down and logged on with my assigned username and password. I had one hour to complete sixty problems, it seemed impossible, but I was up for the task.

Only thirty minutes in and I felt the urge to go to the bathroom. I thought to myself, 'it can wait, lets finish this!'. I continued clicking the mouse and slamming my fingers on the keys, the need to urinate had only intensified. The tapping reminded me of water droplets, the freezing cold from the air conditioner only intensified the urge. I began to do the 'pee dance' in my seat when I noticed that there were only three minutes left. FINALLY! I had finished the exercises; the timer had ended, and I was automatically logged off. I quickly stood up and tried to run to the bathroom.

As I was on my way, I had to take short breaks to interlock my legs in order to keep the urine from escaping. I had finally made it to the bathroom after what felt like an eternity. I rapidly began unclipping the straps and unbuttoning the side buttons. I started to wiggle my way out but to my unfortunate surprise, I felt the warmness from the urine run down my legs. I knew it was too late. I felt ashamed, humiliated; I did not know what to do. I was betrayed by my favorite overalls. They no longer gave me the confidence and coolness I had associated with them, now all they brought was shame. There was no way I could face another human being smelling like urine, so I stayed in the stall and contemplated all the decisions that lead me to that humiliating moment.



1st Communion Dress

I had been attending Sunday classes and going to weekly mass service for two years. The time had finally arrived, I was going to be able to wear a beautiful white dress and receive my first communion sacrament. I was ten years old and was forced by my mother to carry out Catholic religious beliefs. I did not quite understand why she pushed this on me. She was not even baptized.

I asked my mother when we were going to go shop for my dress and she said, "*nosotros no vamos a comprar un vestido nuevo para un día, tu te vas a poner el vestido de Wendy*". When I heard that I was not getting my own beautiful white dress and had to wear my sister's old dress I was heartbroken. I was looking forward to the dress, it was the only thing that made getting up early on Sundays and sitting in a classroom for two hours, and then Sunday mass for another hour worth it. I could not believe my ears; it just could not be. The rage had built up so much so that my eyes began to water. I quickly turned away and ran to my room.

That Sunday morning, I woke up and saw the hideousness that was my sister's dress. My sister, Wendy, is six years older than me so the dress was extremely dated. It had huge poufy short sleeves, a mock neck neckline, a thick sash along the waistline which flared out into layers upon layers of tulle. The entire dress was made out of the scratchiest polyester fabric and was covered in floral beadwork which made it look even tackier. I stepped into the dress and immediately felt the fabric scratching at my skin. As my mother brushed my hair the itchiness only intensified, I imagined breaking out in hives due to the disgusting fabric but to my surprise I was just fine. My mother handed me a pair of white patent leather Mary-janes and placed an elaborate crown with exaggerated veil attached. I felt like the ugliest bride. How could I allow anyone to see me like this.

As we walked to Saint Rose of Lima Church, on 510 W 165th St. New York, NY 10032 I could feel the darted stares. I knew they were looking at me, in the most negative way possible. We arrived at the church after what felt like an eternity. I sat down in the pew and just waited for the ceremonial mass to conclude. As soon as the service was over and my parents captured every movement possible on film, I darted up the stairs and practically tore that dress off. I was relieved to not have it touch my body anymore, I was also thankful that the day was over and there was no need for me to ever set eyes on that dress again.



J.Lo Tank Top

As soon as I walked out of the Mirabal Sisters campus, 21 Jumel Pl, New York, NY 10032, I felt beads of sweat forming on my nose and upper lip. The sweat caused my glasses to slide down my nose, I instinctively pushed them back in place. The day was exceptionally warm for a spring afternoon. You could feel the humidity in the air which made my hair double in width so I was forced to tie it in a low ponytail.

I had on a thin, ribbed white cardigan that I immediately took off. It exposed my semi sheer cream-colored tank top which was slightly cropped and had salmon colored lace along the scooped neckline as well as the straps. I paired it with extremely low rise, flared jeans that were in a vibrant blue wash and my white Nike uptowns. The tank top was rather scandalous for an eighth grader to be wearing and I knew that. I had begged my mother to buy it for me but when she refused, I went back into Macy's and stole it for myself. It was from Jenifer Lopez, better known as J.Lo's new clothing line.

I was enamored by that tank top, mostly because I had seen J.Lo wear a similar one in one of her music videos at the time and I wanted to radiate the same sex appeal as she did. The scooped neckline accentuated my supple breast which were being pushed up by my visible bra. I was there to serve sex and that was exactly what I was doing. I had finally grown out of that awkward phase, no more baby fat, clown feet and a nose that was too big for my face. I had finally blossomed, and I wanted everybody to notice.

It was a typical Friday afternoon; school had just let out and my friends and I had decided to walk around the neighborhood in search of attention, something we were desperately craving. We walked in a little huddle, laughing and joking around, no one around us mattered, we were everything. We talked about boys, who was cute, who was not, who liked who, and so on.

We had finally noticed our surroundings and realized that no one was outside besides us, that is when the storm began. The droplets were so heavy and were falling down so quickly that I could not distinguish one from the other. It felt as if someone was pouring a continuous stream of water directly on me. I was soaked instantly; my tank top was no longer visible, I appeared to be wearing only my bra , but I did not care, it just added to the overall appeal. At first, we tried to run for cover but quickly shifted gears and decided to run in the rain.

I looked up with my mouth wide open, relishing in the feeling of the water slapping my face. It was painful but rather soothing at the same time. I began to spin around in circles and jump into what could only be described as small lakes without a thought in my mind. Although the tank top was initially meant to provide sex appeal it offered something greater that I was not expecting, freedom. I felt free from the need for attention, free from the world, free of my need to conform, nothing else mattered except for me and the rain.



Lily Tattoo

After months of planning I was officially getting my first tattoo. I was sixteen years old and knew this was something I had to hide from my parents. They were extremely against tattoos. For as long as I could remember, I was always telling my parents that one day I would be covered in a plethora of tattoos. We would continuously get into serious debates surrounding the reasons why I should not get any tattoos. They will be on you forever, what if you do not like them later on, you are damaging your skin, it will prevent you from getting a job in the future and so on . After years and years of going back and forth, trying to reason with them, I decided that this was my body and I had the right to *modify* it in whatever manner I saw fit.

It was an early October afternoon, me and my friend Jenay exited the George Washington Educational Campus, located on 549 Audubon Ave, New York, NY 10040 and went straight into a tattoo parlor located close by. We were both getting tattoos that day and knew exactly what we wanted. She went first, as I was a bit scared of how painful it would be. She explained to the tattoo artist what she wanted, he sketched it out and began the tattooing process. After about an hour it was ultimately my turn.

I sat down, told the guy exactly what I wanted. I even went as far as to bring printed images of several drawings that I was fond of, just to provide some visual suggestions. He sketched out the drawing and once I had confirmed that it was exactly what I wanted the process began. I lowered my jeans to expose my hip. He unboxed a brand-new razor and shaved off any hair/ dead skin that was on the area. He then applied a cleanser onto my skin to make sure it was as clean as possible. He applied the sketch, pressed on it firmly to ensure that the outline remained on my skin and then peeled it away.

He replaced the needle on the machine, set up the different colored inks in tiny containers and leaned in.

When he placed the tattoo gun onto my skin I flinched. I was shocked by the pain. After the initial discomfort, I remained still for the rest of the process. It became quite difficult when he reached my hipbone with the needle but somehow, I managed to stay still. After he was finished with the outline he began to color in the tattoo. The circling of the gun to shade in the tattoo caused more discomfort than the outline. After he was done shading, he cleaned the tattoo, applied a thick ointment and covered it with saran wrap.

When I got home that evening, I removed the tape, peeled off the saran wrap and marveled at my beautiful lily. The stem was a vibrant green and the petals were an ombre of pink, orange and yellow. I was completely in love. I looked at myself in the mirror and felt as though I had gained a part of me that should have been there all along. I occasionally catch myself caressing the tattoo and being in awe of how different the texture is on that particular part of my body.



Denim Mini Dress

It was the summer of 2005, and I was having the laziest, most boring day ever, lounging on the couch, flipping through the channels. That is when the house phone rang. I picked up, I heard my friends, Tiffany and Elizabeth yelling “*b%&*\$h, get ready!*”. I immediately hung up and ran to the bathroom.

I hopped into the shower, grabbed the shaving cream, lathered up and began to shave off every hair from my body. I got out of the shower and made sure to dry every crevice on my body, I hated feeling wet, it gave me the feeling of having sweat on my skin. Once I was completely dry, I dunked my palm into a tub of body butter and began to massage it onto my smooth, freshly exfoliated skin, I glistened like a baby seal.

I opened my drawer, and instantly knew what I wanted to wear my new baby phat denim tube mini dress. It was a light wash denim with a frayed hem and ribbed canary, cerulean and white band across the top, it hugged my body perfectly and accentuated all my curves. I paired the dress with plain white slides, in order to not interfere with what clearly was the main focus. I brushed out all the knots in my hair, did two front twists, and clipped it in the back. I was ready to head out, I called Tiffany back to see where we should meet, and she told me to go to her house and we could head out from there.

Once I arrived at 587 West 177thSt, New York, NY 10033, I saw Tiffany and Elizabeth waiting for me downstairs. They told me that they had spoken to some guys we knew, and that we were going to meet them at their house in the Bronx. I was kind of excited since the guy I liked was going to be there. We walked to 181st and Broadway and took the BX3 bus to University Ave/ West 183rdStreet, the bus had no air conditioner and it was incredibly crowded. When we finally arrived, I developed a sticky layer on top of my skin from the sweat and the body butter, I instantly regretted it. I grabbed some

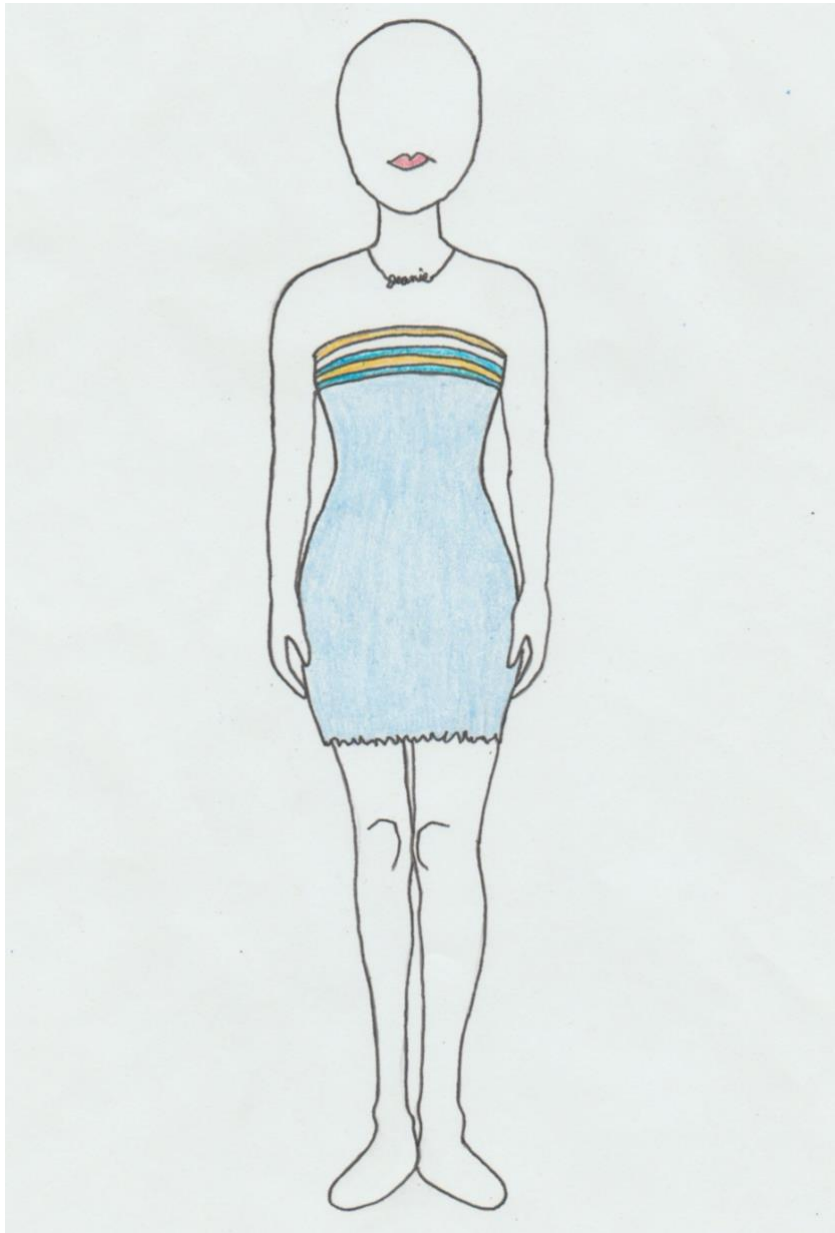
baby wipes out of my purse and tried to wipe off the grime from my skin. We crossed the street and the music was bumping. People were listening and dancing to music on the sidewalks, drinking their four loko covered by a paper bag, and smoking weed out in broad daylight.

Once we got to their apartment, we were greeted with huge hugs and pecks on the cheek. We walked into the living room and they immediately asked, “*do you ladies want anything to drink?*”. Of course, we all said “*yes!*” in unison and laughed. They brought out a bottle of Cîroc vodka and a carton of fruit punch. They made our drinks super sweet; I knew we were heading down a dangerous path, but I went against my instincts anyways and tried to let loose. After a few drinks, the music turned on and the dancing began, my inhibitions were completely altered.

I opened my eyes and saw all of us dancing and singing “*Con tu chulin culin cun fly abro la boca y mi lengua se cae. Ojalai, ojalai. Ojalai y que tú seas mi mai*”. I opened them again and was being pulled towards the bedroom. My crush began kissing my neck. It felt so good that I did not even try to fight it. I softly moaned into his ear, and that is when he lifted me up. I wrapped my legs around his waist and he held me up by tightly grasping my behind. When I opened my eyes, we were on the bed and he had me pinned down underneath him. I knew this shouldn’t be happening, I wanted to get out but when I tried to move away, I was held down by his sheer strength and bodyweight, I felt weakened in my drunken state. I yelled, “*Help!*” but no one heard me through the music. I kept my eyes tightly shut as I sank down into a comatose state.

The next time I opened my eyes I was in my bed wearing the same ridiculous dress. I tried to get up, but my entire body was completely sore. I finally gained the strength to crawled out of bed, when I realized that I was home alone. I went to the bathroom, looked at myself in the mirror and felt disgusted. I washed my face,

brushed the disgusting taste of liquor out of my mouth. I walked into the kitchen, grabbed a bag and stripped down. I shoved everything I was wearing into the bag, tied it up and tossed it out the window. I did not want any reminders of that damn denim dress. Something I had loved so much because it made me feel sexy was now tainted by the events of that horrible day.



Prom Dress

Senior Prom was just a month away and I had yet to find the perfect dress. It was a Saturday afternoon and me, my mother and my sister, Wendy, were on our way to New Jersey to visit David's Bridal, on 153 NJ-4 West, Paramus, NJ 07652 for my sister's second wedding dress fitting.

When Wendy stepped into the dressing room to try on her dress, I spotted a black strapless tulle dress from the corner of my eye. Before she made it back out, I ran towards the dress and pulled it out of the rack. The dress was gorgeous. It was everything I did not know I needed. The majority of the dress was black, except for the bodice which had white embroidered flowers scattered throughout. It had a scalloped neckline which was outlined in white embroidery. The waistline had a satin pleated sash which was very reminiscent of a cummerbund. The dress flared out into a massive ballgown style skirt made out of tulle which hit me midcalf. I looked around and it was the only one they had. I quickly checked to see if it was a size four and luckily it was. I ran back to my mother and showed her the dress. I went into the dressing room, tried it on and as soon as I stepped out, we all knew I had on "the dress".

A month later, the day had finally arrived. I woke up super early so I could have enough time to pamper myself and get all beautified for that night. I threw on sweats, brushed my teeth and went to get my nails done. I decided to go with a classic French manicure, simple but definitely not understated. Afterwards, I went down the block to the hair salon to get a blow-out. I remained under the dryer for an hour and a half. Then they began to pass the blower to smooth out all the frizz, I was stranded there for at least three hours minimum.

I would never understand why Hispanic beauty salons took forever to do hair. My mother thought it would be special to get my

makeup professionally done at MAC, so we made our way to Yonkers. The makeup artist did a sultry smokey eye with a blush nude lip. All that was missing was the dress.

When we got back home, I carefully took a bath. I did not want to ruin my hair or smudge my makeup. I stepped out, intensely dried myself and then lathered myself with lotion. I wanted to be soft to the touch. I went into my room and stepped into the dress. It fit like a glove. My hourglass figure was heavily accentuated by the pleated waistband and substantially flared out skirt. I put on my black strappy sandals, which were encrusted with crystals. I accessorized the entire ensemble with a Swarovski crystal pendant, bracelet and matching earrings. I sprayed on one of my mother's many perfumes and just like that I was ready to go.

My mother took me to my friend's house where we were all meeting. We all stood around as our parents took endless amounts of pictures. The white hummer limo we had rented for the night had finally arrived. We all crammed ourselves inside and were officially on our way to experience a night we would never forget. The entire evening my classmates kept approaching me, proclaiming how amazing I looked. I felt like a celebrity on the red carpet, "*who are you wearing, you look stunning!*".



Aviator Coat

It was December 30, 2010, when me and my cousins, Sasha and Leslie were on our way to Newark international airport, 3 Brewster Rd, Newark, NJ 07114. I was Twenty-two years old and was finally going on a vacation without my parents. The thought of not having my parents around exhilarated me to no end. It was four o'clock in the morning and there was no noise, the streets were completely empty. I had my window completely open, the crisp, freezing air was smacking my face preventing my motion sickness. My mother began to complain, "*muchacha del diablo, sube esa Ventana*".

I was wearing a knitted heather grey sweater that was ribbed along the waist and wrists, a pair of blue, medium wash, low rise skinny jeans, my favorite pair of combat boots, they were so worn in that the brown had faded into a deep cognac color, they looked completely vintage. I had on my cognac aviator coat with an oatmeal shearling lined interior. When I wore that coat, I felt like a pilot in a cockpit, ready to fly off into the unknown. Very similar to what was about to happen. I was about to partake into a new adventure. We entered the airport and I felt like I was entering this whole new world. Everything looked completely different, it had a new appeal now that I was "alone". I was nervous and anxious; I didn't know where to go, I took a deep breath, relaxed and began to make my way through the airport. We quickly made it to our terminal and noticed that they had begun boarding.

I started to feel as if I were being suffocated by the coat. The walls began to close in on me and I could barely catch my breath. We were literally trapped in there like a can of sardines, no space to move, not enough air to breath, and the coat had created this blistering heat that I could not escape. I felt my skin throbbing, I was in hell. Once the plane began to take speed I began to cool down and

started to feel more relaxed. The coat was definitely made for air travel. In no time at all the plane had landed, the passengers began to clap, and we were in the Dominican Republic.

We were picked up at the airport and made our way to San Jose de Ocoa, a small *pueblo* (town) on top of a mountain where our family is from. We had arrived at our grandmother's house. We quickly changed out of our heavy winter gear, grabbed a bottle of Brugal rum, a couple of Presidente light beers and officially started our parent free vacation.

My aviator coat hung next to my bed as a reminder that I would soon be leaving paradise and be returning to New York City's treacherous winter weather. Those 2 weeks passed by with a snap of my fingers. In no time, we were on our way back down the mountain's spiraling road and at the airport where we found ourselves settling into a deep depressive state at the thought of it all being over.



Romper

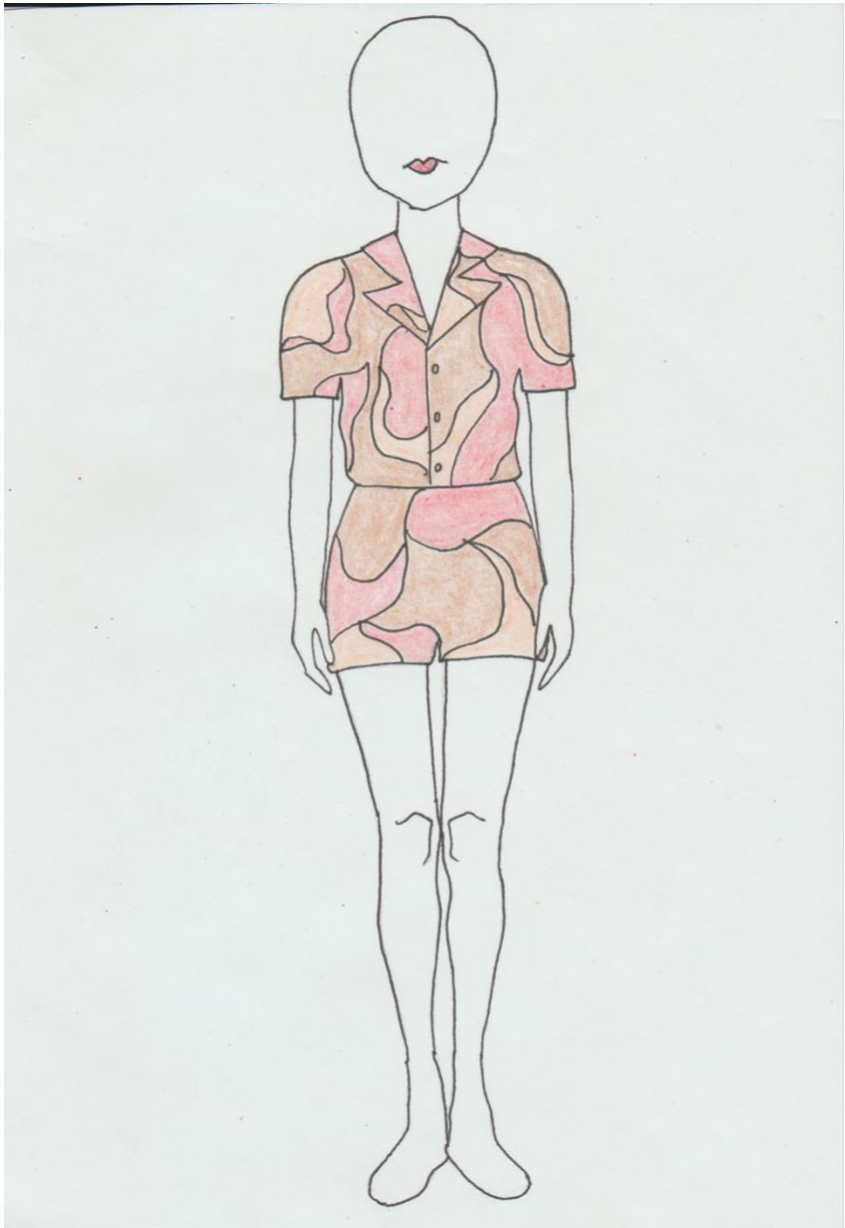
The air conditioner was on high, but I could still feel the heat breaking in through the poorly insulated walls. It was a hot July night and I had just finished washing my hair. The heat had quickly air dried it, so I pulled out the flat iron and began slowly passing it through my hair. My hair sizzled and smoked on the dampened areas. I sectioned off piece by piece until my entire head was finished; nice, smooth, glossy hair, it looked so luxurious. I went to the bathroom, brushed my teeth, twice and splashed water on my face.

I had begun my nightly cleansing routine. I lathered up the cleanser and turned on the clarisonic, as the brush swirled and vibrated the dirt and grime off my skin, I instantly felt squeaky clean. I dried my skin, applied toner, waited until it dried, salicylic acid, waited until it dried, glycolic acid, again waited until it dried and then my nighttime moisturizing mask, my routine was rather extensive but having clear skin was my biggest priority. I had suffered from debilitating acne and I would do anything not to experience that again. I noticed that it was two in the morning and I had to wake up in less than five hours so I ran into bed and quickly went to sleep.

I woke up the next day, walked quickly to the bathroom took a nice cold shower and began to pass the razor on my legs to remove any overnight growth. I tiptoed to my room and got dressed. I slid my legs through the romper and wiggled the waist past my hips, I hunched over to get my arms into the sleeves and began to button up the center. The romper consisted of a flowy short sleeved collared top and short shorts, it had a geometric print which was colored in coral, desert taupe, and a cool brown. I decided to pair the outfit with salmon colored thong sandals. I untied my hair and grabbed my suitcase but before I walked out the door, I examined myself in the mirror. I felt vibrant, the colors danced off the romper, plus it was airy so I knew I was Miami ready.

I ran down the stairs and jumped into the car. That is when I saw my cousins Leslie and Rosalina, we all exchanged huge grins. We rapidly reached the airport, scanned our passports, printed out our tickets and began to run down the terminal, the slapping of our feet on the floor and the rolling of our carry-ons echoed throughout, we glanced at each other and began to laugh. We arrived at our terminal and were greeted by our group of friends who had gotten there before us. We instinctively lined up and began boarding, we all looked around at each other grinned ecstatically, the fun was about to begin in t-minus three hours.

The flight was brutal. The air conditioner was on high and I had on this super thin, romper. I was exposed with no way of keeping warm. I shrivel up in my seat and attempted to conceal my legs with my arms. I had not planned ahead for the actual plane ride. What was 3 hours felt like an eternity as I tried to keep warm. Once our flight officially landed in Miami International Airport. I quickly stood up and tried to make a break for it. I had planned for a sleek entrance into Miami but instead I looked like unpolished. The romper was covered in wrinkles from being huddled up in a ball for three hours. I tried to palm iron them out but it was no use. I clearly did not think this through.



My Sister's Little Black Dress

It was the morning of my grandmother's viewing and I did not have anything black to wear or any appropriate shoes so I had to borrow an outfit from my sister Wendy. She had loaned me her black sleeveless a line, tea length dress that had a thin black sash along the waistline and a pair of black pointed toe, sling back, kitten heels. Looking at the dress instantly made me feel matronly. The high neckline, the A-line tea length skirt, I felt too covered, too modest. The kitten heels didn't help much either. I was accustomed to wearing almost 4-inch heels, this was completely new to me. I had the ensemble laid out on my parents' bed and stared at it with pure disgust and disbelief.

My parents were away in the Dominican Republic and decided not to come back for the service since they would be shipping her body over there the very next day. I was home alone, and this was the first viewing I was allowed to attend. I stood in front of the mirror and began to flat iron my hair. I was taken aback when I began smelling burnt lavender, once I began to see smoke, I had realized that I lost focus of the task at hand and had burnt the hairs by the nape of my neck. I thought, 'no one is going to see that part anyways' and continued with the rest of my hair. I then began to work on my makeup, I wanted to look presentable and not as if I spent the entire night crying. Wendy called and told me that she was already on her way. I grabbed the dress off the bed and shimmied it over my hips. I turned around and glanced at myself in the mirror, I was completely unrecognizable.

We were on our way to Ortiz funeral home, 4425 Broadway, New York, NY 10040 and all I could think about was how lovely the day was and how my grandmother would have enjoyed taking a stroll in the park. When we finally arrived, I saw a remarkably large volume of people waiting outside, heading inside and entering the

funeral home's parking garage. It dawned on me how much my grandmother was loved and not just by me but by a whole group of people, a majority of which I had never even met. As we slowly made our way to the entrance everyone began expressing their condolences but I just didn't want to hear them, I tuned them out and only heard the loud horns honking, the people around us yelling, the birds chirping, the obscenely loud clacking of my heels on the concrete and I just wanted to yell for everything and everyone to JUST SHUT UP! I wanted to silence the world and possibly hear my grandmother's voice again. As I walked towards the casket, I held her in my heart and said goodbye for the very last time. I wasn't aware I was crying until my vision was blurred. My mascara and foundation streaked my face and I just couldn't believe that this was it. She was completely ripped away from me, I had lost that special love that you think will last a lifetime.

Once I got home, I stripped out of the dress and laid it delicately on the bed. It will forever hold a special connection with my grandmother which is why it has never been worn since. It lays in my closet in remembrance of a difficult day and our last goodbyes.



Cropped Turtleneck

It was my cousin Leslie's birthday and she had planned an outing to Bar None, 98 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10003. I wasn't particularly in the mood to go out, it was early November, the air was brisk, and the rain had dampened the festivities for me but none the less I had to make an appearance. I looked through my closet and grabbed a hunter green cropped turtleneck, which had belonged to my grandmother, of course I had made some alterations. As soon as I slipped the turtleneck on, I smelled my grandmother's scent, it was like magic. I deeply inhaled the strong floral scent. I felt her warmth wrap around me; I could feel her love once more. I paired it with some high waisted black acid wash skinny jeans, which I tucked into my suede cognac knee high boots. I was contemplating leaving my hair loose, but I instantly remembered the rain and the havoc that it would cause to it so I decided to tie it up in a top knot. I grabbed my dad's oversized jean jacket which I had stolen from his closet. Adding masculine pieces from the men in my life to my outfits always gave me a sense of power and confidence. I anxiously waited for my boyfriend Chris to arrive.

I ran down the stairs, made my way to the entrance, I pushed it open and the fresh smell from the rain hitting the concrete filled my nostrils. I loved the smell of the rain, there was something so fresh and pure about it. A few minutes later Chris stepped out of the cab, walked towards me, leaned down and delicately kissed my lips. The sheer thought of receiving more of his kisses changed my perspective of the night. Chris gently grabbed my hand as we walked to the train. While we waited on the platform, he put his arms around me and kissed my forehead, it was so sweet, so tender, I could stay in his embrace forever. The A train was arriving, the noise was deafening, the wind blew dust straight into my eyes, I shut my eyes

and quickly looked away. We got on the train and made our way downtown.

We stepped out of the station and the rain had turned into a light drizzle. The rain lightly touched my cheeks and streaked my glasses. We walked into the bar and I instantly saw Leslie; she was surrounded by all her coworkers. She forcefully hugged me and shoved a drink in my hand. Chris walked up to the bar and got himself a drink. After a few hours of dancing I felt like it was time for me to go. It was already late, and the commute back home was going to be hell. Chris and I quickly said our goodbyes and made our way back to the train. The train was packed, Chris and I cuddled up in a corner and I unknowingly fell asleep in his arms. Next thing I knew we had gotten to my stop and was so close to being in my bed. The night had gotten rather chilly, so I wrapped my arms around Chris for warmth and support. We finally made it to the front of my building, I pulled out my keys, opened the door and walked inside.

Chris pulled me by my hand and wrapped me in his arms. I felt the heat radiating off his body, it was nice and inviting. He squeezed me in his arms and kissed my forehead. I looked up and stared him right in his eyes, my heart was fluttering, he pressed his lips onto mine and as he pulled away, he said "*I love you*". I felt as if my heart had expanded twice its size and my chest was struggling to restrain it. I quickly said, "*I love you too*" and kissed him passionately. Just like that, his cab arrived, and he had to leave. We said our goodbyes between multiple kisses, and I watched him walk away. There was an intense rush coursing through my body, I felt as if I could fly. I floated up the stairs and got ready for bed. As I took off my grandmother's turtleneck, I inhaled her perfume and felt an overwhelming amount of love in my life. I laid in bed that night and couldn't help but think of us and our future and the love my grandmother had shared with us that night.



Suede Moto Jacket

I could see my breath as I exhaled, it was a cold October morning, and I had woken up late that day. I ran into the bathroom, quickly brushed my teeth, rinsed my mouth with mouthwash and jumped in the shower. I was in there no more than five minutes when my mother began knocking, telling me to hurry up. I rapidly dried myself and instinctively threw on a pair of marbled black and white leggings, a pair of black Nikes with neon orange laces, a black leopard adrenalize varsity tee. There was a lot going on but for some reason it just felt right, I felt confident, comfortable and ready to take on the day. I grabbed my suede burgundy moto jacket; the smell of the suede memorized me, it was fresh, captivating, there was something about it that I didn't want to cover up with perfume. When I slid my arm inside the sleeve, I felt the smooth, slippery silk brush up against my skin, I was instantly cooled. I knew it wasn't the smartest garment to wear in order to stay warm that day, but boy did I feel like a badass b&*\$h.

Me and my boyfriend Chris were on our way to Cancun, Mexico. We desperately needed a break from the hectic city life, so we purchased the tickets a month prior, kind of a spur of the moment thing. It was our first vacation together and our first-time visiting Cancun which was thrilling. My heart was fluttering from all the excitement that was soon to come.

As we made our way through the airport, I felt all the commotion going on around us. The strange aroma from the mixture of the different cuisines filled the air, people were ruffling through their bags, laughing, yelling, awkward glances and then suddenly a group of people randomly flashed by us, clearly, they were running late, Chris and I both shared a chuckle as we watched them race by with their bags flailing in the air. We passed through a couple of doors and suddenly it seemed as though we had entered an alternate

universe. All of the previous noises had completely vanished and the wheels from our carry-ons intensified and echoed throughout the terminal, it was somewhat peaceful. We began boarding the plane as soon as we arrived at the terminal. In as little as four hours we'd be in sunny, hot Cancun, and I couldn't wait.

Our plane had officially landed in Cancun, Mexico. As soon as we walked into the hotel, I could smell the fresh greenery, the gentle sound of the water droplets falling into the pond, it was so peaceful, so soothing. All the greenery made me feel as if we were transported to the center of a jungle, the ivy was cascading down from the top floor covering all the open space, the ceiling had a sunroof which allowed the sun to shine straight through, it felt so open, so tranquil, this was the perfect place to relax. As we changed out of our airport clothes, I caressed the suede jacket and wished that I could continue wearing it, but it was not weather appropriate.

We explored the resort and allowed the scent of the ocean consume us. We quickly stumbled across a taqueria that was located inside the hotel and I tasted my first authentic Mexican taco, it was like nothing I've ever had before. The combination of all these different flavors marinating in my mouth, it was ecstasy. After we had our fill of tacos, we made our way to the bar across the taqueria and ordered frozen strawberry daiquiris. We got our drinks, lounged on a nice private daybed, enjoyed our drinks and each other. In no time at all, I was back to wearing the suede moto jacket but this time around I did not wish to be caressed by the slippery silk but instead by the steaming sun.



Pussy-Bow Blouse

After months of attending church school and going to “mandatory” weekly Sunday Mass it was finally time to receive my confirmation. I was never fully invested in religion. Don’t get me wrong, I am not an atheist, I believe there is something greater out in the universe, but I was not completely sold that it was this powerful all-knowing God. What I had come to learn was that to believe in God is to have faith. I put myself through all of this for my nephew, Nicholas. My sister had asked me to be his godmother and I was so honored I could not decline. I have always shared a special connection with him. I was a nurturing figure for the first three months of his life, it was me and him day in and day out. I knew I had to be there for him on this special occasion.

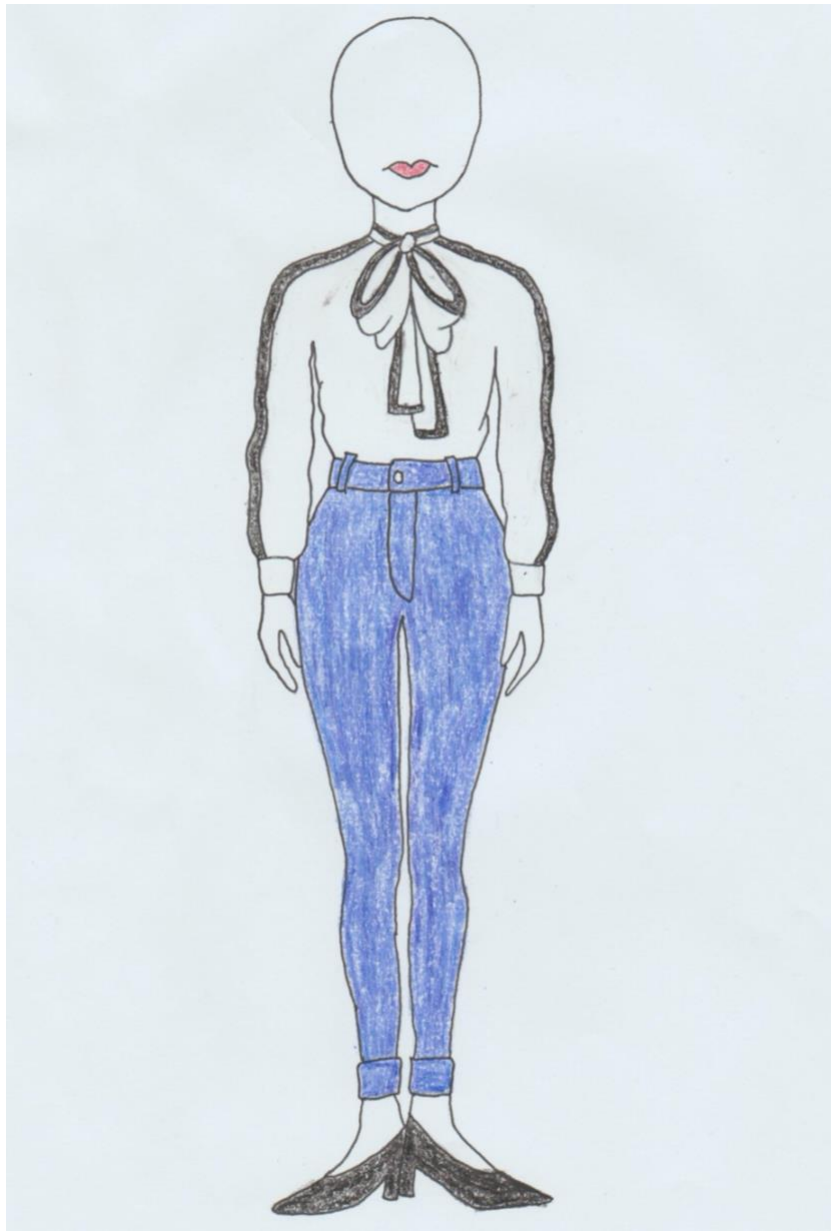
It was a chilly spring day; the air was so dry, I felt like I had survived days in the Sahara Desert. I took a sip of water and instantly felt the cold liquid run down my throat and cool my chest. I glanced at the time and decided I should start getting ready I stepped into the shower and was greeted by sharp stabs of ice-cold water, there was no hot water, great. I bathed as hurriedly as possible and hopped out. As soon as my feet hit the floor and draped the towel over my shoulders, I felt a warm sensation enter my body and go up my spine. I tiptoed to my room, being extra careful not to slip. I sat down and began applying my makeup.

I meticulously blended my foundation, concealed my under-eye bags, applied my bronzer and blush, added a lot of mascara and bam, I was done. I looked inside my closet and decided to wear my new pussy-bow blouse. It was semi sheer with black piping along the edges which really helped the oversized bow stand out, it also had a thick black stripe extending from the neckline, down the shoulders and to the wrists. It made me feel polished and put together, a businesswoman ready to massacre the boardroom. I added a pair of

ultra-high waisted rinse wash skinny jeans and some black pumps with gold spikes throughout, it gave the outfit that little edginess that it needed. I felt sophisticated and regal but still appropriate for church.

My mother, sister and I gathered up our things and made our way down the stairs. The clicking and clacking from our heels echoed throughout the building. I immediately grabbed the railing because I felt like in any second, I would nosedive down the stairs, the perspective from that height was completely disorienting. Once we got downstairs our uber was already waiting.

We had finally arrived at the Church of Our Lady Esperanza, 624 W 156th St, New This was the first sacrament I was getting elsewhere and it was mostly due to the fact that my priest was going to be there and the mass was going to be in English, which meant a shorter service. After what felt like an eternity the priest had finally called forward the confirmation class to take part of the eucharist and the holy wine. As I made my way back to my pew, I looked at my sister with a wide grin on my face, I had ultimately finished and was on my way the very next week to becoming my nephew's godmother. My heart filled with so much joy. My *dress* provided the extra faith I needed in order to handle the new responsibilities.



New Hair, Who This?

After twenty-three years of keeping my hair as long as Rapunzel's, I had decided to chop it all off. It was the summer of 2018 and I could not manage to withstand the scolding heat any longer. Every time I did my hair I was immediately forced to tie it up into a top knot due to the sweat and heat that was formulating on the back of my neck. In the whim of the moment I decided to walk to a beauty salon that was located not more than two blocks from my house on, 2232 Amsterdam Ave, New York 10032. I strolled in and told the hairdresser that I wanted to cut my hair.

She quickly took me to the back and asked me to sit down in the shampoo station so she could wash my hair. She placed the sprayer hose directly onto my scalp and the freezing water instantly numbed me. She asked, "*Esta muy fria la agua?*" and I replied, "*demasiado*". She adjusted the temperature and began scratching the crown of my head.

She lathered my scalp multiple times to confirm that it was squeaky clean. After she rinsed out all of the shampoo remnants she applied the conditioner. She smeared the substance all over my scalp, grabbed a wide tooth comb and began aggressively yanking at my hair. I thought I was going to be left bald when she was finished, but miraculously I still had a majority of my hair. She wringed out my hair and wrapped it in a microfiber towel. She gestured to first chair on the left and said, "*Siéntate*". She placed the smock over me and asked me, "*Por a donde lo quiere?*". I grazed the top of my shoulder and told her, "*Por ahi, mas o menos*". She grabbed the scissors and that's when I knew there was no backing down.

She took the first snip and I automatically cringed. I instantly flashed back to when I was seven years old and my mother had informed the hairdresser behind my back to cut it above my shoulders. When I had realized what she had done I instantly began to cry. I took a deep breath and told myself that this was something that I wanted to do. No one was forcing me.

She placed the scissors down and that is when I looked in the mirror, I could not believe what I had done. It was too short; I was completely out of my comfort zone. She pulled out the blower and the round brush; and began drying my hair. Little by little I started to notice the hairstyle come together. It no longer looked like I had a wet dog on my head, I appeared more sophisticated and grown. When the hairdresser was finished I could not stop thanking her. She had managed to eliminate all of my doubts and fears caused by my previous traumatization and make what I had envisioned come to life.

When I stepped out I felt this new wave of confidence course through my body. It was definitely different; I could no longer hide behind my long hair, something that I had grown accustomed to. I was there to be seen and everyone had to take notice.



Sequin Midi Skirt

After a year of longing, the day had finally arrived. I was going to see Ed Sheeran in concert, my excitement could not be contained. I woke up early that day, walked into the bathroom and grabbed my toothbrush from the holder, added toothpaste and began brushing my teeth. I was starving and felt this day was deserving of my favorite Dominican breakfast, *tres golpes*. It consists of *mangu*, which is mashed up plantains; fried cheese, fried eggs, Dominican salami and pickled onions. It was finally time to begin pampering myself.

I went into the shower and began washing my hair. I knew I wanted to let it air dry which would take several hours. I lathered up my scalp, rinsed, and repeated multiple times until I could actually hear my hair go "*squeak, squeak!*". I then began shaving my legs. Once I got the shower, I wrapped my hair in a microfiber towel, put on a fuzzy robe and began filing my nails. I looked through all my KL polishes and grabbed my favorite, "Hug & Roll", a FRIENDS show reference. It was an extremely light lavender, so light that it almost appeared to be white. Once my nails dried, I began my extensive face washing routine. I cleansed, applied serums and moisturized my face and body.

I looked into my drawer, pulled out my primer, foundation, concealer, powder, bronzer, blush, highlight, eyebrow pencil and mascara and began to beat my face. I needed it to look flawless. I bounced the beauty blender on my face for a substantial amount of time between each product application, before I applied the mascara, I drenched my face in setting spray and fanned myself dry. After two hours, my hair was officially dry. I connected the curling wand to curl the strands that were left limp. When I was done my curls were so big and fluffy.

I went into my closet, took out my cropped heather grey fleece hoodie, and carefully unwrapped my silver sequin pencil skirt. I had

only worn that skirt once before and it was definitely time to bring it out again. I wished all my skirts fit me like that one, it hugged my curves in all the right places and put my voluptuous behind on display. Since I knew, without a doubt I would be standing the entire night I paired the ensemble with my white stan smith sneakers. Dressy but still cute and casual, how I typically preferred to dress. It was five o'clock in the afternoon and I was ready for the night to begin.

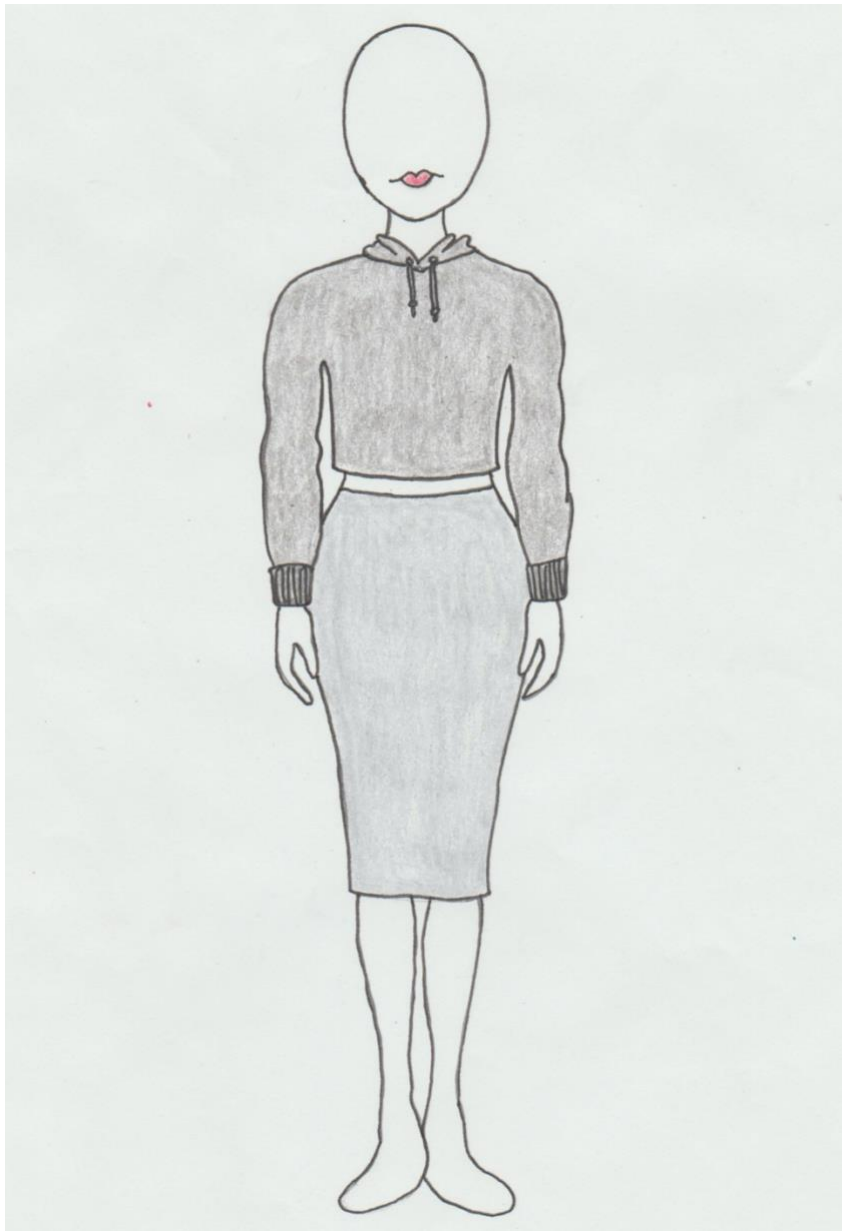
I met up with my boyfriend Chris and we swiftly made our way to Port Authority. The bus ride to 1 MetLife Stadium Dr, East Rutherford, NJ 07073 was unbearable, it was a Friday afternoon so the amount of traffic heading into New Jersey was massive, a ride that should've been no more than twenty minutes turned into an hour and a half but we had finally arrived. I hurriedly got off the bus and dragged Chris along. We walked in a speedily manner and made it to the entrance.

We got to our seats right when The Fray began singing *'how to save a life'*, the entire stadium joined in, *"Where did I go wrong? I lost a friend, somewhere along in the bitterness, and I would have stayed up with you all night, had I known how to save a life"*. Finally, The Fray introduced Ed Sheeran and the crowd began to scream. I grabbed onto Chris' shoulder and began to shake him while displaying the biggest grin on my face, it was finally time!

Ed Sheeran walked on stage and I began to lose it, I was screaming at the top of my lungs and when I looked over at Chris, he was laughing at me. Ed Sheeran began to sing and I followed along word for word throughout the entire concert. When he started singing the last song of the night, *'Thinking out loud'*, the crowd went silent. In the darkness of the night the only thing visible was the flashlights moving with the lyrics. It appeared as though millions of fireflies lit up the sky, the moment felt unreal, it was so magical. I

took in the breathtaking sight as I sang along. Chris stood up from his seat, put his arms around me as we swayed side to side to the song.

The night was over, and I couldn't believe it. I have been waiting for that night for over a year and just like that it was over. It was everything I expected and more. When I woke up the next day I glanced over and saw my sequin skirt, I was instantly reminded of "fireflies" in the sky. A beautiful reminder of such a wonderful night.



About the Author



Jeanie Castillo is from Washington Heights. She currently has an associate degree from BMCC and hopes to graduate with her bachelor's from New York City College of Technology, CUNY majoring in the Business and Technology of Fashion BS by the spring.