

# Cascading Roses

Elizabeth Taylor

I did feel a twinge of guilt in allowing the woman to assume I was engaged, but her job was to sell dresses, not verify my relationship status. Well, that's what I told myself, yet I realized there's more to buying a wedding dress than the dress itself. Maybe she did need to know about my future groom. Maybe I needed to know.

At one point in that trying-on stage the woman helping us asked my mom where my fiancé was from. My mom told her Garland. A few dresses later, she asked me where we were getting married. I told her Bountiful. The problem was my boyfriend Mike was from West Jordan. I'd always planned on marrying him in Salt Lake. And then there was the issue that two of the dresses fit me perfectly. No alterations needed. The woman said she'd never seen that before. I bet she's never helped a girl buy a dress who didn't know who she'd be marrying in it either. I didn't tell her that.

It turns out that in high school I developed this terrible habit of buying a dress for the dances long before I ever had a date to them. So far, nothing could touch my junior prom dress. Solid red, it fit me like a glove. I bought it as a sophomore, but wore it a year later. It's funny—I'm not a patient person—unless of course I'm trying on dresses or waiting to wear them.

I loved them both, so I tried the two dresses on again, back to back for comparison. I put the first one on. The bodice was completely beaded with sequins and pearls. The lace pattern underneath the beading continued down my arms stopping just below my elbows. At my waist was a

bustle of silk roses that flowed into a chapel train cascading down with roses, lace, pearls, and sequins. As I stood gawking in the mirror, my first thought was, *Mike would die—a close second, I wonder how long Jordan will make me wait?*

Jordan. He's the other part of this two boy equation. We were high school sweethearts. He'd loved me in red and all my other pre-dance date purchases. It just always worked out like that, but I hadn't seen him for almost two years. Therein lay my confusion.

My mom watched me watch me for a moment, and then reminded me to try the other dress on again.

The second dress was completely fitted around the waist, looking almost like an inside-out corset. There wasn't any lace or beading, but the satin was striking against my dark hair. It was very elegant and refined. It reminded me of how well behaved I was around Mike. Except the night I met him. I was just me then—I didn't know better.

We were introduced around 7:00 pm. When the sun rose the next morning, Mike and I were still talking. I remember thinking he was just like Jordan, except he danced. Jordan wouldn't be home for another year and a half. That was way too much time for nothing to happen. And so, everything did.

A month after we met, Mike and I became dance partners; I blame the rumba. Every time my phone played his ring, the 1812 Overture, my heart jumped. We broke up twice but could never remember why we weren't together. Almost a year after we met, I moved to Russia to teach English for five months. When I returned home, Mike

had a girl friend. I was planning to marry Jordan. That lasted about a week.

The chemistry between Mike and me was continuous and undeniable. We could, and did, laugh for hours and I loved to laugh, but I also loved to love. Mike was very unaffectionate and highly critical. I was okay with me not being perfect all the time, but he wasn't. I'd never seen him cry. And I don't think he liked my clothes. I remember never wanting him to see me in my red prom dress. He would've thought I was the devil—but that dress was me. Between our breakups, I wore it to a college homecoming dance with someone else. I sent pictures so Jordan could see me in the dress. I was a bit curvier this time around; I don't think Mike ever noticed I had curves. At least, he pretended not to.

In the end, the two perfect-fit dresses weren't at all alike. One had blond hair the other brown. I mean, one was very simple and pretty, the other ornate and gorgeous. I felt like I could marry Mike in one of them. I knew I could marry Jordan in the other. And so I bought the dress—the one that was me. On the way home my mom brought up

the comments we'd both made to the saleswoman. "And I'm still dating Mike..." I sighed in frustration. She laughed and assured me, "We both know you will never love anyone else." She was wrong. I did love Mike, but a few days later I broke up with him because I didn't know if he really loved me. As he cried in my arms at goodbye, I realized he did. I've never felt that low. A month later Jordan came home.

This morning I mailed a Valentine's Day package to my fiancé. In it—pictures of me in my wedding dress. I still see Mike from time to time. We've remained close friends. It turns out I could have married him in that dress after all. Yesterday, I had him help me pick which pictures to send. As he looked through them, I realized why he'd always been so critical: he just wanted me to be my best, to be me. For a moment, I forgot why we weren't together. Then I remembered. Mike would've always wanted me to be me, but I would've been plain satin for him. Because of Jordan, I've always wanted me to be me. I guess it's a good thing I did know who I was marrying when I bought the dress; I cascade roses for him.