

Little Black Dress

Lilia walked 7,392 steps to and from her apartment on an average day. And being a woman, Lilia was, on an average day, cat called at a new corner. A new stoop. A new shop front. Since her body became what it was meant to be, they were there, noticing out loud.

A new man. The same bullshit.

“Ay Ma, lemme talk to you!”

“Yo Shawty! Where you goin so fast?”

“Baby Doll! I got something for you!”

Day in and day out, Lilia would leave her house in any manner of outfits—slacks, skirts, blouses, shorts, dresses, blazers, heels, flats—didn’t matter. Whatever it was, she shouldn’t be wearing it. Whatever she was wearing was some sordid request to the men she passed. If she was outside she was subject to the male gaze.

“Mami! Oh my God, you’re too good to be true!”

“Sweetheart! Don’t run off so quick!”

“Hey Girl! I’ve got what you need!”

Lilia walked on by, not turning her head or throwing up her middle finger. She didn’t shout back or even glance their way. This wasn’t a new phenomenon for Lilia, or really any woman in the history of the patriarchal society the world calls home. None of these men or their calls were harmless, but some had more weight to them than the others.

“Fine then! Dumb Bitch!”

“Fuck you! You’re ugly anyway!”

“Nasty Ass Slut! Just keep walking!”

Lilia’s head stayed high. She never wavered in one of her 7,392 steps. She didn’t quicken her pace or hide from the men or their “compliments.” Nothing that any of these men could say, shout or scream would scare her from living her life. She didn’t let their fear control her.

Lilia knew what all of these men didn’t. She understood them better than they would ever know. She knew that they were scared. She knew that women terrified them. That the sheer bombastic force that stemmed from being a woman shook them to their y chromosomes. That the thought of the power they carry within themselves turned the minds of men into garbage and their words to compost. She knew that their words could and would rise to a crescendo of violence one day, she knew they already had for so many. Just as she walked by these men daily, she walked in step with other women. Some who were taken out of step, taken all the way down. She saw the pain on their faces as plainly as she saw the lust in the eyes of men. There was no escape from either with the way things had been and continued to be.

It was enough to make anyone cry behind closed doors, rage against the world with a clever sign and a crocheted hat, shut themselves off entirely in misguided self preservation plots. But Lilia wasn’t worried about then men. Her body was her own, her heart too big, mind too sharp, power too much, will unbreakable. And by the end of it all they would know that, too.

On a day just like any other, for no reason more particular than the fact that it was time, Lilia donned a very special dress. A crisp sleeveless white dress that hit her above the knee. As she took it from the hanger she imagined the face of every woman who had had hands laid on her. As she tucked her breasts and body into the bodice she saw battered and broken women, torn

clothing, fractured bones, and crushed hearts. And as she slid the zipper up, what she heard were the cries of help that never seemed to reach the right ears at the right time.

With her first confident step out the door she set off for a new day in her life.

“Hey Girl, how—”

“Ooh Honey, where are—”

“Baby, you gotta—”

With each step Lilia took another voice was silenced. Another mark added to her pristine dress. With each comment from a new man’s mouth the dark smudges that made up their souls appeared on her skirt. The men of the world were withering and turning to husks as the blackness of their very beings manifested on Lilia’s dress. Their poison was her power.

“Hey, Sugar—”

“Angel Face, you are—”

“Beautiful, where have—”

The bodies fell at her feet with each step. As her strides grew louder the perfect white of her dress edged its way into deep, dark black. She tossed her hair and kept her gaze forward, stepping over whoever she needed to. Lilia walked on, well beyond her 7,392 steps, until the voices were gone completely and replaced by an all new chorus.

“Thank you!”

“God bless you!”

“You’ve saved us all!”

Cries of joy filled the air. Women began flooding the streets. Wearing everything from their own skin to burkas and head scarves because they knew that the sun had set on the life they had known and they were finally free. Finally free from judgment and fear and degradation.

Lilia walked proudly, in her little black dress, as she knew that the world could finally be at peace.