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I got married  
– and lost my  
best friend

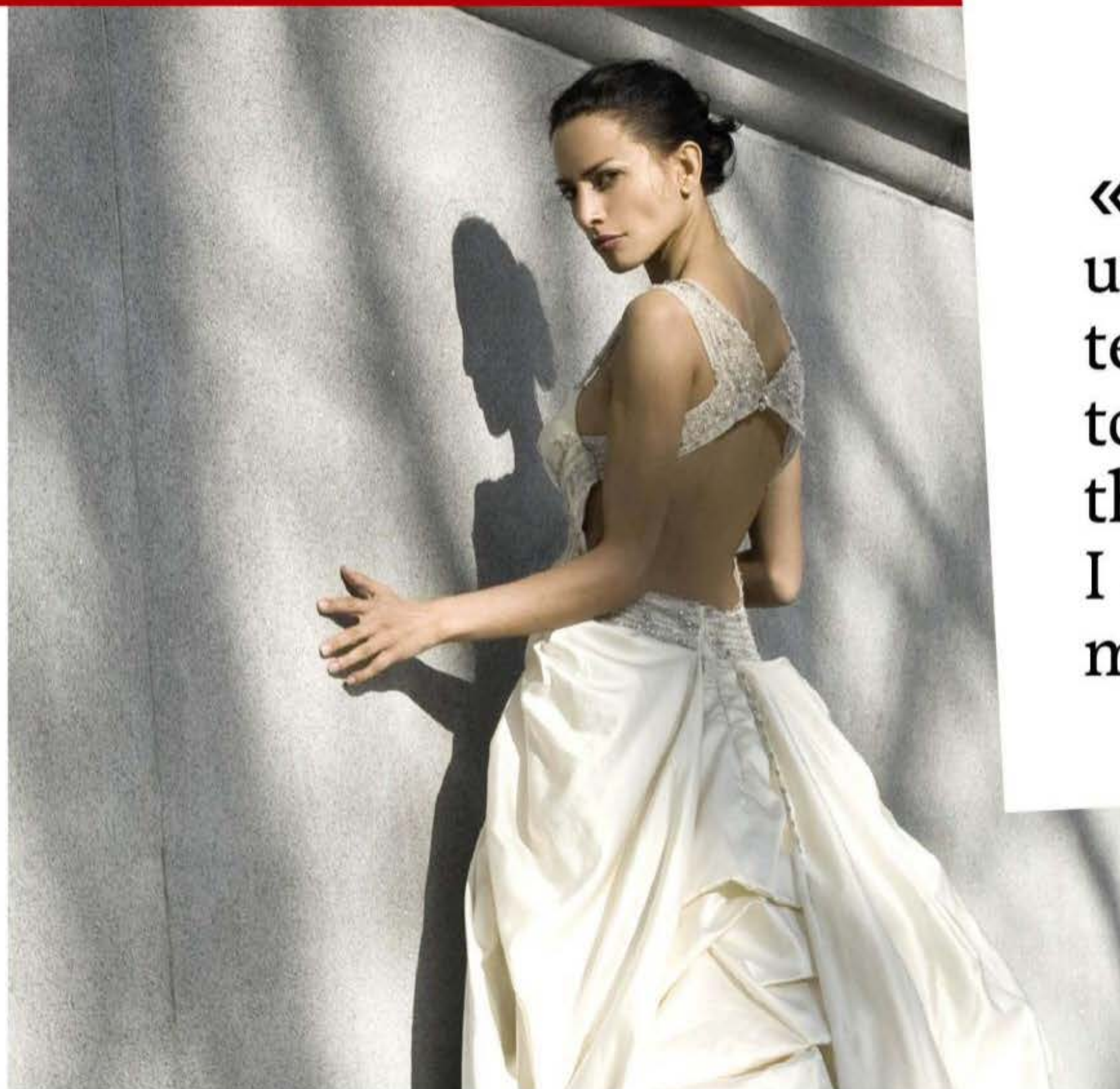


It was meant to be the happiest day of her life, but Julie Wright's\* oldest friend didn't want to be part of it

When the text arrived, I had to re-read it several times before its meaning sank in. It was from Sarah\*, one of my dearest friends, informing me that we had 'nothing in common' any more and there was no point in continuing our friendship. I was devastated, but once the shock wore off, I knew there was only one reason she could have sent it: three weeks earlier I'd told her I was engaged. Ironically, I thought it was our differences that made the friendship work. She was the carefree, live-for-the-moment one, a 30-year-old mature student with a fragile grip on her finances and a soap opera-worthy love life. I, on the other hand, was the sensible, serious one, with a corporate job and a long-term boyfriend, Henry\*, who I'd known since school. I lived vicariously through tales of her latest crushes, happily spending hours dissecting one-word text messages from guys.

When I got engaged, aged 29, these differences created a gulf between us. It's not that she was jealous; more, I think, that she feared my marriage would prevent me from being there for her in the way I had previously. I also wonder if it made her consider her own relationship status, however happily single she claimed to be. Maybe she saw my impending nuptials as an all too tangible reminder that her life wasn't where she thought it would be by this point: while she was still a student, her friends were growing up – both professionally and romantically – and she was being left behind. It didn't help that, as I settled into the routine of a long-term relationship and an exhausting job, I was increasingly unable to relate to stories of adolescent escapades and unsuitable boyfriends, and she may have felt I was being unsympathetic or judgmental. It was undeniable that we were growing apart, but I thought our decades-long history would see us through to the point where we had more in common again. Instead, all of that underlying tension bubbled to the surface the moment I started planning my wedding.

Sarah and I met as tweens, bonding over similar backgrounds and alternative music. She was the first of my friends to have a serious boyfriend, while I was a late bloomer. And, as she celebrated each subsequent anniversary with him, I was impressed and more than a little envious of how grown-up she was. After A-levels we went to different universities but kept in touch. But, by our mid-twenties, our childhood roles had fully reversed. I was the 'grown-up' one, working as a lawyer and thinking about moving in with Henry after three years together, while Sarah was still at university and embarking on a series of passionate relationships that never seemed to work out. When Henry proposed 18 months ago, I felt conflicted about telling Sarah. We met for a coffee and chatted about her life, until she asked me how I was doing, which is when I told her – almost sheepishly – that I was engaged. Outwardly, she was happy for me, but I sensed she was holding back and so I played down the news, implying that it had been a low-key proposal, even though he'd actually been planning it for months and did it in front of my whole family. I even said I hadn't started thinking about wedding plans yet, before changing the topic completely.



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Three weeks later, Sarah and I found ourselves squabbling over something minor. Whereas in the past we would have resolved things pretty quickly, this time it snowballed, with texts flying back and forth (neither of us having the stamina to hash it out over the phone), until eventually I received that fateful message telling me she didn't see the point in continuing our friendship. The only logical conclusion I could come to was that her reaction had been caused by my engagement, but I knew there was no point confronting her with my suspicions. After Sarah's text, I began to worry that my wedding would alienate other people too, especially since I was the first of my friendship group to get married. I became determined to be as understated as possible about the entire thing, trying not to talk about wedding planning unless explicitly asked and making sure not to post anything wedding-y on Facebook. And when it came to finding a dress, I only took my mother along, worrying that friends could get bored or think that I was showing off, even though the logical part of my brain knew that probably wasn't the case.

Eventually, I decided against having bridesmaids altogether, mostly because it would have felt strange without Sarah there. I convinced myself it was silly to put a group of adult women in matching shoes and dresses they'd probably hate anyway. As the guest list came together, I felt a pang each time I realised Sarah's name wasn't on it, and kept hoping we'd resolve things. But by the time I sent out invitations, it had been almost a year since we'd spoken and it didn't feel right to invite her. It wasn't until the big day finally arrived, however, that it dawned on me: I was secretly relieved Sarah wasn't there. It's not that I didn't miss her – I did – but formalising your commitment to someone is nerve-racking as it is, without the added pressure of worrying whether or not your mates are genuinely happy for you.

It later emerged that a couple of my other close friends were really disappointed they weren't bridesmaids. I was sad, too, as I didn't have anybody to get ready with or to help with the little things that inevitably went wrong. Sadly, I let the breakdown of my relationship with Sarah overshadow the whole event, instead of focusing on good wishes from everyone else. Looking back, I realise that getting married is the once-in-a-lifetime occasion where it's OK to be slightly self-centred. Good mates will forgive you and hopefully understand that having a ring on your finger doesn't mean you're turning your back on your friendships. I'm sad that I had to lose someone I valued to realise that.

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Photos (posed by models): Gomillion and Leupold/Contour By Getty. \*Names have been changed