Written by Marcia Humphrey
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Dear Marcia,

My friend invited me to attend my first Ebony Fashion Fair, on May 17, hosted by the local chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. I agreed to attend this annual traveling fashion show before I knew that the tickets were $75! Now I feel that I can't back out, and I am trying to figure out how to pay for a ticket *and* make sure that my own look is not a Fashion-Don't!
Help!

Hi Friend,

I would love to give you tips on how to pull your look together on the cheap, but first, I want to ask you an important question. Can you afford to attend this function or do you think you have to go to prevent disappointing a friend? If your concerns are more centered on a false sense of obligation to your girlfriend, then you may want to reconsider your plans. Your financial stability has to be one of your main priorities and you have to remain focused and not allow your emotions and whims to set the agenda for your money.
Now that we've cleared that up, I am going to assume that you are not using the light-bill-money to attend this event.
So let's talk.

The outfit

I just discovered another hotspot for bargains. It's the Wilson's leather Liquidation Store, on Glenwood Avenue in Minneapolis (*www.wilsonsleather.com*).
This place has coats, purses, and dresses at great prices.
I first visited the store with four friends and two hours later we each came out with a bag in tow.
Most notable were the $15 dollar Calvin Klein dresses- they appeared to be the high-end manufacturer's samples.
They had beautifully unique detailing, but with most bargain-shopping, there is some sort of catch.
The sample dresses are typically made in sizes 6 and 8.
Never one to be easily discouraged, I tried on a couple of dresses that appeared to run bigger (on a good day, the top of my body is a size 10 and my bottom half is size 12).

Long story short, I bought two gorgeous dresses and I will be wearing one of my fabulous $15 outfits to the fashion show.
Bargain-hunter Beware:
Call ahead to check the store hours; They are only open Thursday-Sunday from 10-6 and no returns are allowed.

While I know that you want to be a Fashion-Do, at this show, remember that the models, not you, are the main attraction. Having said that, I know you want to look good at a special gathering, because I do, too. If there is no money left for a new dress, go to your own closet and get creative.
Update a long dress or skirt by shortening the length or consider rockin' the Michelle Obama look; reinvent one of your favorite long-sleeved dresses by transforming it into a sleeveless one, and then add a scarf to wrap around your shoulders.
Scarves are still a hot spring look and they are available in lightweight, colorful fabrics that are just perfect for the season.

The hair

If you want to get your 'do done for about half price, check out the beauty schools in your area.
Let one of the advanced students do your hair and nails for a fraction of the cost.
Don't worry; the instructors are always there to oversee their work.
Call in advance for an appointment, expect
it to take more time than you may be used to, but save big $$!
One to check out: Aveda Day Spa Institute at
www.aveda.com

The attitude

Once you have ironed out most of the details of your look, then relax. Truth is, the most important factor in determining how much you enjoy this outing is your attitude.
Before leaving home, decide in advance, to have a good time.
Be pleasant and introduce yourself to the folks at your table, strike up light conversation, and even pay a sincere compliment or two to a sharp looking sister.
Plan to go to the fashion show wearing your best assets: your bright smile and friendly disposition.
Enjoy!

Marcia Humphrey is an interior decorator and home stager who specializes in achieving high style at a low cost. A native of Michigan, she and her husband, Lonnie, have three children.