

## **Undress Me**

**(Woman to Woman)**

by

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# Undress Me

## DESCRIPTION

The language of love has many dialects, and Hannah and Laura explore the diphthongs of desires as Laura asks Hannah, in the middle of a crowded bar, to undress her with words. She gladly responds in the best mother tongue she knows.

## CHARACTERS

- HANNAH
- LAURA (the "au" should be pronounced as "ow," the sound made when someone is injured).

## SETTING

- Bar

## TIME

- Present

## MISCELLANEOUS

- Two bar stools
- Table
- Two glasses of beer or wine
- LAURA wears earrings and a pendant. The earrings will be removed. The pendant must also be easy to unclasp and remove.

## NOTES

- In directing this, the director should aim for as much physical movement as possible, but kept small and, in most cases, never making actual contact. For instance, when HANNAH describes her breath along LAURA's neck, she should be standing close enough for LAURA to sense this, but she never actually touches her. Suggestion rather than palpable contact.
- What also makes the play "work" is if the actors speak the stylized language as if it were "normal" routine speech. Emphasizing the stylization takes away the chance to play with(in) the language.

## Undress Me

A bar -- chatter in the background. HANNAH and LAURA are sitting. She turns and looks at her, pauses, then speaks.

LAURA  
Undress me, Hannah.

HANNAH  
Undress you.

LAURA  
Yes.

HANNAH  
Here.

LAURA  
Here and now.

HANNAH  
And why?

LAURA  
It is time.

HANNAH  
Time for what?

LAURA  
For our leap forward.

HANNAH  
This is quite a leap.

LAURA  
Aren't you ready?

HANNAH  
Quite a leap forward from just yesterday, where, if I remember, we held hands for the first time without acting as if we'd touched each other by accident.

LAURA  
Your point?

HANNAH  
Well, to go from that to this without spending a little more time there and here --

LAURA  
You're scared.

HANNAH  
No. Of what?

LAURA  
Of me.

HANNAH  
No.

LAURA  
That I would go from that to this without following you there and here.

HANNAH  
It is quite a lunge --

LAURA  
(overlapping)  
She's thinking, "I should leave --

HANNAH  
I don't want --

LAURA  
" -- before she takes me over the edge."

HANNAH  
-- to leave. I don't want to leave.

LAURA  
You want to stay.

HANNAH  
Yes.

LAURA  
Then you'll have to undress me.

HANNAH  
The price of staying.

LAURA  
The blessing of being here with this, which you say you want.

HANNAH  
And only required that I undress you.

LAURA  
In a manner of speaking.

HANNAH  
And how?

LAURA  
In a manner of speaking.

How? HANNAH

By word of mouth. LAURA

Meaning? HANNAH

With your mother tongue. LAURA

I am to unhinge you by vocables. HANNAH

Singe my ears. LAURA

Lay siege by syllables. HANNAH

Desire by diphthongs. [pronounced "dif-thongs"] LAURA

What brew are you drinking there? HANNAH

Lay it not to the alcohol. LAURA

Then what? HANNAH

I want you to undress me here. LAURA

Here. HANNAH

In public. LAURA

Because? HANNAH

I want to sit here with my eyes closed, in eye-range of everyone, while you whittle at my buttons and clasps and elastics, knowing that no one here knows what you are knowing about me. LAURA

Low-rent strip-tease. HANNAH

Now you see it, now -- LAURA

HANNAH  
That -- moistens you?

LAURA  
Like a stamp.

HANNAH  
A new way to "go postal."

LAURA  
Moisten your resolve -- and do it.

HANNAH  
And if I -- refuse? From modesty, of course.

LAURA  
I will counter with flattery of the cunning  
linguist. Such as: flatter, flatter, flatter,  
and flatter -- enough?

HANNAH  
You drive a sweet bargain.

LAURA  
The dotted line awaits.

HANNAH  
Signed -- sealed --

LAURA  
Deliver.

HANNAH  
Any particular style?

LAURA  
Just start! I am not in the mood for  
disquisitive analysis. Any style -- just make it  
bold and italic.

HANNAH  
Then close your eyes -- I am going to sit on the  
porches of Laura's ears and tell tales of steam.

LAURA  
I knew the slangster would come through.

HANNAH  
Imagine --

LAURA  
I obey.

HANNAH

Imagine this: in a room, warm -- with light,  
lucent -- and music, dulcet. You know I'm there,  
but can't see me.

LAURA

Is this a slow stalk, or a pounce?

HANNAH

Sshhh! You know I'm there because I am close  
enough for you to feel my breath trace your neck  
-- to trail along the slope of muscle that runs  
from just behind the ear to your shoulder. I say  
to you --

LAURA

"You are as savory as -- "

HANNAH

Who is telling here?

LAURA

Sorry.

HANNAH

In fact, I say nothing.

LAURA

What am I wearing?

HANNAH

Begin with your jewelry.

HANNAH takes off LAURA's earring as she says the line.

HANNAH

Lifting the silver slick of your earring, I slip  
the back off and ease the post through the lobe -  
- a slight fleshy tug, and then it's free.

HANNAH does the same to the second and puts both away.

HANNAH

Then the second earring.

HANNAH does not actually lick her ear.

HANNAH

With just the tip of my tongue, I trace the crimp  
and cockle of your ear --

LAURA

Which one?

HANNAH

The right one -- my breath embroiders. You shiver.

LAURA

I -- squeeze.

HANNAH

(unclasps the pendant)

The clasp of the pendant kneels on the top nub of your spine --

LAURA

You unlock it --

HANNAH

-- and let the pendulous weight slide through the valley --

HANNAH lets the pendant fall into her hand, which she positions at LAURA's waist.

LAURA

It is not the valley of shadow.

HANNAH

-- and then catch it at your waist --

LAURA

The equator --

HANNAH

And the light dances on the silver.

HANNAH puts the pendant down.

LAURA

What else?

HANNAH

Self-restraint! There are miles to go -- The latté-colored sweater you wear has small buttons that squeak as they squinch through the button hole. My fingers, thick and calm --

LAURA

Calm?

HANNAH

Narrator's prerogative. Thick and calm -- I poke them clumsily, but they're agreeable. Separation is their freedom.

LAURA

How many buttons?

HANNAH

How many do you want -- what will your impatience endure?

LAURA

Twelve -- no, fourteen.

HANNAH

I am at seven, then -- half done, half unopened gift.

LAURA

And what do you see?

HANNAH

Undergarmental infrastructure --

LAURA

Unlink it.

HANNAH

Low on the agenda.

LAURA

Move it up!

HANNAH

Seven buttons left, magic seven. Unbutton or rip through -- no, this instead: I will lift the sweater off, leaving the remaining seven buttons enslaved. Feel the slide of the yarn's grain --

LAURA

My hair sparks --

HANNAH

The hesitation of the cuffs over the wrists, then --

LAURA

Off.

HANNAH

Like a fallen flag.

LAURA

What color?

HANNAH

What?

LAURA

The brassiere.

HANNAH

Burgundy.

Underwire? LAURA

Soft cotton. HANNAH

What to do. LAURA

Indeed! To the southern hemisphere next and spelunk, or do slalom these gentle tectonics? HANNAH

Do something! LAURA

Stepping behind you -- HANNAH

I'm thirsty. LAURA

HANNAH takes LAURA's beer and guides it to LAURA's mouth. She drinks.

Behind you. HANNAH

The length of you -- yes. LAURA

I slide each cord over the flare of your shoulders and let it fall over your triceps -- HANNAH

Stop! Stop. I have to know your intentions past this point. Breasts unaltered are nothing, palm-sized flesh -- "tits" are like a snack food. But there are grottoes and groves -- LAURA

Deeper divisions. HANNAH

Deeper nourishment. Do you plan to pillage? LAURA

No -- ponder. HANNAH

Loot? LAURA

No -- linger. HANNAH

Disappear? LAURA

No -- discover. HANNAH

Can I trust? LAURA

You wouldn't have started if you didn't. HANNAH

You have your passport, then. LAURA

Urgency -- the skirt unzipped, run down the rigging of your legs -- the gartered stockings, puddles at your feet -- the silk diphthonged underwear, darted off hummingbird-quick. No longer calm. HANNAH

HANNAH hesitates.

Go on! LAURA

We have arrived. HANNAH

Where? LAURA

At the border. HANNAH

Cross it! LAURA

HANNAH hesitates again. LAURA opens her eyes.

What? LAURA

Wait. HANNAH

For what? LAURA

Should we cross this border? HANNAH

Imagine it! LAURA

HANNAH

The room, warm -- the light, lucent -- the music,  
dulcet. The discarded clothes watchful. The  
narrator -- the narrator is at a loss for words  
as she looks upon --

LAURA

What?

HANNAH

Close your eyes.

LAURA

What?

HANNAH

Close your eyes.

LAURA

And then?

HANNAH

The narrator looks upon more sweet beauty than  
her eyes deserve.

LAURA

And what sayeth the tongue?

HANNAH

This: "nothing which we are to perceive in this  
world equals / the power of your intense  
fragility: whose texture / compels me with the  
colour of its countries... / (something in me  
understands / the voice of your eyes is deeper  
than all roses) / nobody, not even the rain, has  
such small hands"<sup>1</sup>

LAURA

(opens her eyes)

That's what it says?!

HANNAH

Consider it a moment of -- ripeness. Consider it  
-- stepping on the border. Not over.

LAURA

Close your eyes. Close them! All right: the  
room, warm -- the light, lucent -- the music,  
dulcet. Urgency -- your pants --

HANNAH shakes her head no.

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<sup>1</sup> e.e. cummings, "Somewhere I Have Never Travelled,  
Gladly Beyond"

LAURA  
Skirt?

HANNAH  
Capris --

LAURA  
Really? Capris, then, run down the rigging of  
your legs -- sandals, scattered -- cotton panties  
--

HANNAH  
Nothing --

LAURA  
I want something to slide off --

HANNAH  
Bikinis.

LAURA  
Bikinis, darted off hummingbird-quick.

HANNAH  
The shirt?

LAURA  
Ripped open like a veil. Now -- no longer calm.  
"Her eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers  
of waters... / her cheeks are as a bed of spices,  
as sweet flowers... / her hands are as gold rings  
set with the beryl... / her mouth is most sweet:  
yea, she is altogether lovely. This is my  
beloved, and this is my friend."<sup>2</sup> A second foot  
on the border.

HANNAH opens her eyes.

HANNAH  
How well do we know each other?

LAURA  
How well should we?

HANNAH  
How well can we?

LAURA  
How much to risk?

HANNAH  
How much more undress to undress?

They close their eyes.

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<sup>2</sup> Song of Solomon, 5:10-16 (variation)

HANNAH

Those two people standing in the room, warm --

LAURA

The light, lucent --

HANNAH

The music, dulcet.

LAURA

They are standing breathful and poised.

HANNAH

Let's leave them there.

LAURA

Next to their tree of knowledge.

HANNAH

Growing on the border.

LAURA

The fruit hanging.

HANNAH

Their mouths prepared.

LAURA opens her eyes and picks up her beer.

LAURA

And as for our mouths --

She proceeds to drink. So does HANNAH. They finish and put their glasses down. They bring their faces close together but do not kiss. HANNAH balls her hand into a fist and holds it over their heads. LAURA reaches up and "plucks" the fruit and brings it up between them. They both bite on it as if biting an apple. Sounds of chatter in the background.

BLACKOUT