

# Undress Me

by

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## DESCRIPTION

Stefan and Laura explore the diphthongs of desires as Laura asks Stefan, in the middle of a crowded bar, to undress her with words. He gladly responds in the best mother tongue he knows.

## CHARACTERS

- Stefan
- Laura (the “au” should be pronounced as “ow,” the sound made when someone is injured).

## SETTING

- Bar

## MISCELLANEOUS

- Two bar stools
- Table
- Two glasses of beer

LAURA wears earrings and a pendant. The earrings will be removed. The pendant must also be easy to unclasp and remove, possibly connected with a small piece of velcro.

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 STEFAN describes his breath along her neck, he should be standing close enough for LAURA to sense this, but he 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

*A bar—chatter in the background. STEFAN and LAURA are sitting. She turns and looks at him, pauses, then speaks.*

Undress me, Stefan. LAURA

Undress you. STEFAN

Yes. LAURA

Here. STEFAN

Here and now. LAURA

And why? STEFAN

It is time. LAURA

Time for what? STEFAN

For our leap forward. LAURA

This is quite a leap. STEFAN

Aren't you ready? LAURA

STEFAN  
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.

Your point? LAURA

STEFAN

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

LAURA

You're scared.

STEFAN

No. Of what?

LAURA

Of me.

STEFAN

No.

LAURA

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

STEFAN

It is quite a lunge—

LAURA  
(overlapping)

He's thinking, "I should leave—

STEFAN

I don't want—

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

STEFAN

—to leave. I don't want to leave.

LAURA

You want to stay.

STEFAN

Yes.

LAURA

Then you'll have to undress me.

STEFAN

The price of staying.

LAURA

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

STEFAN

And only required that I undress you.

LAURA

In a manner of speaking.

STEFAN

And how?

LAURA

In a manner of speaking.

STEFAN

How?

LAURA

By word of mouth.

STEFAN

Meaning?

LAURA

With your mother tongue.

STEFAN

I am to unhinge you by vocables.

LAURA

Singe my ears.

STEFAN

Lay siege by syllables.

LAURA

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

STEFAN

What brew are you drinking there?

LAURA

Lay it not to the alcohol.

STEFAN

Then what?

LAURA

I want you to undress me here.

STEFAN

Here.

LAURA

In public.

STEFAN

Because?

LAURA

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.

STEFAN

Low-rent strip-tease.

LAURA

Now you see it, now—

STEFAN

That—moistens you?

LAURA

Like a stamp.

STEFAN

A new way to “go postal.”

LAURA

Harden your resolve—and do it.

STEFAN

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?

STEFAN

You drive a sweet bargain.

LAURA

The dotted line awaits.

STEFAN

Signed—sealed—

LAURA

Deliver.

STEFAN

Any particular style?

LAURA

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

STEFAN

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.

STEFAN

Imagine—

LAURA

I obey.

STEFAN

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?

STEFAN

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—”

STEFAN

Who is telling here?

LAURA

Sorry.

STEFAN

In fact, I say nothing.

LAURA

What am I wearing?

STEFAN

Begin with your jewelry.

*STEFAN takes off her earring as he says the line.*

STEFAN

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.

*STEFAN does the same to the second and puts both in his pocket.*

STEFAN

Then the second earring.

*STEFAN does not actually lick her ear.*

STEFAN

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

LAURA

Which one?

STEFAN

The right one—my breath embroiders. You shiver.

LAURA

I—squeeze.

STEFAN

(STEFAN unclasps the pendant)

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

LAURA

You unlock it—

STEFAN

—and let the pendulous weight slide through the valley—

*STEFAN lets the pendant fall into his hand, which he positions at LAURA's waist.*

LAURA

It is not the valley of shadow.

STEFAN

—and then catch it at your waist—

LAURA

The equator—

STEFAN

And the light dances on the silver.



*STEFAN puts the pendant on the table.*

LAURA

What else?

STEFAN

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?

STEFAN

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

LAURA

How many buttons?

STEFAN

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

LAURA

Twelve—no, fourteen.

STEFAN

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

LAURA

And what do you see?

STEFAN

Undergarmental infrastructure—

LAURA

Unlink it.

STEFAN

Low on the agenda.

LAURA

Move it up!

STEFAN

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—

STEFAN

The hesitation of the cuffs over the wrists, then—

LAURA

Off.

STEFAN

Like a fallen flag.

LAURA

What color?

STEFAN

What?

LAURA

The brassiere.

STEFAN

Burgundy.

LAURA

Underwire?

STEFAN

Soft cotton.

LAURA

What to do.

STEFAN

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

LAURA

Do something!

STEFAN

Stepping behind you—

LAURA

I'm thirsty.

*STEFAN takes her beer and guides it to her mouth. She drinks.*

STEFAN

Behind you.

LAURA

The length of you—yes.

STEFAN

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

LAURA

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—

STEFAN

Deeper divisions.

LAURA

Deeper nourishment. Do you plan to pillage?

STEFAN

No—ponder.

LAURA

Loot?

No—linger. STEFAN

Disappear? LAURA

No—discover. STEFAN

Can I trust? LAURA

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

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. Thick and no longer calm. STEFAN

*STEFAN hesitates.*

Go on! LAURA

We have arrived. STEFAN

Where? LAURA

At the border. STEFAN

Cross it! LAURA

*STEFAN hesitates again. LAURA opens her eyes.*

What? LAURA

Wait. STEFAN

For what? LAURA

Should we cross this border? STEFAN

Imagine it! LAURA

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

What? LAURA

Close your eyes. STEFAN

What? LAURA

Close your eyes. STEFAN

And then? LAURA

STEFAN  
The narrator looks upon more sweet beauty than his eyes deserve.

And what sayeth the tongue? LAURA

STEFAN

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” [e.e. cummings, “Somewhere I Have Never Travelled, Gladly Beyond”]

LAURA

(opens her eyes)

That’s what it says?!

STEFAN

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—the pants unzipped, run down the rigging of your legs—socks and shoes, scattered—cotton briefs—

STEFAN

Bikinis—

LAURA

Bikinis, darted off hummingbird-quick.

STEFAN

The shirt?

LAURA

Ripped open like a veil. Now—thick, and no longer calm. “His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters... / his cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers... / his hands are as gold rings set with the beryl... / his mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend.” [Song of Solomon, 5:10-16] A second foot on the border.

*STEFAN opens his eyes.*

STEFAN

How well do we know each other?

LAURA  
How well should we?

STEFAN  
How well can we?

LAURA  
How much to risk?

STEFAN  
How much more undress to undress?

*They close their eyes.*

STEFAN  
Those two people standing in the room, warm—

LAURA  
The light, lucent—

STEFAN  
The music, dulcet.

LAURA  
They are standing breathful and poised.

STEFAN  
Let's leave them there.

LAURA  
Next to their tree of knowledge.

STEFAN  
Growing on the border.

LAURA  
The fruit hanging.

STEFAN  
Their mouths prepared.

*LAURA opens her eyes and picks up her beer.*

LAURA

And as for our mouths—

*She proceeds to drink. So does STEFAN. They finish and put their glasses down. They bring their faces close together but do not kiss. STEFAN balls his 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.*