

Undress Me

(Woman to Woman)

by

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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.

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

Undress me, Hannah. LAURA

Undress you. HANNAH

Yes. LAURA

Here. HANNAH

Here and now. LAURA

And why? HANNAH

It is time. LAURA

Time for what? HANNAH

For our leap forward. LAURA

This is quite a leap. HANNAH

Aren't you ready? LAURA

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.

Your point? LAURA

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

You're scared. LAURA

No. Of what? HANNAH

Of me. LAURA

No. HANNAH

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

It is quite a lunge -- HANNAH

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

I don't want -- HANNAH

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

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

You want to stay. LAURA

Yes. HANNAH

Then you'll have to undress me. LAURA

The price of staying. HANNAH

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

And only required that I undress you. HANNAH

In a manner of speaking. LAURA

And how? HANNAH

In a manner of speaking. LAURA

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

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.

HANNAH

Low-rent strip-tease.

LAURA

Now you see it, now --

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 --

Off. LAURA

Like a fallen flag. HANNAH

What color? LAURA

What? HANNAH

The brassiere. LAURA

Burgundy. HANNAH

Underwire? LAURA

Soft cotton. HANNAH

What to do. LAURA

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

LAURA
Do something!

HANNAH
Stepping behind you --

LAURA
I'm thirsty.

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

HANNAH
Behind you.

LAURA
The length of you -- yes.

HANNAH

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 --

HANNAH

Deeper divisions.

LAURA

Deeper nourishment. Do you plan to pillage?

HANNAH

No -- ponder.

LAURA

Loot?

HANNAH

No -- linger.

LAURA

Disappear?

HANNAH

No -- discover.

LAURA

Can I trust?

HANNAH

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

LAURA

You have your passport, then.

HANNAH

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 hesitates.

LAURA

Go on!

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 --

What? LAURA

Close your eyes. HANNAH

What? LAURA

Close your eyes. HANNAH

And then? LAURA

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"¹

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.

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.

¹ e.e. cummings, "Somewhere I Have Never Travelled, Gladly Beyond"

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."² 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.

HANNAH
Those two people standing in the room, warm --

LAURA
The light, lucent --

HANNAH
The music, dulcet.

LAURA
They are standing breathful and poised.

² Song of Solomon, 5:10-16 (variation)

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