

## PAPER DRESSES

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*Laura Young*

The day that Gunther left me I went on the pill. About an hour or two before. I went to the gynecologist and put on a paper dress that stapled at the sides and had to lie there. Legs spread apart. Just so I could go on the pill. Just so I could give Gunther what he wanted. Just so I could make him happy.

I called him when I got home, in between my two doctor appointments. I put off showering so I could call him. I put off washing away the violation of being probed with cold metal so I could hear his voice.

"Hi," I said.

"Hi."

"I went on the pill this morning," I said.

"I want to see other women," he said.

The day that Gunther left me I thought, well, I thought, that's that. He said the tone in my voice was expectant. I said "Yeah, well I just went on the pill."

"What's that supposed to mean?" he asked. He asked me to analyze the statement. I didn't have the patience, nor the time.

"You figure it out." I hung up the phone and walked out the door down the hall to Randy's. He lived down the hall. Gunther didn't like him. So I went to his place and knocked on the door. He answered and he told me he had just woken up. The place smelled of burnt popcorn and dirty hair. Randy had dirty hair. Gunther said he was a pig, but Gunther showered everyday. I didn't. I was more like Randy.

"He left me." I said it. Randy was the first person I told. I didn't cry. I said it matter-of-factly, like I was reading a book. A book about a girl who went on the pill and her boyfriend left her. And she didn't even cry.

"Oh." That's what he said. He didn't ask me why, like I knew my mother would when I told her, he just stood there playing with his dirty hair and looking around his place and sniffing. He smelled the burnt popcorn, too.

I sat down on his couch and started playing with the stuffing that was coming out of the seams.

"I have to go to the doctor at noon," I said.

Randy handed me a pipe and his shoulder to cry on. I took the pipe and looked at it.

"I have to go to the doctor at noon," I said again. Not the gynecologist, just the doctor.

"Bloodwork?"

"No."

"Knock yourself out." That's Randy. He told me to knock myself out. So I sat there on the couch and we listened to Jimmy Cliff and didn't talk. Not a word. I guess he didn't know what to say to me. I don't know what I would've wanted him to say. But I wanted him to say something. Anything.

"What are you doing today?" I asked him.

"This," he said, gesturing to the room with his hands. I think he meant he wasn't leaving. I wished I never had to leave. I wanted to sit on the couch forever, just me and Randy, saying nothing. And listening to Jimmy Cliff.

Gunther and I used to listen to Jimmy Cliff. We got the records from the public library. Sometimes we would go into the little study rooms and make out, but once we were caught. We got caught and that's when Gunther stopped kissing me in public. Eventually he stopped holding my hand. He used to sit right next to me when we watched a movie. Eventually he sat across the room. That's how Gunther was.

"I love you," he would say, sitting across the room.

"What?" I would ask, pretending that I couldn't hear him, that he needed to be closer. Motioning for him to come nearer.

"Never mind," he would say and wave his hand at me as if to shoo me away.

Randy never shooed me away. I guess he never really did anything except sit around and get high. Maybe that's why he had such dirty hair, because he was too stoned to get in the shower. Randy played the mandolin and he would write songs for me. He would play a few chords and belt out a few words.

"And there she was standing with the wind in her hair/My oh my you look so fair/Won't you come give me lovin'/Without you I got nothin'..."

He wasn't good. But they were songs written about me. They were written in a blue notebook with torn out pages and drawings of pot leaves and phone numbers scribbled everywhere. Randy took this notebook everywhere. I asked him once if it was his Bible. He said,

"No, it's my journal. This is where I put my soul."

Gunther gave me a journal and I burned it. I wrote his name on every page and then burned it in the park. It felt good. One time we were talking on the phone and he said, "I don't know if I love you, I don't know what love is."

He had never been in love before. I was his first.

"But love is all you need," I said. Like the Beatles song.

"I want to know what love is," he said. Like the Foreigner song.

So I asked him what he wanted me to do and he said he didn't know. I hung up the phone and went to the park and burned the journal he gave me.

I was sitting in Randy's place and I could hear my phone ringing. Randy

used to tell me he could hear me having sex with Gunther. I told him that was disgusting. He never said anything again. My phone was ringing and my machine picked it up.

I strained my ear, hoping it was Gunther, but it was just the doctor's office reminding me to bring in some pee in a cup or something.

"For tests, dear," the nurse explained over the phone.

"Well, I have to go drink water," I said.

"Okay," said Randy. He was pulling dirty hairs out of his head and putting them over a candle. It smelled like burnt popcorn and permed hair now. I was getting sick.

"Randy?" I asked.

"Yeah?"

"You want to meet at Dunbar's at 1:00?"

"Sure."

"Okay, see you."

"Yeah, later."

I don't like to drive. Gunther would drive me everywhere. In the sidecar, even if it was cold. Just for me. He said he liked to drive me places. I guess it made him feel like a man. I had to drive to the doctor. I sped, 65 in a 30, and it was raining. It was a rainy day and Gunther left me, but I wasn't crying.

There were lots of old people in the waiting room at the doctor. I wished Randy was there to keep me company. I wished Gunther would drop dead. I wished I could take a syringe from the place and stab it into his eyes so he could never look at another girl again.

I fell asleep, but woke up when my name was called. I went into the examination room and put on another paper dress that stapled at the sides. I was trying to get comfortable on the table, but the sheet they roll out on it kept slipping. I slipped off and ripped my paper dress. So I took the table paper and was wrapping it around me when the nurse comes in and says,

"What have you gotten yourself into?"

"I ripped my paper dress," I mumbled.

"Well, we can fix that," she said and got out the stapler. I counted the clicks of the stapler. It was a methodical sound, not like when you hear someone clipping their fingernails. She took my blood pressure. "Seems to be a bit low," she said. I was supposed to be fasting for this visit, she told me. I guess there was bloodwork after all.

"I had a jelly donut," I said.

"Well now, that won't do, will it?"

I guess it wouldn't because when she left I saw her whisper something into the doctor's ear and he just shook his head.

Gunther used to tell me he had a secret for me and when I came close he stuck his tongue on my ear. I hated it and he knew it. But I always fell for it. I guess I hoped that one of those time he would say something romantic. Instead all he said was, "Gotcha again, sucker!" and started laughing. Because Gunther left me on this day, I was in a cold room with bad music on the

intercom. But I was proud because I wasn't sad.

The doctor came in and said "Well, what do we have here?" He didn't get a smile out of me. Not a raised lip. Nothing. He deserved nothing from me. I hated the doctor. He got to wear clothes and I had to sit there freezing in a paper dress. He was listening to my heartbeat. The stethoscope was cold on my chest.

"Does it sound broken?" I asked.

"What?" he asked, stepping back.

"I said does it sound broken?"

"No. Why would it?"

I started to cry. Right there in the cold room with my paper dress on all stapled together like a huge diaper. I started to cry.

"Oh well, my boyfriend and I broke up."

He patted my back and started telling me that it was going to be alright. He told the nurse to get me some juice and cookies. Gunther left me and I was getting juice and cookies in return. The doctor told me how beautiful I was and how many other men there were out there for me. He told me that "Whatever his name is, was pretty stupid to let one like you go."

My paper dress was wet now from my tears and I was trying to get the bottom of it up to my nose to wipe it.

Yeah, pretty stupid." That's all I could say. They told me all they needed was my pee and I could leave. I was crying and they were telling me I could leave.