

Piper Anderson

473 words

Comfort Food

He flung her dress on the bed. “So you’re seriously not going? I even got this dry-cleaned for you.”

“I’m so busy anyway. And... well. Never mind.”

“*And* what?”

“*And* I don’t want to be around those people. You know I don’t like them. And you get all... I don’t know. You’re just different around your colleagues.” She’d been to those types of functions with him. When she tried to contribute to the conversation he would smile at her like she was a pretty prize he was showing off, and look— she could talk, too!

“What you’re saying is you don’t like how I am when I’m with them.”

“I didn’t say that,” she said. Her chest felt much too tight.

“Yes, you did. Or, you might as well have.”

“That’s hardly the same—”

“You only like me when it’s just the two of us.”

“I don’t like you right now and it’s just the two of us.”

“Don’t be so childish.”

He left the room without saying another word and she stood facing where he no longer was. The dress lay crumpled on the duvet in its garment bag. He had bought it for her; it was long and black with a back so low she couldn’t decide if it made her feel sexy or exposed. She

smoothed the dress out, and her hand brushed the paper stretched around the dry cleaner hanger, “We Heart Our Customers” printed across.

She’d grown up with parents who were businesspeople, and their closet was full of pressed pants and ironed blouses fresh from the dry cleaner. When they argued, as they often did, she would slip into the master bedroom, go into the closet and shut the door. It was dark, and their snapping voices were muffled. All sorts of paper-wrapped hangers clicked together. She liked nothing better than to rip little pieces off and stick them in her mouth. Sometimes she munched on the pieces, her skin skimmed by silks and satins, the air scented with lavender detergent. Sometimes she let the paper dissolve between her teeth until it became a soft membrane. It would unfurl and dampen and sink into her tongue slowly, stretching out like a rose petal— and just as sweet. It had been years and years since she’d eaten clothes-hanger paper.

She heard the back door slam, a sound that made the whole house shake, that sent tremors through her legs. She leaned her knees against the mattress for a little support. Now that he was gone, it was quiet. Falling dusk made the room dark. Her fingertips fluttered over the paper again. She hesitated. She blinked. She tore off a piece and nibbled. Delicate, sweet. Her fingers stayed perched on her mouth for a long time, as if she were still pressing the paper against her parting lips.