

# Metamorphosis & *Sunny Seas* of *Blossoms*

A short story about  
the transformative power of fashion,  
the unspeakable affect of garments &  
the feeling of being dressed.



Yellow Water Flag (Lt. Iris Pseudocorus)



Paris, France, 11<sup>th</sup> of August. The course of the day is written in the stars. She had hoped to sleep a bit longer. Well, now she is awake. Pulled out of her dreamland by a single sunray painting circles on her face. She squints against the sun. The window is open, the ends of the curtains swinging in waves, with a tranquil rhythm. The day is forecasted to be scorching.

Summer turns Paris into a smelting furnace. The atmosphere morphs into a swelling fireball, rolling through the city from east to west. Now, in August, the locals have long left the city to spend their summer breaks at the seaside, hiding away in coastal towns and lake cottages until *la rentrée* calls them back to the city. The few inhabitants that stay, seek shelter on the riverbanks of the Seine under the shadows of the linden trees in silky dresses and heeled sandals, some in linen shirts and light cotton pants pretending their sartorial choices are unimpressed by the climbing thermostats. They leave their tiny shoeboxes of apartments in the morning and return in the evening hours after the buildings breathed out the feverish air that built up with the journey of the sun from even the smallest vents, niches and pores of their porous bricks .

The heavy doors of the wooden wardrobe creak loudly. It could easily be repaired with a droplet of oil. Yet, she prefers to keep it this way. The sound gives the wardrobe a respectable character, a vintage feel as if the wood incarnated its previous owner's secrets, witnessed through the garments stored inside. She likes to think of objects this way - as if they are old souls who store the treasures, the memories, the presence of their possessors.

In truth, she has no idea of the origins of this piece of furniture. It has been in the apartment since she moved in; a soil-coloured colossus, sitting in the corner of the room like a solid timber throne. Imagination goes a long way in creating a sense of purpose.

She vacillates. Hesitantly, her hand hovers along the sides of the garments, hanging neatly in order. A little cramped, yet organized. Intuitively, her fingers wrap around the cold iron of a hanger parading an ochre-coloured dress . A beautiful cut, a long layer of flowy fabric forming into a pleated skirt, tied with a wrap belt, fluttering sleeves just wide enough to cover the shoulders. It still has the tag on, like so many other pieces disappearing between the packed layers of clothing. If she stares at the shelving for long enough, the colours and contours merge into a blurry mass. A mass of consumption. Guilt. Shame? Sometimes it nestles into her stomach. Not today. She buries the burdening feeling of insignificant belongings somewhere deep, deep down her guts, somewhere her conscientiousness cannot find it .

She steps in front of the mirror and twirls. A step to the left, a swing to the right. A sudden euphoria erupts in her chest, her heart skips a beat. Her gaze wanders from the soles of her feet to the crown of her head. The sight fills her with sweet, dense joy, like a precious glass full to the brim with fresh nectarine juice. The pleats of the dress fan out as she turns, creating an endless circle. A golden orbit with herself in the centre. Venus. Grounded in a solar system by the presence of the dress. Belonging to a universe.



The sun has found its way through the curtains and hits the mirror at an angle that projects dozens of little specks onto the pattern of the dress. For a moment, it seems like the floral ornaments melt off, softened by an imperceptible warmth. Waxy versions of yellow water flags, buttercups, dandelions and daffodils. Slowly, she sways from side to side, the solar specks dance across the pleats, vanishing and resurfacing between the folds, changing the complexion of the fabric, multiplying the florescence by a thousand.

She leaves the apartment without any destination in mind. Perhaps a visit to a library around noon. Deciding in the spur of the moment where to turn, aimlessly wandering through the city, purely relying on what her intuition tells her to do next. She used to spend her days like this at least once a fortnight when she had just moved to the city. Now, far less often but still every now and then. Whenever she craves a little nostalgia, she ventures out again into this city that she knows like the back of her hand by now, and pretends she sees it for the first time. She likes to see it as paying tribute to the version of herself she was back then.

III.



**S**he walks along the Rue de Abesses towards west, passes the cemetery of Montmartre, and heads south on the Rue des Légendes, towards Quartier de Batignolles. And just like that, before noon she has already experienced the treasures, the memories, the presence of abbesses, passed souls and legends, without talking to a single soul.

A lonely flaneur on the opposite pavement whistles an old tune. It sounds familiar in her ears, a memory lingers to the surface of her consciousness. The tune points her somewhere back in time to a certain setting. It unleashes a fragment of a remembrance, yet she cannot grasp where it stems from. Any attempt to recollect it pushes the traces further back. So be it. The comfort of knowing it is stored somewhere in her guts is sufficient. She feels at ease. Detached, yet engaged. The day seems promising.

It is still early. The merchants of the Batignolles farmers market are just opening up. Fresh fruit is being displayed on tables with wobbly legs, decentred by the uneven pavements. Tarpaulins are being spanned to protect the precious produce from the heat that will weigh down on the streets later, teasing their tiny cells, depriving them of their molecules of aromatic liquid that make them so delicious. But the sun is not burning yet.

She spends a while walking bows around the stands, enjoys a coffee in a quaint café, chatting with an elderly local, watching some pigeons pecking between the ankles of the passer-bys, desperate for a few crumbs of sugary pastries. As she wanders through the streets, the dress absorbs the sunrays, soaking them up, saving them in its fibres. She feels like she is blossoming. On a picturesque day like this it is easy to dwell. Not least in the beauty of the city. This beautiful, idyllic, yet tedious place of a city. Paris loses its charm once it becomes the site of daily life, in all its ordinariness, its insincerity, its pretentiousness. A lot of show, far less substance. *Parallels to fashion*, she thinks.

After a while, she craves a change of scenery. The sun is high in the sky, it is almost noon and she wants to escape the midday heat to spare herself, her dress from getting ruined by promenading through the heat. A metro towards the Mazarine library is all she needs to put her idea into practice.



She enters the underground at Saint-Lazare station. She rushes down the flight of stairs, the seam of the skirt gathered in one hand. The lengths of the dress swirl behind her. *A swaying sea of sun-coloured blossoms*, she thinks. She cannot help but see the clichéness, the silliness of the situation, yet somehow it pleases her. It fits her narrative. She reaches the top of the stairs and steps onto the platform. A little out of breath and just in time to see the taillights of the metro disappear in the black duct of the tunnel. So, she waits. She turns around on one heel, the soles of her leather flats make an undefinable squeaking sound. She looks around the platform, her eyes gliding over the silhouettes of the people waiting on the opposite track. She thinks of the book *Clothes Make People* by Gottfried Keller.

A distant grumble announces the entrance of the next line 12 like thunder in a far off summer storm in the countryside.     *One.*     *Two.*     *Three.*

*Four, five.*

People begin to shuffle their feet, phones are tucked away, chipcards handed from the right to the left, elbows move over the closures of handbags. The wagons pull into the station. She catches a glimpse of her reflection in the greyish, dull windows, steadily interrupted by the filthy hulls of the convoys. Like a glitching slideshow. The echo of the metro becomes the whirring of the projector in her imagination, the continuous chirruping of the wheels resembles the clicking of the remote. The colours of her dress look shabby under the neon lights, washed out and sanitised with a greenish undertone. Suddenly, she feels misplaced, longing for the air and the soft, warm light she felt earlier on the market. The doors open with a sizzling sound. The commuters enter the wagons like life-sized versions of eager little ants. Society is always in a rush. Even on Saturdays. She observes, waits and enters as the last person, just in time as the electronic doorway closes with a mechanic clap. The sound feels like it erupts from her own ear. She realizes how close she was to getting the seam of the dress caught inside the merciless frames. It makes her feel surprisingly vulnerable and she recognizes the residue of adrenaline lingering through her veins. She contemplates sitting down but the pure thought of the itchy polyester squares causes her malaise. Goosebumps. She shudders by the picture of the delicate material of the dress against the harsh, worn out surface of the seating.

She arrives at the station Rue du Bac. Paris' metro tunnels are long and not seldom the walk towards the urban surface appears like a time-lapse. Exit Boulevard Raspail. Exit Boulevard St. Germain. She turns around the corner, light-hearted, unfazed.





A harsh, sudden gust affronts her inattentiveness and pulls her out of her haze. These gusts of wind coming from nowhere, whipping through the tunnels still catch her in surprise. The air always feels dusty down here, the particles carry a stale scent of moth sheets, burnt sugar and cheap plastic around. She can feel the masses of commuters passing her left and right, a little too close to her body, to her dress, to herself. Irritated by the human barrier she created they utter undefinable noises, articulating their despise, like small morose gnomes.

The front side of her dress is glued to her body by the frontal wind, sketching her figure all too precisely. Her body is drowning in the sweeping folds of the dress, pushed under the surface, a suffocating surface made from yellow yarns. Something is *amiss*. She feels uncomfortable in her skin, uncomfortable in the dress, uncomfortable with her choice. Each step brings her closer to exposure. Dressed, yet exposed. Her body breaks out into a cold sweat, despite the sultriness of the underground. Intuitively, she crosses her arms around her torso, drawing in the seams of the neckline with one hand. She waits for the shoal of people to pass, like fish they swim up the hoistway that brings them back to the vibrance of the city. Leaving her behind.

The shoal is gone. The direction of the gust changes, it calms down. The dress loosens from her body. It begins to move around, swirling, whirling and twirling. Swaying, like honey-coloured waves. *Yellowcaps*, she thinks and smiles. She continues her way with bouncing footsteps. The discomfort

is gone as if the gurgling sea of material washed away the unease of the body. The calm after the storm. The noise of the surrounding streets gets louder with every step upwards. Rue de Grenelle. She is reluctant to walk this street, its name reminds her of *Grenouille*, the evil protagonist of *Perfume* by Patrick Süskind. She read the book when she was far too young and the creeps of it are burned into her mind. Fortunately, the library is in the opposite direction. She continues her way.



**T**he Mazarine library is empty this Saturday. The surfaces of the long tables look untouched. They look like they are missing something. As if each wooden chair and each bottle green lamp is awaiting a person to fulfil their purpose. The reading nooks look like giant empty walnut shells, back to back. The setting is eerie. She can hear the ruffling of the dress, the tapping of her shoes on the wooden floors. The few visitors are walking with their heads down and stony-faced expressions. One nods to the other, a serious smile, without the eyes. She finds a childish joy in skimming the aisles, soaking up titles of books, imagining what stories are hidden between the delicate pages. Eventually, she pulls out random books, skims a few blurbs and cross reads a few lines. As soon as she has chosen a selection of books she finds the most secluded spot of the building. *Reading is to be pursued in solitude*, she thinks. Time passes as she dives into the worlds created by the authors.

The air in the library is fresh. A little too air-conditioned, a quantum too chilly that causes a persistent sting inside of the lungs. She can hear footsteps in the hallway behind her. A stranger passes her. She can feel the gaze, being read, as if she was one of the books. An open book. Out of nowhere, her dress seems inappropriate for the occasion, she feels like Mabel Waring from *The New Dress* by Virginia Woolf. The volume of her dress feels exaggerated. Excessive. Unserious. The wrong choice. Shivers are sent down her spine, she feels observed, on a silver plate, although the stranger has long disappeared behind the aisles. She wishes she would be wearing something else, something well-placed. She gathers the books without retaining the titles, not even of the one she was reading. With rushed movements she places them back on their shelves and leaves the library without turning back, bearing in mind to come back another time, properly dressed for the occasion.



**V.** **T**he glistening sun is burning in her eyes. Immediately she longs for the temperatures of the library she just left behind. She traverses the Pont des Arts, heading towards Le Marais. Observing and being observed. One only saunters these streets dressed a certain way.

She enters a bakery. An elderly lady, waiting in line, turns around. She looks dignified, jewellery the size of raspberries dangle from her wrinkly earlobes, nothing about her perfectly ironed two-piece is out of line. The lady's eyes wander up and down the yellow dress. Contrary to the stranger in the library she seems complaisant. In an imperceptible gesture the lady bows her head. Mabel Waring's confidence restores.

As she strolls with whipping steps through the quartier, she observes her reflection in the windows. Her appearance seems to change with each glass. It reminds her of the metro pulling into the station at Saint-Lazare earlier. This time the slideshow does not glitch, each diapositive shows a different version as if the same shot is altered through a kaleidoscope. By now, the temperatures have reached the peak. The weave of the material meshes into her skin, imprinting a web of a hundred small squares into the epidermis. She is suddenly uncomfortably aware of the neck tag, the wrapped belt prevents her from breathing and the asymmetric hemline interferes with the rhythm of her steps. It is as if the dress is forcing her to pause, addressing her in the only way possible: through its physicality. The dress is wearing her. *Uncomfortableness always expresses itself so bodily*, she thinks. Comfortableness never does as if the body sees it for granted. Like a mimosa.

There is a little green park nearby, square Georges Cain. She could sit on one of the benches for a while, sort her thoughts, rest her tired feet and maybe loosen that restricting belt to allow herself some deep breaths. The thought of the oxygen reaching all the boiling cells in her body makes her tempted to loosen the belt in this very moment – one grip, a short, sudden pull or a slow, barely noticeable movement. Briefly, an out of body experience flashes before her eyes – she sees herself walking down the street, a sweaty, crumpled mess, red-headed, shoulders shapelessly hanging towards the pavement, the arms swaying heavily as if they live a life of their own. It reflects a harsh contrast to the mellifluousness of the dress.

Her thoughts drift away. She ponders about being in control of one's body. The control is illusionary. It barely is control of the body itself, more so the manifold ways of using fashion to cover its apparent imperfections. As if the body and all its vulnerability would stop existing once covered up, hidden under layers, masking its rawness, adorned in the distracting beauty of dress .

The foolish idea of loosening the belt passes as fast as it entered her mind. *Improperly dressed.* She is reminded of the out of place feeling in the library. Her cheeks flush, not with heat but with embarrassment. She straightens up her shoulders and concentrates on her walk. On a whim, she lifts the skirt, making the seam dance around with a frivol flick of the wrist and forces herself to a jaunty skip as she places on foot in front of the other, imagining herself as the version in the sun-drenched mirror this morning.

Now almost at the entrance of the square, she scans the surroundings. Free benches are a scarce good in Parisian green spaces and the relief as she eyes one of these restful rarities in a shadowed corner runs down her spine like a drop of cool water. She sits down, by habit she crosses one leg over the other just to untangle them in the next second. It would certainly crinkle the dress. Neatly, yet with an underlying hast, she drapes the fabrics over her knees.



**T**he leave canopy of the honey locust trees shields the bench from the sun and a subtle breeze tingles around her. The velvety leaves are faintly rustling, swaying viciously. The sleeves of the dress blow upwards, imitating the movement of miniature wings. Within seconds the material of the dress no longer feels like it is melting into her body. She can almost hear how the damp weave, heated up from her body, detaches from her back with a velcro-like sound. She notices how the fabric flutters between her shoulder blades as if an invisible force, a minuscule realm is keeping it from glueing to the surface of her body, no longer weighing down on her shoulders but rather draping over it like sunrise fog brushing over a hill. It is like the distance between the dress and her skin lets her breathe as if her movements are freed from the sartorial prison of the dress and the dress liberated from the structure of her body.

She unwraps the croissant which has left buttery stains on the paper bag. Her teeth sink into the rich layers of dough. A few crumbs sail down like caramel coloured snowflakes. She observes the passer-bys. *People are easy to read*, she thinks and for a while, she kills time by laying out storylines like movie plots for the flaneurs. She notices how she creates the storylines on their clothing. The woman with the corporate, unobtrusive costume of an undefinable grey nuance is certainly trying to blend into the male-dominated area of finance. The girl with the ironically worn jelly sandals and strawberry hair clip - maybe an art student breaking free from the restrictive small-town traditions she was brought up with. The teen boy with nail polish has yet to discover how harsh and judgmental the world truly is.

Her train of thought stops. Where are these blueprinted personas coming from? She attempts to bring up characters that exceed the obvious, that allow the persons to be someone completely else than their appearances let fathom. She wonders what her narrative would be. *In the end, everyone has the same story, no matter their fashions*, she thinks half-heartedly. She is startled by her own discontented disposition for a brief second and in the next one wonders if indifference is an equivalent to bitterness.

She remembers a film she saw some years ago. The main character works as a fashion editor for a renowned magazine. The film is abounding of clichés. Still, something made the protagonist incredibly charming. The directors showered her with mischievousness and phlegm for being

untouched by the drama of fashion. Reoccurring outfits assemble like a red thread throughout the movie, creating an apparent relatability for the viewer. The movie features an expression that sometimes lingers around her mind.

What is more important: anything or fashion?

The cap of the orange juice bottle is leaky. It does not bother her. Two drops of sugary orange-flavoured water run down her palm. One is runnier than the other. It is like a race of tiny glucose syrup bugs. One of the drops loosens from her wrist joint and falls right into the petal core of a yellow flower. How unfortunate. The stain disappears immediately, the little flower soaked it up like a squish of water enabling it to grow. A swamp for the yellow water flag, a droplet of lifeblood for the buttercups, the dandelions, the daffodils. She defocuses her gaze. If anything, the additional yellow pigments make the flowers look more vibrant. One minute later she already forgot. Solely the sticky residue on her hands remains.

Finally, in an incidental manner, she loosens the belt. She can hear the fibres creaking as she pulls on one of the strings of the bow. The sling stutters and buckles through the knot, the movement is far from smooth, it feels too forceful, causing hundreds of fissures in the microscopic depths of the fibres. The force of the knot releases. The cramped up pleats of the fabric unfold, opening like curtains on an opera stage.



The material moves and shifts, she takes a deep breath in, feeling her ribs expand, filling out the capacity of the stretchy material, challenging the seams on the sides. Even the dress seems relieved, lifted from the burden of the compulsive fit. How can something so empowering be so imprisoning at the same time? *Fashion is contradictive*, she resigns.

She looks towards the sky. The sun is on its way down. She sighs. Not in exhaustion, rather in relief. Her mind shifts. Time to return home. Lost in thoughts, her hands run along the lines of the pleats. A half-hearted attempt of ironing out the crinkles. They remain. So be it. She likes to think of clothing this way as if the imprints caused by the body and the day store the treasures, the memories, the presence of their possessors.

VII.

**S**he traverses the Seine via Pont Neuf. Taking a bow along Square du Vert Galant seems pleasant. Slowly, with serenity, she continues her way. Her route home takes her along the riverbed of the Seine. The branches of the linden trees are motionless as if painted into the air. Groups of people have assembled on the piers. From afar they look like grapes, hanging from a stem, a decisive moment away from tumbling into the river stream. They sit on the piers, barefooted.

White, creme, ecru garments on the sandstone grounds, pressed down by the weight of their possessors' bodies. The stagnant river water licks on their legs. A few dress seams and rolled up trousers dip on the surface of the brownish waters. Their wearers do not notice.

They are unimpressed, at ease, filled with the imprints of the day, relieved from expectations. Drunk on life.

The same as always. An ordinary August day in Paris. She merges into the masses, on her own, yet belonging. She has left the orbit of the dress and entered the realms of reality.

VIII.

**T**he key turns around. The door swings open. She makes her way up the narrow staircase to her apartment. When she enters her space, the room is dark. Grey contours sketch the interior of the room, the only source of light comes from the small vent between the shutters. The evening sun mildly shines through. Dust is dancing in the chink of light. With a grand gesture, she opens the shutters. For the last time of the day she catches a glimpse of her own reflection in the windows. She looks like herself. Not the magical version from this morning, not the distorted one from the metro wagons, not the one skipping through the shop windows in Le Marais. Just a disenchanting, humbled version, created by this day that has passed.

It is as if the dress has been taken down the pedestal of illusion. Freed from expectations, showered with purpose. The purpose of being dressed, of *feeling dressed*. The space for imagination has crumbled, destroyed by practicality, by unawareness, by the incidents of the day. By the city, the metro, the wind, the sun, the stranger from the library, the elderly lady. The bench, the croissant flakes, the orange juice drops. By her body. *The old soul of the wooden wardrobe could certainly catch up a few memories from it*, she thinks.

She brushes the sleeves off her shoulders, carelessly. Or familiar? The dress cascades onto the wooden floors like an empty shell, worn, torn, shapeless, lifeless without the flesh and bones of the body underneath. It resembles a flowing stream of yellow ink, evaporating into the air like the tranquil surface of a lake on a cold spring morning. No more effervescent sea, no more gushing spume.

Yet, somehow, once it lies on the ground it looks like it has life to it – the folds of the material winding in curves, draping in serpentine shapes, liberated from any pattern, the forming seams, the inevitable moulding demanded by the human physique. The dress resembles a curled up serpent. Vigilant but peaceful in a way. Ready to shed its skin, to rid itself of the marks of the day.

Metamorphosis.

She sees the dress in the corner of the eye. The familiar feeling of guilt creeps up her spine. She should not treat a treasure as precious as this so carelessly. She shakes the feeling off. It won't make

a difference. Whether it is put on a hanger or lies on the floor, a dress is a dress. How she treats it does not change its value. Or does it? She steps over it with her bare feet. Leaving it be.

IX.

**S**he drifts to the surface of consciousness, slowly, confusedly. She forgot to shut the blinds. Her eyes take a while to adjust to the blue, moonlight-drenched contours of the room. Before she can fathom the impulse, she picks up the dress from the floor with drowsy movements. Slowly, with sensible fingers, she drapes it over a hanger and places it in the wardrobe where it belongs. Time for the treasures, the memories, the presences to travel into pandora's box - the wooden wardrobe, whose depths are densely filled with affects.

