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Holiday Afterthoughts

Sylvie · Wednesday, January 3rd, 2018

I love Thanksgiving. It's Christmas without the hoopla and hassle. It's about getting together, hopefully with people you enjoy, be they family or friends and just having a fine time eating and yakking and hanging and doing nothing.

Christmas… well, Christmas is a whole other thing. Wrecked by commerce.

There was this item on my 20-year-old granddaughter's wish list. The Dress. White with black polka dots, short sleeves in a style reminiscent of the 1940s. Yes… Perfect, I thought, as I stared at the online image. This is something she really would like to have. She said so. You order it online, it's delivered to your door. You wrap it. She's happy. You're happy. No hassles. Merry Christmas.

So… The Dress arrived on my doorstep from some remote destination in a coarse cardboard envelope, probably guaranteed to have no carcinogens. When I took the dress out of the cardboard it was this pathetic polka-dot thing, as wrinkled as a newborn and weighing a lot less. I'm guessing five ounces. Maybe four? Maybe less. But it's the label that stumped me. "Made of recycled paper." I've seen a lot in my life, but a dress made of recycled paper? Never. Nor did I remember anything in the online description mentioning paper, recycled or not.

I hung THE DRESS up with care. After all, paper tears. I hung it up hoping the wrinkles would fall out. They did not. How do you iron recycled paper, I wondered? Please don't say carefully. I decided to let younger, hardier souls attempt the ironing.

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There were instructions about how to clean this dress. DRY CLEAN ONLY. Figures. But not just any old way. You needed to take it to a *green* dry cleaner — no, not a rookie, just one untainted by the use of the dreaded and maleficent Perc. Perc, it seems, is nothing less than anathema in environmental circles. Short for the unpronounceable perchloroethylene, a chemical that has been exiled to the growing pile of chemical no-nos.

To hear the manufacturers of this paper dress tell it, Perc is worse than wearing wrinkle-free polyester, which, by their standards, is the unacknowledged path to an early death. But thanks to our ever-vigilant FDA, we won't have to worry about Perc for much longer. My research shows that it will be banned from *all* American dry-cleaning establishments by 2023. I, of course, continue to be part of the resistance. I have not visited a dry-cleaning establishment of any color or

category in the past seven years. If a garment is not made of *washable wrinkle-free* material, I won't buy it. And if it happens to be deadly as well as wrinkle-free, I guess I'd rather die sooner than have to iron anything more complex than a napkin.

We live in a society that we know by now loves to throw the fear of Hades into anything we eat, wear, indulge in or — especially — enjoy. It's that Puritanical strain. So persistent. I've long since learned to make up my own mind about such things and I highly recommend it. It makes everything so much easier.

My granddaughter in The Dress… Photo by Melina Young.

So Christmas came and with some trepidation I gave my delightful granddaughter the dreaded Paper Dress. And guess what?

She. Loved. It.

She didn't care that the wrinkles persisted. She didn't care that it was made of paper. She didn't care about the dry cleaning stuff. And I have to admit that it looked much better on her than it did hanging wrinkled and limp even on a fancy hanger. On her, in fact, it just looked great. It helps of course that she's 20 and slender and good-looking, dress or no dress. But she's also smart. So what if it wasn't Viella, or Cotton or Silk or Taffeta or Satin or Wool? Such tired old standbys. And she was not even worried about the future of that Dress. You know. The *maintenance*. So I took my cue from her and the clear evidence that she was happy with it. I decided to be happy too and adapt to this bold and brazen new world.

Now it's on to a new year, paper, polka dots, wrinkles and all. Tomorrow, this granddaughter is off to a grand new adventure in London for her college semester abroad. Should I worry that this dress is decidedly short-sleeved, warm-weather clothing and that London is decidedly cold and rainy from January to March?

Don't be foolish. *She*'s not worried. And if I've learned anything over the past month it is that I shouldn't be worried either, not about a single solitary thing. Worrying is… very *passé*. A useless old habit for which there is no room in this brave new world. She's happy. I'm happy. The Dress? The Dress will take care of itself.

Granddaughter and Grandmother when the younger one still wore braces. Photo Melanie Simonet.

So bring it on. Happy New Year Everyone. Keep calm, keep joyful — and keep on keeping on.

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