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AYRAVANA FLIES
or
A PRETTY DISH

Sheila Callaghan
646-283-3473
sheila.callaghan@gmail.com
<http://www.sheilacallaghan.com>

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AYRAVANA FLIES or A PRETTY DISH

OLIVIA- 20's-30's, frizzy hair and bulgy eyes, a nervous sort

ELEPHANT- 30's-40's, crisp and well groomed, a bit delicate

Set requirements: none.

ELEPHANT and OLIVIA are standing in their own spaces. OLIVIA is wearing lipstick that is far too red
ELEPHANT is wearing a suit and tie. They both carry large suitcases.

OLIVIA

It was a pretty dish. A pretty pretty pretty pretty dish. Dish meaning meal of course. RECIPE. A pretty pretty recipe. Meant to be. Orchestrated as such. And EXOTIC. People like pretty and exotic things. Even if they are fleeting. If they fleet. ESPECIALLY if they fleet. And dishes of course fleet because one second they are sitting before you on a plate pretty as a petunia and in a blink they are muscled through your thorax and thrashed to oblivion by gastronomic juices.

ELEPHANT

I wasn't feeling very special at the time.

OLIVIA

Pretty dish with lots of colors. EXOTIC. Gloria darn it I have an idea and she looks at me like I've never had an idea in my life which isn't far from the truth for all she knows because original ideas don't come quickly in this little shoebox bistro with the dirt floor and net ceiling. I mean one can't possibly get a proper idea with all the airplanes roaring overhead. The noise, the outrageous obtrusive interminable NOISE of it! Every day, every hour... It would be different if we had a proper ceiling but we don't, all we have is a net, so we walk around in special shoes when it rains so we won't sink down into the mud...

ELEPHANT

I had a thunderous headache from the sound of airplanes overhead. It doesn't always bother me but for some reason that day I was excessively sensitive to my aural environment. I work at the airport, you see.

OLIVA

Gloria darn it I have an idea and I skid over to her skid you see because it had been raining all morning and the floor was one big mud slick and Gloria looks at me with this FACE and I try to muster a twinkle in my eye to get her all anticipatory, build some tension you know, and then I say CUMIN! But I meant to say VEGETABLE STEW because cumin is the most exciting part and I didn't want to blow my wad right away but I was concentrating so hard on the eye-twinkle that I forgot the order of things, so I back up and say

ELEPHANT

Vegetable stew

OLIVIA

Vegetable stew

ELEPHANT

Vegetable stew

OLIVIA

Vegetable stew

ELPHANT

Vegetable stew

OLIVIA

Vegetable stew

ELPHANT

Vegetable stew

OLIVIA

Special of the day.

ELEPHANT

I wasn't feeling very special. My headache made me cross and mopey. So I decided to treat myself to lunch.

OLIVIA

Golden peppers I say. GOLDEN, I say, the valuable kind. And shiny, so shiny you can see the reflection of the crisscross patterns of the net ceiling on its skin. The sun had come out by then you see. But the floor was still muddy. Mud takes a while to dry. And big luscious tomatoes, I mean LUSCIOSO, the kind with the sweet pulpy tongues. Fat bawling onions with crispy skins. And fresh basil, stems and all. And something virile, like a zucchini, a big hard zucchini, so big and colossal it could choke an elephant.

OLIVIA and ELEPHANT glance ominously at each other.

ELEPHANT

I had never been to this bistro before. It was diminutive and ramshackle. The walls were cardboard. The floor was mud. My trouser cuffs were caked the moment I stepped in the door. And the ceiling was simply a stretched-out hairnet.

OLIVIA

Pretty dish, pretty pretty pretty dish. All the colors of fall. To remind people of the passing seasons, of their own mortality. Some universal pondering with their afternoon meal. Came to me in a flash, Gloria. Gloria? What do you think? Gloria smiles a full fleshy smile. The space between her eyebrows involuntarily twitches. We trade eye twinkles... and then I really let her have it. CUMIN, I say, trying to flavor the word different than before to keep it new. CUMIN? She asks, her entire face a question. Gloria, we've been Americiana-Ordinaire for very very long time. Look around you. The couple in the corner snorting chicken soup through drinking straws... the businessman at the counter dripping candle wax onto his strip steak... the toad in the undershirt eating glass... they are desperate for a comestible adventure! All people really want in life is adventure. I say we give it to them.

Gloria is quiet for a moment. Then her bottom lip does a little quiver-dee-do, and she says OLIVIA which she never says because it's not my name, wait, sorry yes it is, OLIVIA, you are a genius.

ELEPHANT

I sat down by the window where the floor was most muddy from the morning showers and opened my menu. Then I went like this: eh, mm, na, woo, hun, ar. Because nothing really tickled my trunk.

OLIVA

SO. Chop chop chop I go, dice dice dice chop, mix mix, taste, mix mix sprinkle sprinkle pour, mix mix taste, cook cook cook cook cook taste sprinkle cook cook cook cook taste scream swear, cook cook cook cook cook cook taste and smile. And I'm shuttled to another time and place, growing up as a little girl on the vegetable farm. No. Yes, the vegetable farm. In my tom sawyer overalls and my straw hat and my bare feet, skipping through the plantation and digging up vegetables from the warm soil, then skipping home with a full basket and cooking them all up in a big wicker pot, then adding special spices I'd ordered from my spice catalogue, exotic spices with names too long to pronounce, from countries too small to see, and I'd serve them warm in a loaf of bread with the heart torn out. Ooooooooh. Mmmmmmm. La la la la la. People clamored at my kitchen window in frenzied hordes for a taste of my wildly original dishes. "Olivia is cooking in her wicker pot again, bring the tin foil and the toothpicks!" Tearing each other's hair, ripping their own shirts. For a TASTE, I tell you. And after one bite they'd drop to the dirt in a swoon. Because I made more than just dishes. I made VOODOO. Not the creepy kind with the mumbling and the eyes-rolled back and the rag doll stuck with pins. The good kind. I burned flavors into peoples mouth- memories. I could conjure music from the tip of the tongue to the uvula, each tiny increment of space resounding a different chord. It was clear I had a future as a Voodoo Priestess of Culinary Wizardry. But alas. I got thwarted somewhere between point A and point A. Until now.

ELEPHANT

Pardon me...

OLIVIA and ELEPHANT glance at each other.
OLIVIA skids over to ELEPHANT.

ELEPHANT (cont.)

She was a manic young lass. There was something spooked and gurgling about her. It was enchanting.

OLIVIA

I had never seen a pachyderm up close before. Not in a suit, at any rate. He had huge grey lashes and ancient pupils. His grey skin fell in thick folds above his collar. Was he a South African Bush elephant? A Malaysian Tree elephant? A Sri Lankan Marsh-hopper? Was he EXOTIC?

ELEPHANT

I'm a vegetarian.

OLIVIA

Where are you from?

ELEPHANT

I grew up in a small village in central India. But nowadays I consider myself more of a citizen of the world.

OLIVIA

Where do you work?

ELEPHANT

The airport.

OLIVIA gasps.

OLIVIA (aside)

Exotic indeed! A true wayfarer!

ELEPHANT (aside)

She was impressed, the saucy little beaver. My fat heart swelled. I asked her if she might tell me the special of the day.

OLIVIA

With pleasure.

ELEPHANT

The noise from the planes overhead was so clamorous she had to lean in close to say it. Her hair smelled like pepper. Her breath was vague on my cheek. Her frizzy hairdo tickled my proboscis. She whispered

OLIVIA

Vegetable stew

ELEPHANT

Vegetable stew

OLIVIA

Vegetable stew

ELEPHANT

Vegetable stew

OLIVIA

Vegetable stew

ELPHANT

Vegetable stew

OLIVIA

With CUMIN.

ELEPHANT gasps.

ELEPHANT

A spice from home. It had been so long. Thoughts of the festival... the heat, the sitars, dust rising in clouds from my feet, jewels draped on dyed cloth hanging between my eyes, "Ayravana, Ayravana, Vahana of Indra, Vahana of Sakra..." They whispered their holy hymns into my ears....

OLIVIA (to ELEPHANT)

I made it myself

ELEPHANT

"Ayravana... you've lost your wings... will you fly again... fly Ayravana..."

OLIVIA

It has shiny golden peppers and big luscious tomatoes...

ELEPHANT

I was transported... the dark men, their turbans wrapped tightly, their thick black beards pointing toward their hearts, the women in their kaleidoscoping saris and their jangling jewelry, all kneeling before me and singing the tale of my legacy:

(singing)

"Thousands of years ago, to the north of the Himalayas, a banyan tree of great height stood. One day, a flying elephant, while passing over the tree, swooped down and alighted upon one of its old branches to rest awhile. The old branch, unable to bear the massive weight of the elephant, at once crashed and fell. The hermit Dirghatapas had been seated beneath the tree engrossed in meditation and of course was unhappy to have been landed upon. He immediately cursed the elephant bird and deprived him of his wings, and so others of his kind. The elephant thus was forever earthbound."

OLIVIA

...fat bawling onions and fresh basil....

ELEPHANT

This is the legend they sang as they placed the cool damp cloths to my temples and waved their colored plumes at my underside. And my answer to them? "Good people of India, fear not... I shall fly again."

But as I uttered this vow I knew it was a lie. Contrary to my robust appearance, I am timid beast. I resist adventure. I cringe at most derivations of titillation. I arrived in this country by sea, not by air, adding weeks to my journey to subvert the condition of airborne-osity. I work at the airport so I may be close to those who take flight, knowing all the while I have not the courage to join them.

OLIVIA

And a big hard zucchini.

ELEPHANT

And she. All tangles and tempestuousness. She'd not look upon me with such dewy eyes if she knew my true nature... I strained to disguise it. I ordered the special of the day with a hearty nod and a courageous roar. YES, YES, I BELIEVE I SHALL HAVE THE VEGETABLE STEW.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!
Contact the author (sheila.callaghan@gmail.com)
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