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CRAWL, FADE TO WHITE

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CRAWL, FADE TO WHITE
by Sheila Callaghan

LOUISE / YOUNG LOUISE- female, 38....
FRAN / VOICE- female, 45-55
DAN- male, 45-55
APRIL- female, early twenties
NOLAN- male, early twenties
NIKO-male, 28-32

A stroke (/) marks the point of interruption in overlapping dialogue. When the stroke is not immediately followed by text, the next line should occur on the last syllable of the word before the slash— not an overlap but a concise interruption

ONE.

FRAN and DAN in their living room. They are dressed very stodgily, in drab clothing from the late 60's. DAN is folding little autumn-colored pieces of paper. FRAN is cutting leaves from them. Their actions perfectly mirror one another; fold-snip, fold-cut. Something taut and fat and terrifically unsaid hangs between them. Piles of colored paper leaves lie at their feet in orange, yellow, red.

They sit there for a bit. Finally.

The doorbell rings. FRAN and DAN glance at each other, bewildered and timorous.

FRAN stands and hundreds of tiny color scraps fall from her lap at her feet. She opens the front door. It is LOUISE, in her coat and hat. She is made-up and well-coifed. She smiles graciously.

Beside her is a large cardboard box.

Hello.

LOUISE

Hello.

FRAN

I hope it isn't too late to call...

LOUISE

Not at all.

FRAN

FRAN opens the door wider and gestures for LOUISE to enter. LOUISE drags the cardboard box in after her carefully. FRAN resumes her cutting nervously. LOUISE sits down, still in her coat and hat. DAN has stopped folding and is staring at LOUISE.

LOUISE

I live next door.

FRAN

We've seen you. Not seen as in "seen" really. We didn't know where you lived. Lived. I meant lived.

LOUISE

I've been there twenty years. You can see my house through that window.

FRAN and DAN look through the window. They see LOUISE's house.

FRAN and DAN

Ahh.

FRAN (cont.)

Your bedroom window. Is facing our living room window. You don't have curtains.

LOUISE

I suppose I don't.

DAN

We've seen you. In your bedroom.

LOUISE

Ah.

DAN

You have guests sometimes.

LOUISE

Indeed.

DAN

Men.

LOUISE

I do.

FRAN

It's going to rain tomorrow. Upwards, they say...

LOUISE

I heard.

FRAN
We're having a sale. A Fall Clearance Sale. We're selling some things. We wanted to

DAN
Wanted to

FRAN
Sell things. Old things we kept. It's a Fall Clearance Sale. But the trees lost their leaves too early this year. Fall fell before our sale.

DAN
So we're making our own leaves. So people will know.

LOUISE
Actually, that's why I'm here.

DAN
We're almost out of paper...

LOUISE
For the sale.

FRAN
It doesn't start until eight A.M. tomorrow.

LOUISE
I understand... have you another pair of scissors?

FRAN
Have we, Dan?

DAN
Scissors? Another pair? No. No, we only have one pair. One pair of scissors.

FRAN
One pair of scissors. Only one.

LOUISE
May I use those?

FRAN looks at her scissors. She looks at DAN.
She looks at LOUISE. She looks at the scissors.
She hands LOUISE the scissors, very carefully,
handle first.

LOUISE approaches DAN. She places her fingers
on the paper he is folding and removes it from his
hands. He lets her, stunned. LOUISE returns to her
seat and begins cutting the folded paper. DAN and
FRAN look at each other, incredulous.

LOUISE

You see, I'd like to sell something in your sale.

FRAN

Sell? Well.

FRAN looks at DAN.

DAN

Well.

DAN looks at FRAN. They both look at the cardboard box next to LOUISE.

FRAN

Is it... I mean/

LOUISE

An antique. It has been in my family for a century. I have no doubt it will go at once. The city folk flock in early, at around six-thirty. I've attached a price. Be sure to stand firm. I'll come by tomorrow evening to collect my cash. You may retain fifteen percent for yourselves. Does that sound equitable?

FRAN

Yes

DAN

Equitable.

FRAN

Yes.

LOUISE is done cutting. She hands the scissors back to FRAN and the paper back to DAN. She stands beside the large box.

LOUISE

Very good. Now if you don't mind...

She gestures for them to turn their backs.

FRAN & DAN

Of course.

FRAN and DAN turn their backs, close their eyes, put their fingers in their ears, and begin to mutter "la-la-la-la-la."

LOUISE kneels by the box. She strokes it lovingly.

In another space, APRIL and NOLAN have just completed vigorous sex in a small twin bed in a

college dorm. They are barely conscious, heaving desperately, covered in blood and sweat.

APRIL

I've lost something.

NOLAN

Cramp.

APRIL

I've lost something. Am I dead?

NOLAN

Cramp.

APRIL

I feel dead

NOLAN begins slapping something beneath the sheets.

NOLAN

Is this my leg or yours

APRIL

How long have we been here

NOLAN

Eleven days.

APRIL

Have we been eating?

NOLAN

Each other.

APRIL

It's coming back to me...

NOLAN

We also ate some of your laundry. A T-shirt, a black sock, a white sock, half a pair of jeans...

APRIL

Less for me to pack. What's that? The phone?

NOLAN

We ate the phone.

APRIL

I hear ringing.

NOLAN

I don't.

A long beat.

It's time.

APRIL

Are you sure?

NOLAN

Yes. I think. Yes.

APRIL

Okay.

NOLAN

With much gasping and straining, APRIL and NOLAN rip themselves from the bed with wails of pain.

Okay.

APRIL

They begin to throw anything that remains on the floor into bags.

LOUISE is done with the box. She stands. She touches DAN and FRAN to cease their muttering.

LOUISE (cont.)

Thank you. I will see you tomorrow evening. My name is Louise.

FRAN

Fran.

DAN

Dan.

LOUISE

Good to meet you. Goodnight.

LOUISE exits.

DAN and FRAN glance at each other.

FRAN stands and slowly approaches the box. She kneels before it. She cuts the duct tape with her scissors and opens the box top. She peers in.

DAN opens the folded piece of paper that LOUISE had been cutting. It is not a leaf. It is an oval.

DAN stares at it as though he has never seen an oval before.

FRAN is transfixed by the contents of the box.
DAN is transfixed by the oval.

DAN

Fran. Look at this.

FRAN does not. Her breathing becomes heavy.
DAN walks over to FRAN and peers inside the box.
He too is stunned. They clutch each other.

APRIL

Leaving The Bed.

NOLAN and APRIL circle the bed. They mumble the following lines quickly, monotone, overlapping slightly.

NOLAN

Each day cracking egg-like over our heads with the yolk of sunlight spilling into our eyes/

APRIL

we allowed it to dry around us and create a shell of stink to stay the world from our union/

NOLAN

creating god-like motions from the vigorous devourings of our sex/

APRIL

and now as we wash the shell from our skin and separate our centers/

NOLAN

let us retain the stain of each other's juices/

APRIL

inside each cavity/

NOLAN

each crevice/

APRIL

each fold of skin/

NOLAN

May we/

APRIL

Fester. May we/

NOLAN

Fester. Forever.

APRIL and NOLAN join.

Should we anoint it?

NOLAN

No... it has become toxic.

APRIL

APRIL removes a canister of Biggie Mart gasoline from a drawer and pours some onto the bed.

Oh. Grab your raincoat. You'll need it.

APRIL (cont.)

LOUISE appears in an unknown space. She dons a long blue cashier's apron in disgust. On the chest are stamped the words "Biggie-Mart" in white corporate font.

LOUISE
...so she will have options greater than mine so that people will rip the sky open and wrap her in it like a cloak so that she may unfold and her unfolding shall evoke the most eloquent mercy ever known...

She pins a large white plastic rectangle on the apron. It reads "LOUISE".

Fran

DAN

I know

FRAN

Fran

DAN

I know.

FRAN

APRIL lights a match.

TWO.

LOUISE's house. Dark as the inside of a stomach.

A zipper. Fumbling. A switch, then light.

NOLAN is lying on the floor, thrashed and hyperventilating, along with APRIL's open suitcase. APRIL is on the floor next to him. They

have been running all night. They still wear their coats.

The room is very posh but very bare. The only object in the room is a picture on the wall. It is of a young man dressed in a white uniform, standing next to a white van and smiling. The lettering on the van reads "HARMONY ANIMAL SHELTER."

The picture is fading softly to white.

NOLAN

Ho. Lee. Mother. I think my lungs blew up.

APRIL retrieves the Biggie Mart gasoline from her suitcase and hands it to NOLAN.

APRIL

Fuel.

NOLAN

Good thinking

He swigs. APRIL looks around the room at the emptiness. She pales.

NOLAN (cont.)

Maybe we should sleep.

APRIL

Not until she comes home

NOLAN

It's five AM... where could she be...

APRIL stands with difficulty and approaches the picture on the wall. She studies it. An impalpable hairline crack runs through her.

APRIL

I've never seen this

NOLAN

Who is it

APRIL touches the outline of the man on the photo.

APRIL
(remembering)

She met him over the corpse of a dead dog... their fingers touched through the bloody matted hair on the dog's back... the heat rose from the dog's body and was absorbed into their hands... harsh divinities leaked from their eyes and splattered onto the asphalt where the dog lay... the

dog grew cold beneath their agency... and two small white suns rose within their bodies.
Stomach to throat. Stomach to throat.

NOLAN

Again.

APRIL
(sexy)

She met him over the corpse of a dead dog... their fingers touched through the bloody matted hair on the dog's back... the heat rose from the dog's body and was absorbed into their hands... harsh divinities leaked from their eyes and splattered onto the asphalt where the dog lay... the dog grew cold beneath their agency... and two small white suns rose within their bodies.
Stomach to throat. Stomach to throat.

NOLAN

Again.

APRIL

She met him over the heat from the asphalt where white suns rose within their stomach throat/

NOLAN attacks APRIL. They struggle, then resolve into yet another session of ravenous love-making.

LOUISE enters. NOLAN and APRIL scramble to assemble themselves. LOUISE takes off her coat while APRIL and NOLAN put their clothes back on. She somehow stashes the Biggie Mart apron so APRIL cannot see it.

LOUISE

Well! What a splendid surprise! Welcome home. I didn't expect you until fall break....

APRIL

We left early...

LOUISE

And how delightful, you've brought a friend. I'm Louise.

LOUISE extends her hand to NOLAN glamorously.
NOLAN takes it.

NOLAN

Nolan.

LOUISE

A pleasure. I didn't know April had a *paramour*...

APRIL

I told you about Nolan / months ago

LOUISE

And so HANDSOME.

NOLAN

Hee.

LOUISE

Would either of you like some tea?

APRIL
(overlapping)

No/

NOLAN
(overlapping)

Tea would be great.

LOUISE exits into the kitchen. APRIL and NOLAN adjust themselves to be more comfortable. But since the room has no chairs, it is difficult.

LOUISE returns with a mug.

LOUISE

I'm afraid I have no fresh leaves. Nor do I have a pot to heat up water. I hope an old tea bag in cold water will be agreeable to you....

NOLAN

Sure.

LOUISE hands NOLAN his mug. He takes it and lifts the tea bag from the mug. He gnaws on it.

NOLAN (cont.)

Crunchy.

LOUISE

How was your drive?

APRIL

We ran.

LOUISE

Sixty miles? That must have been a poignant outing.

APRIL

It was awesome.

LOUISE

Splendid. And how's school?

APRIL

Where is it, Louise?

Are you enjoying your classes?
LOUISE

Everything but, we said.
APRIL

LOUISE
(to NOLAN)
April is so reluctant to speak of her studies... she's always been modest about her exceptional achievements...

APRIL
The four-piece Stratford tea service with the gold wash interior. The Antique Persian Lavar Kerman rug.

LOUISE
(to NOLAN)
I didn't even know she was valedictorian of her high school until they called her name to speak at graduation...

APRIL
The hand-carved oriental teakwood and pearl dinette set. Your emerald-cut blue-diamond drop earrings from Harry Winston. Your Roberto Cavalli leopard silk dress with the keyhole slit and the tags still attached...

Are you an exceptional student as well?
LOUISE

No.
NOLAN

Louise, we CALCULATED.
APRIL

LOUISE
We MIS-calculated, darling. Your scholarship is taxed. Your dorm is private. The rug and dinette set did not go for as much as I would have liked.

And the business?
APRIL

An all-time low.
LOUISE

I've given it to our neighbors next door to sell at their Fall Clearance Sale. The city folk will snatch right it up. They know precisely how to care for such things. It shall be in good hands. Why don't you tell me about school.

APRIL
I ate the school.

LOUISE

Did you.

APRIL

I got a bum score on a p-chem exam so I rented a little propeller plane and dropped five tons of magic shell, then I grabbed a serving spoon from the cafeteria and mounded.

NOLAN bursts into laughter. But stops when he realizes it wasn't meant to be funny.

NOLAN

Oh.

LOUISE

Surely that was a bit drastic for a poor grade.

APRIL

It wasn't one bad grade. It was a million. I'm failing out of school.

A beat.

I'm failing out of/ school

LOUISE

I heard you.

APRIL

They brought around a minesweeper to explode all the bad students. I made the loudest bang.

LOUISE

They would have contacted me.

APRIL

No, Louise. They only do that in grammar school. As long as we don't slit open our stomachs and disembowel ourselves, they pretty much expect us to function on our own.

A beat. LOUISE turns to NOLAN.

LOUISE

Nolan, is this true?

NOLAN

Um, no.

APRIL

I AM BLOWING EVERYONE AWAY. Professors look at me like they're watching the cosmos disrobe.

LOUISE

Of course you are, darling. You always do.

APRIL

You don't even know what I'm studying...

LOUISE

Of course I do. Physics...

APRIL

Quantum mechanics.

LOUISE

Of course. Nolan, do you have any idea what that is?

NOLAN

No.

LOUISE

She never tells me...

APRIL

You never ask.

LOUISE

It's all quite above my head...

APRIL

The study of the energy and frequency of particles and waves. Of light. Light. Light. Light. Light. Light.

LOUISE
(to NOLAN)

And what do you study at college?

NOLAN

April, basically

APRIL

Pay attention Louise, because I am about to provide you with a stunning metaphor.

LOUISE

All right.

APRIL

You can never know the exact location and exact velocity of a particle of light, Louise, because light particles obey the uncertainty principle. And if you know the velocity of a light particle very accurately your knowledge about its location will suffer, and vice versa. Which is why you NEVER say the particle is in a certain location with a certain velocity, but rather the particle's

most PROBABLE location is here and its most PROBABLE velocity is this... Which goes to prove that when you look beneath the surface of nature to see why things behave as they do, YOU FIND ONLY UNKNOWABLES.

A beat. LOUISE and APRIL stare each other down.

APRIL (cont.)

You understand?

LOUISE

No, darling. Your bed is still here. I'll go make it up for you both... I assume you'll be sharing...

NOLAN

Yeah

LOUISE

Would you prefer the sheets with the walruses having tea or the re-enactment of the burning of Joan of Arc?

APRIL gathers her things to leave. She takes the coffee mug reluctantly from NOLAN's grasp and hands it to LOUISE.

LOUISE

April... where are you going? Back to school I hope?

APRIL

To the neighbors. To get it back.

APRIL puts her coat and hat on, and gestures for NOLAN to do the same.

LOUISE (cont.)

They aren't starting their Fall Clearance Sale until eight A.M...

APRIL

We'll wait.

LOUISE

On their lawn?

APRIL

I can't stay here. My skin feels wrong.

LOUISE

You have classes to attend.

APRIL gives her mother a withering look. She exits with NOLAN.

A beat. LOUISE adjusts her hair. She then retrieves the Biggie Mart apron and stares at it.

THREE.

Early morning, sun just coming out. NOLAN and APRIL are shivering beneath the four trees in their raincoats. They are waiting for the Fall Clearance Sale.

APRIL is fuming with anger. NOLAN is uncomfortably trying to get her to talk.

NOLAN

You didn't tell me your mom was so hot.

APRIL doesn't answer.

NOLAN (cont.)

She's got this, like, ELEGANCE...

APRIL doesn't answer.

NOLAN (cont.)

And she's so YOUNG. Moms are never that young. Not ones I've slept with, anyway. She must have been in her teens when she popped you out....

APRIL

Just gave it away. Like it wasn't, like it didn't even... I am SO, I need a BRICK, something to bite through, okay no, I don't mean to be like, VAMPIRIC, but it's whatever FINE right, because.

A beat. She sighs.

APRIL (cont.)

She was sixteen. When she had me.

NOLAN

Wow.

APRIL
(proud)

Stinky, gnarled. Living in the streets. Her family was rich. I mean stupid wealthy, corkscrewing from every orifice. She went to a Swiss finishing school. Did you know it's a very serious crime to eat bread with soup at a dinner party?

NOLAN

No.

APRIL

You make crumbs. It's disrespectful to other guests. Also. Sixty-five to seventy centimeters of space should separate each guest at a table. Fruit must always be peeled and eaten with a knife and fork. La-la-dee-da. She bolted, never looked back. Wicked, huh.

NOLAN

Wow. Why did she sell all your stuff?

APRIL

To keep me in school. I've been in private boarding schools all my life, you know. Even kindergarten. Always sending me away.

NOLAN

When are you gonna tell her?

APRIL

I don't know. She's gonna freak. But it's better this way, I think. Her business isn't doing very well...

NOLAN

What business.

APRIL

I feel so weird. Like dizzy, kind of...

NOLAN

What business.

APRIL

And my teeth feel heavy..

NOLAN

What business

APRIL

Consulting.

NOLAN

What does she consult?

APRIL

What time is it

NOLAN

Five to six. April, why won't you tell/ me

APRIL
(sharply)

She's a beauty consultant. For rich people.

NOLAN

Oh.

APRIL
This forest is haunted, you know

NOLAN
Yeah?

APRIL
With the soul of my father

NOLAN
Yeah?

APRIL
I never met him.
He died in a helicopter crash over Bolivia.
He was eaten by lions in Kenya.
He was gouged by a bull in Barcelona.
He was hit by a train in Louisiana.
He choked on a chip in England.
He fell off the Great Wall of China.
He drowned in a puddle in Paris.
He grew wings and a beak.
Wings and a beak.

NOLAN
Um, okay, so what happened to him?

APRIL
Wings and a beak. Flew away. That's all I know about him. Besides how they met. And that they lived in a closet at an animal shelter for a while.

NOLAN
A closet?

APRIL
She never talks about it. About anything. Don't leave me, Nolan.

NOLAN
I think I'm dying, April. My chest swells a lot. My fingers buzz. My skin feels too tight. My saliva tastes like rotting wood. I swallow a lot when I'm not even eating. And sometimes I can hear really high frequencies in the air. I think it's because of you.

APRIL
Don't ever leave me.

NOLAN
I won't.

APRIL
Ever.

NOLAN

I can't.

NOLAN shows APRIL a vein.

NOLAN (cont.)

Green. It was blue yesterday. You're in me.

They scramble on top of each other. It begins to rain around them in slow motion. Upwards.

FOUR.

YOUNG LOUISE is curled up in a ball in the corner of a small, dark closet. She is fifteen. She wears a crappy, torn, second-hand dress, and looks like she hasn't bathed in two weeks. She is sleeping.

Inside the closet are a make-shift milk-crate desk, a sleeping bag, some hanging clothes, several empty cans of Biggie Mart root beer, and much dirty laundry. It is clear that the closet has been used recently as a bedroom and an office.

A young man enters, holding a parlor lamp tightly in his arms. It is the man from the picture on LOUISE's wall.

The lamp is an antique oil-burning parlor lamp from the early 1900's, highly ornate and highly valuable.

The man carefully places the lamp on the floor. LOUISE wakes up with a start.

They stare at each other quietly for several moments.

NIKO

You haven't left the closet. Have you.

YOUNG LOUISE shakes her head no.

NIKO (cont.)

Where you been shittin'?

She points to a corner.

NIKO (cont.)

Eleven days.

YOUNG LOUISE

Yes.

You been eating?
NIKO

Clothes.
YOUNG LOUISE

Whose?
NIKO

Yours.
YOUNG LOUISE

A long beat.

It's so quiet... are they all dead?
YOUNG LOUISE (cont.)

Most of 'em.
NIKO

Didn't occur to you to feed 'em, I s'pose.

YOUNG LOUISE
I was going to. But then when you didn't come home I thought you wanted them to die. And then I thought you were dead. So then I wanted them to die.

Well. Got your wish.
NIKO

A beat.

Where have you been sleeping?
YOUNG LOUISE

Back of the van. Somewhere off the highway.
NIKO

A beat. YOUNG LOUISE touches the lamp.

Thought I'd never see it again.
YOUNG LOUISE

NIKO
Took it to the same pawn shop four different times. Second time he doubled his offer. Third time he tripled it. Last time he wept like a baby.

But I couldn't do it. Kept picturing you sittin' here wonderin' how I could take it from you. Made my blood freeze in my veins.

A beat.

NIKO

So. That's that. Fella down the way wants to take this shack off my hands. Told him okay. Gonna stay in my van. Gotta pack some stuff.

YOUNG LOUISE remains silent. NIKO grabs a plastic bag and begins shoving his remaining clothes into it.

YOUNG LOUISE

Don't leave.

NIKO

I'm. You know. I'm not a pair of shoes with invisible heels. Or a fancy dress with little mirrors sewn into it. Or a metal thingy with diamonds. Or a silk nothin'. All that stuff you talk about. I'm none of it, Louise.

And I'm also not the man to keep you from it.

YOUNG LOUISE retrieves a lipstick and a mirror from her purse. She smooths her hair and begins applying make-up.

NIKO watches her silently a moment.

NIKO (cont.)

You know you don't need that crap. You're beautiful without it.

NIKO exits.

YOUNG LOUISE continues to apply her lipstick, calmly, over and over and over. Her hand is shaking.

FIVE.

DAN is sitting on a lawn chair under a tarp outside the house. It rains in slow motion around him, upwards. He is dressed more colorfully than before and wears a happy-looking hat.

The words "FALL CLEARANCE SALE" are spelled out with paper leaves, the very leaves FRAN and DAN have been cutting all month. Paper leaves decorate the scene in garish abundance.

Around DAN are piles of baby items, in mountains of blue and pink and white: baby clothing, baby toys, stuffed animals, mobiles, strollers, cribs, rolled wallpaper with rainbows and clouds. A child's tape

deck plays a child's tape of sugary nursery-rhyme songs. Everything with price tags.

FRAN appears from inside the house, also dressed more colorfully, in party clothes. She shoots DAN a panicked, naughty grin. She seats herself quickly in a lawn chair as DAN watches her.

FRAN and DAN glance behind them at their house. They glance around them at the neighborhood.

FRAN

It is done.

DAN

You are radiant

FRAN

Am I

DAN

You always had the smoothest cheeks. Paper thin. Afraid to touch them or my fingers would tear right through to your teeth. Afraid to touch you. Apricot pie. A pastry crust between you and I, your glowing fruit inside...

FRAN

It's going to be a good year.

NOLAN and APRIL appear. They are a dirty mess, covered in mud and wet leaves and blood, their clothing torn and their hair mussed.

APRIL

Hello.

FRAN and DAN

Hello.

APRIL

I'm April. My mother lives next door.

FRAN

Ah.

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