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LASCIVIOUS SOMETHING
a play by Sheila Callaghan

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LASCIVIOUS SOMETHING

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

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

ACT ONE

AUGUST is a weathered, emaciated, older-than-his age 35. He's covered in dirt and his fingers are stained red and covered in small cuts.

He is out in the field, tending his vines.

It is 1980.

AUGUST

My one hand. This hand, with its million minor cuts. Watched it move through the air. Watched it stretch its fingers toward the neck. The middle one trembling like a thin live wire. Curling as they reached the neck, curling around the back, finger finger finger finger thumb, then TOUCH, cool, like everything good in life, you know that kind of cool, and the red inside... the word I want to use is LUSH, red lush like the million minor cuts on my hands... but cooler than blood...

I knew what I was doing.

I held it by its neck, I felt its cool. I wondered if my blood would cool with it. I wondered if it could sense my touch somehow, if the atoms spun differently beneath my palm. I stood a respectful distance from it. Gripping. Not gripping, something more respectful than gripping. Because *I* was the one being gripped, you see. So. *Holding*, and I let the air between us fill and fill, with. With. That emotion you reserve only for the most holy of objects.

I held it by its neck. Then, after several moments, I lifted it. With this hand. Then I moved this hand beneath for support. A new touch, the circle of ridges pressing into my thumb... A pattern of small black lines crested my thumb, the soot and oil from between the ridges. 70 year old soot. Cris-crossing my minor cuts.

Brought it upstairs, placing both feet on each step, and allowed it to be taken from my hands just long enough to be placed into my carrier. How much, I heard myself asking. And she told me. My heart did not race as I thought it would, but I *did* bite my tongue. My blood was warm.

I barely saw the money leaving my fist, damp cash, barely saw the roiling concern in the woman's eyes—she had noticed my cuts, I suppose, or maybe the worn soles of my sandals—and when the carrier was handed back to me its weight was sweeter than any weight that had *ever* loaded my pockets.

At home... You did WHAT, she said... but I hardly heard her. She looked like a little brown bean, a little naked brown bean on the white sheets while I was plaster and roof and sky and clouds and black space. You did WHAT she said again, but with less conviction, and I realized she was making herself okay with it. With the prospect of leaner dinners and even leaner laundry trips. With using the cheapest of chemicals in the sink of our darkroom-slash-lavatory. With splitting open her empty paint tubes with a razor just to get the tiny half-brushful still inside...

And then she said. In her smallest, warmest voice. I hope you know what you're doing.

I did.

He disappears.

DAPHNE is seated at a worktable on a porch. She is 24 and poised, striking; a dark flower with a long willowy stem. She wears a work-shirt and jeans.

A modest, aging home sits behind her. She is surrounded by a trellis with grape leaves and bunches of fruit hanging down. She wears a sweater—it is slightly chilly. November in the Mediterranean.

She is scraping into a clay block. Every now and then she will consult a photo of the property.

LIZA appears. She is 35, also weathered beyond her years, out of breath. She carries a small book and a small bag and wears a large-brimmed hat.

LIZA

H-hello, I.

DAPHNE looks up and smiles. LIZA flips through her phrase book.

LIZA (cont.)

Sorry, *Ya-mas, Keery Moo. / Eethen*

DAPHNE

(Greek accent- much like Spanish)

I speak your language.

LIZA

(out of breath)

Oh, Super. There's a. Sign actually. TWO signs, but. A man with a donkey. Could I sit?

DAPHNE

Please.

LIZA

Thanks. I'm so winded! Kept thinking I was at the Summit but then there'd be ANOTHER... so and gosh the donkey had like a beard?

DAPHNE

Ah.

LIZA

So I started up the Thing again, but the path was all overgrown

DAPHNE

My husband has been very busy. He means to cut down the wild grasses but it is harvest and we have only one boy full-time.

LIZA

Do you know the donkey I'm talking about?

DAPHNE

You are American?

LIZA

I am. It had a beard. And eyebrows.

DAPHNE

My husband is American. He does not see Americans often. We get British, Germans. Mostly the summer.

LIZA

And the fella was SUCH an excuse me asshole. I think he hates your. I don't know what he hates exactly.

DAPHNE

You say that why?

LIZA

He kept spitting. *Ftou, ftou!* Greek-greek-greek, *ftou!*

DAPHNE

He is short and like a prune

LIZA

Prune-like, yes, and. Wheew. Angry?

DAPHNE

My husband will come up for his omelet shortly. Will you have some omelet with him?

LIZA

Um. Sure

DAPHNE

You have arrived on a special day. It is the last day of harvest for the season.

LIZA

Terrific.

DAPHNE

How long do you anticipate staying with us?

LIZA

Hadn't figured / actually

DAPHNE

We charge ten American dollars per night, or we have a weekly rate of sixty American dollars.

LIZA

Okay.

DAPHNE stands and retrieves a decanter filled with wine from the corner. She hands LIZA a glass and fills it.

DAPHNE

Welcome to our Island.

LIZA

Oh, it's... kind of early but what the heck! I'm on VACATION. Salut.

LIZA raises her glass.

LIZA (cont.)

You aren't having any?

DAPHNE

I cannot drink. I am expecting.

LIZA

Well. That is. N--wonderful news. Congratulations!

LIZA drinks deeply from the glass. DAPHNE returns to her sketching,

LIZA (cont.)

SWEET.

DAPHNE

It is not good. It is the run-off, so it is fortunate you do not pay so much attention in the sipping.

LIZA

Oh. I never really do. Just sorta knock it back and wait to get. Heh dizzy.

DAPHNE smiles politely.

LIZA (cont.)

Boy, you're. Beautiful, I wasn't quite uh prepared...

DAPHNE

Where did you say you heard of us?

LIZA

This hostel in Italy, in Rome actually, and the—I've been traveling, so... and you know there's, they have the the. Corkboards. For backpackers.

DAPHNE

You do not have a backpack.

LIZA

No. What are you drawing?

DAPHNE

It is an etching. I am designing the label. We hope to begin selling next fall.

DAPHNE tilts the clay toward LIZA.

DAPHNE (cont.)

It is not done... you see I need to fill in the details on the leaves. Also the wood grain on the barrels. And also it is missing the name.

LIZA

Ah. Are you from nearby, or.

DAPHNE

My family is a small village a few kilometers away. *From, is from.*

LIZA

I'll bet there are legends here...

DAPHNE

I will spare you.

LIZA

I want to hear ALL the legends. I've never been to a place with. I mean ANCIENT...

LIZA glances around the space and notices a black and white photograph.

LIZA (cont.)

Is this your....

DAPHNE

My husband, yes. Seven years ago.

LIZA

You took this?

DAPHNE

Yes. I was studying art at the University of Santa Cruz... My freshman thesis was a photo essay on the vineyards of the Napa Valley. I dropped out of school just months after. Then we moved here.

LIZA

What's wrong with his eyes?

DAPHNE takes the photo from LIZA.

DAPHNE

It was harvest and he was an apprentice. Picking and pressing and tasting and not sleeping, he was drunk all the time.... a piece of twine being frayed very slowly.

DAPHNE touches the photo lovingly.

DAPHNE (cont.)

I had never met a man like him... so wild, so unfinished...

LIZA looks up at the grape vines woven overhead.

LIZA

Oooh! Sorry, I'm. Easily delighted.

DAPHNE

Not at all.

LIZA

But yes I am delighted to be here. To be here in this place, this. Donkeys that need a shave, ha! And such a, an astonishing... It's. You know? HUMBLING. And these, these handsome...

DAPHNE

Help yourself.

LIZA

Don't you need them?

DAPHNE

We do not harvest those. They are for decoration and shade. Please.

LIZA

Oh no no no no no...

DAPHNE stands and picks a stem of grapes. She feeds one to LIZA, slowly.

DAPHNE

You will find we are very generous people. Do not hesitate to ask for anything.

LIZA

... what's your name.

DAPHNE

(voiced TH, "Thahf'-nee")

Daphne.

LIZA

Th. Oh, DAF-nee. Like in Scooby-Doo.

DAPHNE smiles.

DAPHNE

No. And how do they call you?

A small beat.

LIZA

Liza.

DAPHNE's face falls almost audibly. LIZA shoves the remainder of the grapes into her mouth.

A beat.

LIZA

As in "Minnelli."

A beat.

LIZA (cont.)

Is there somewhere I could go get cleaned / up

DAPHNE

Of course. The guest house is down those steps and around the back. You are the first door, the suite. The key is in the handle and the sheets are starched and folded for the bed.

LIZA

Super. Thanks.

LIZA exits.

A beat. DAPHNE realizes she is still holding the photo of AUGUST. She places it back on the table and composes herself.

AUGUST sweeps into sight, singing loudly in Greek.

AUGUST

Na ena karidi
Na ena zoozooni
Fa'eh toh zoozooni prota
Ella hondreh'

He suddenly roars loudly.

AUGUST (cont.)

That is the sound I have been holding in all morning.

DAPHNE

Congratulations, *agapi-mou*.

AUGUST

Thank you, *kota*. Is the Champagne iced?

DAPHNE

When is it not.

AUGUST retrieves a bottle from the cooler and pours himself a glass. She watches him carefully.

DAPHNE

You have earth on your lip. Eating your dirt again...

AUGUST

I can taste how it plays into the grapes. See for yourself.

He kisses her.

DAPHNE

Ick.

AUGUST

I ain't too good to eat dirt. But you...

DAPHNE

I am far too good. Which is why you stay with me.

AUGUST

You won't eat dirt. Woman. Because you ARE dirt. Woman. Filthy filthy chicken...

He begins to kiss her. She notices his hands covered in cuts.

DAPHNE

Vlepis! Ti Krima!

AUGUST

Stems are tougher than last year. Scissors kept breaking. Managed not to split any skins...

DAPHNE

Except your own.

DAPHNE retrieves a damp rag.

AUGUST

The last day is always the hardest...

DAPHNE

Did Boy throw up?

AUGUST

Around five-thirty.

DAPHNE

We give him too much drink during harvest.

AUGUST

He's better with a hangover. More gentle.

DAPHNE

Where is he?

AUGUST

Down with the crushers, pressing his little heart out. We'll save the big cleanup for tomorrow.

DAPHNE

Avgusto...

AUGUST notices DAPHNE's etching.

AUGUST

Ooh. Better....

DAPHNE

...but... ?

AUGUST

No it's good. I'm just thinking.

DAPHNE

Not joyful enough...

AUGUST

We have time, *kota*. We'll get it right.

He touches her tummy.

AUGUST (cont.)

How are you feeling?

DAPHNE

Tired. The queasy woke me.

DAPHNE wipes AUGUST's hands with the rag.

DAPHNE (cont.)

Avgusto—

AUGUST

Ow. Weird. My knuckle. When I move my hand like this, my knuckle hurts. See like this, it hurts. Like this, it doesn't. This, ow. This, no. Ow, no. Ow, no.

DAPHNE

Avgusto. I must tell you. Someone is here.

AUGUST

From the village?

DAPHNE

An American.

AUGUST

That's odd... a tourist?

DAPHNE

Someone from your past.

A beat.

My past? AUGUST

A woman. DAPHNE

Who? AUGUST

DAPHNE does not answer.

Daphne... AUGUST (cont.)

The one who bites. DAPHNE

A beat. LIZA enters.

I had trouble finding the.... LIZA

She notices AUGUST.

...bathroom. LIZA (cont.)

Holy shit. AUGUST

Hello, August. LIZA

Holy shit . It's you. Is it you? AUGUST

It's me. LIZA

Ho. Lee. SHIT. What the hell are you doing here? AUGUST

I was just telling your your / wife LIZA

DAPHNE

I will go make the omelet. Excuse me.

DAPHNE exits.

LIZA

I was telling... she is STUNNING, by the way

AUGUST

Thank you

LIZA

And so YOUNG.

AUGUST

Thank you... Liza! Wha...

LIZA

I was in Rome, and Romania, and Prague, and Buda-pesht/

Suddenly, AUGUST grabs LIZA. They begin kissing passionately. He starts to tear off her clothes.

DAPHNE enters with a plate of scrambled eggs. AUGUST and LIZA do not stop.

DAPHNE

You might like to know, they said on the radio. Your president has been elected. He is named Ronald Reagan.

AUGUST and LIZA stop kissing. LIZA exits. AUGUST and DAPHNE move into the exact positions they were in before LIZA entered. The plate of eggs remains.

AUGUST

Who?

DAPHNE does not answer.

AUGUST (cont.)

Daphne...

DAPHNE

The one who bites.

A beat. LIZA enters.

LIZA

I had trouble finding the....

She notices AUGUST.

LIZA (cont.)

...bathroom.

AUGUST

Holy shit.

LIZA

Hello, August.

AUGUST

Holy shit . It's you. Is it you?

LIZA

It's me.

AUGUST

Ho. Lee. SHIT. What the hell are you doing here?

LIZA

I was just telling your your / wife

DAPHNE

I will go make the omelet. Excuse me.

DAPHNE exits.

LIZA

I was telling... she is STUNNING, by the way

AUGUST

Thank you

LIZA

And so YOUNG.

AUGUST

Thank you... Liza! Wha...

LIZA

I was in Rome, and Romania, and Prague, and Buda-pesht—did you know that's how they pronounce it? With a 'sht'?

AUGUST

I'm, I'm literally

LIZA

PESHHHT. I was doing some traveling, so... did you know Hungary has the highest, the highest um suicide rate of any other country? In the world?

AUGUST

You look. Astonishingly beautiful.

LIZA

Ha!

AUGUST

You're a woman.

LIZA

Ha! I suppose I am. Dropped all the baby fat. Well I suppose it was more like standard grade D American Chub... big Mac and a vanilla McShake every frickin' meal...

AUGUST
(not listening)

That's right...

LIZA

Strange that we didn't see the irony of keeping our enemies in business...

AUGUST

Are you hungry? Can I get you anything? Champagne?

He dashes over to the champagne bucket.

LIZA

Those were some times. Livin' on love, lard, lactose, and Marx...

She sizes him up.

LIZA (cont.)

How is it that you look exactly the same?

AUGUST

That's very kind of you, but it's a bald-faced lie.

LIZA

You're swarthier, actually...

AUGUST

Swarthier? No.

LIZA

Not a little swarthier? Not even a little?

AUGUST

Knobbier, maybe. Less hair.

He hands her a glass of champagne, then realizes she still has her wine.

AUGUST (cont.)

Oh, sorry, I didn't / even realize

LIZA

No, it's, hang on...

LIZA downs her glass quickly. AUGUST is amused.

AUGUST

You aren't a wine drinker.

LIZA

I'm no I don't suppose I mean a glass with dinner sometimes but.

AUGUST
(mischievous)

All right... are you as CLEVER as you ever were, Miss Liza?

LIZA

Clever-er, actually.

AUGUST

Then you shall learn. About such things. At this place. Are you as SELF-ABSORBED?

LIZA

You can't tell?

AUGUST

Then you will learn a lot, for fear of being made a fool.

LIZA

Ah. Well good.

AUGUST

Last question.

LIZA

Games, little August and his little / games

AUGUST

Are you still a raging lunatic?

LIZA

Well of course. It's in my nature.

AUGUST hands her a glass of champagne.

AUGUST

Then. Cheers.

DAPHNE enters with a large plate of eggs and three forks.
AUGUST immediately begins wolfing it down.

DAPHNE

I make it like the French. With heavy cream. An old French lesbian showed me how. She said Americans don't eat eggs. She said Americans therefore are the dangerous people. She had chickens in her back.

AUGUST

Backyard. She didn't have chickens in her. Heh.

DAPHNE

Her eggs came to the kitchen still warm from the chickens' bodies. Once we found a beak in the egg. A little baby beak.

AUGUST

Daphne's family spent their summers at various chateaux in Normandy. Fancy fancy.

DAPHNE

It's where I learned to drink wine. The Greeks don't understand wine.

She offers a fork to LIZA.

LIZA

Thank you.

LIZA eats a forkful.

DAPHNE

My lesbian also told me it is customary to spit into the eggs of our enemies.

LIZA stops chewing.

DAPHNE (cont.)

Fortunately, I do not spit. Spitting is a dirt habit. For people who eat dirt. You agree?

AUGUST

Talking about spitting while one is eating is also a dirt habit, *mikri-kota-mou*.

DAPHNE

Only from those with the dirt-mouth. You are not eating, Liza.

LIZA

I'd like to be drunk first, thanks. Great eggs.

DAPHNE

Thank you. You might like to know, they said on the radio. Your president has been elected. He is named Ronald Reagan.

LIZA looks over at AUGUST. He continues eating, as if he has not heard.

LIZA

I didn't know you had American news over here.

DAPHNE

We receive the large news, the head--headlines, of course. We once received American newspapers to the house. But then *Avgusto* stopped wanting American news. You know that vine in his neck, the big vine? When he would read the American news his vine would pop.

LIZA

Vein, I think. Right?

DAPHNE

He has a grape vine in his neck. Tell her, *Avgusto*.

AUGUST

I have a grape vine in my neck, Liza. It used to be a vein. But now when I bleed. My blood is wine. Delicious eggs, my filthy chicken. You know, tonight? We should have a feast. For Liza.

DAPHNE

Of course we should.

LIZA

Oh, no...

AUGUST

What do you eat?

LIZA

Don't go to any. I wasn't even planning on / staying

AUGUST

There are no other guest houses for miles.

LIZA

I eat everything.

AUGUST

A feast then. For the last day of harvest AND for a long lost friend. More champagne?

LIZA

No thank you. All right.

He pours.

DAPHNE

Liza. You are the first old friend of my husband's which whom I have met. I would very much like to hear a story from his youth.

LIZA

Um ... I met him senior year of high school, so... he was a, oh god a WRETCHED student. I mean he was a genius, but. But he liked to do, heh. Bad things. To teachers. Like have AFFAIRS with them.

AUGUST

Ha! I forgot about that!

LIZA

Oh please, how could you / have POSSIBLY

DAPHNE

Affairs. Love affairs.

AUGUST

Man oh / man...

DAPHNE

I am not shocked.

AUGUST

Just the one, Liza is hyperbolizing/

LIZA

One was / PLENNY

DAPHNE

I don't know that word, / Hyper...

LIZA

She was so OLD!

AUGUST
No she was / not.

LIZA
She was what, fifty, / fifty-five?

AUGUST
THIRTY-five. Ish.

DAPHNE
You were how / old?

AUGUST
I don't / recall

LIZA
Seventeen. He got EXPELLED. For BONING his chemistry teacher! She was, is, is this an appropriate / story

AUGUST
It's fine.

DAPHNE
Go on.

LIZA
Well he was planning on dropping out anyway. Was on this angsty kick against formal education.

AUGUST
Heh/

LIZA
Wanted to eat garbage and write leftist propoganda and build bombs out of uh, Styrofoam / and rubber bands

AUGUST
You're leaving out the best part of the story!

LIZA
Oh! So this teacher wasn't just ANY teacher... she was BLACK. A BLACK teacher in a white public school system. In 1963.

AUGUST
Same year Kennedy was shot/

LIZA
You can just imagine the uproar from the—do, do you know anything about the American Civil Rights movement?

DAPHNE

Yes.

LIZA

Well anyway. She got very fired AND very publicly ostracized... And a week later, all the members of the board of ed woke up to spray-paint on their driveways: "GOOD MORNING, BIGOT!"

AUGUST and LIZA laugh. DAPHNE does not.

LIZA (cont.)

Man were you intimidating. You had this um, eating the world with your eyes kind of thing...

AUGUST notices DAPHNE's discomfort. He touches her hand.
Small beat.

DAPHNE

Ha. That is an amusing. I also know a story. It is one involving you.

LIZA

Really? What?

DAPHNE

I'm sure if you thought hard you would think it up.

LIZA

I am thinking hard...

AUGUST

Miss Liza, what is the one story my wife would have to know?

LIZA

I really can't imagine...

AUGUST stands and turns his body to the side, and pulls down his pants. A puffy, bite-shaped scar is dug into his hip.

DAPHNE

It was the night he left you. You and he were living out of your small car at the New Jersey shore. You had no more food. You had not washed yourselves in two weeks besides your feet in the ocean. You had sex four times a day and were on pot much of the time. You were lying with your stringy head in his lap with your eyes closed.. You were talking about molecules moving in your fingers and your feet. You were talking about how your skin was not solid, how the vinyl seat was not solid. You said everything was vibrating in nature at all times, and you said it scared you so much, and you said the only time you felt still was when his voice was in your ears, low and serious. And then you felt a wet drop on your closed lids, and you opened them and he was crying into your

eyes. And he said you are so beautiful Liza, you are so beautiful you could crack the sky open. And you said August you are like the universe, you are so big you fill me you fill my ears and you fill me. He brought his head down to yours and unrolled his tongue into your mouth. And his fingers wound around your hair. And you grabbed his hip with your hand and you said the word NEED, and you wrapped your thick leg around his skinny leg and said the word NEED, and then you sank your teeth into his hip and bit so hard you came back with part of him in your mouth. And then you made love. And you fell asleep. And when you woke up you had a red smear on your face where you fell asleep in his blood. But he was gone.

LIZA

Huh. I don't remember that.

AUGUST

You do, Liza.

LIZA

I don't, really. Biting. I'd remember a thing like that. But I do have the urge quite often. To bite people. I just don't think I'd follow it through.

AUGUST

Of course you would. You want to bite my wife right now, Liza. Admit it.

LIZA

Well yes. I'd like to bite her face off. But I won't do it.

AUGUST

I think you just might.

LIZA

No. I wouldn't.

LIZA approaches DAPHNE.

DAPHNE

You will. You are about to.

LIZA

Bite your face? No. I will not bite your face.

LIZA bites DAPHNE's face. DAPHNE quickly covers her cheek with her hand.

DAPHNE

Good. You see? You see now? An animal.

LIZA moves slowly.

LIZA
(carefully)

That. Wasn't. Me.

A beat. AUGUST notices DAPHNE's discomfort.

DAPHNE (cont)

Ha. That is an amusing. I also know a story. It is one involving you.

LIZA

Really? What?

DAPHNE

I'm sure if you thought hard you would think it up.

LIZA

I am thinking hard...

AUGUST

Miss Liza, what is the one story my wife would have to know?

LIZA

I really can't imagine...

AUGUST stands and digs into his pocket ,and takes out a package of Wint-O-green Lifesavers.

AUGUST

Bang.

LIZA

Are those...

AUGUST

Wint-o-green Lifesavers!

He pops three in his mouth and begins to chew, smiling hugely.
LIZA begins cracking up.

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