

ELEVADA
By Sheila Callaghan

RAMONA, a petite, bright bubbly gal in ballet slippers, jeans, and a pretty fringed scarf, sips a half-glass of wine and chatters happily while KHALIL, a mixed-race, stylish dude listens politely and perhaps slightly confused, drinking a coke.

RAMONA

...I'm kind of like the, well the wine-iest stuff I do, I run a weekly tasting panel for quality control or like, to screen new product--

KHALIL

Uh-huh--

RAMONA

I write and edit descriptions for back labels and marketing collateral, um you know brand positioning, creative campaign brainstorming, competitive research, that sort of.

KHALIL

Okay, cool.

RAMONA

I used to do the events, like coordinate wine events--

KHALIL

What's a--

RAMONA

Like promoting a new, or bunch of, like we had "Wine Rave?" Back in the day? Marketed to 20-somethings, you know, labels with wee animals or old-timey bicycles and stuff. Two hundred vendors. Thumping electronica. It was a zoo.

KHALIL

Wow.

RAMONA

A zoo! A lot of the guys had on cologne. I mean--

KHALIL

Cologne!

RAMONA

Right?

KHALIL

Ruins it for everyone.

RAMONA

Not ruins, I mean everyone seemed to be having a good time...

KHALIL

No, I mean, you know.

RAMONA

Wine and spirits, you know. What's not to. It's just inconsiderate, a little. But now I just, I'm a desk gal. I miss it. The people. I'm definitely one of those. I like having an excuse to talk to people. "What do you like, what are your hobbies?"

KHALIL

A desk gal. Like, a—

RAMONA

Yeah. But I'm really happy to be where I am. I'm very lucky. I am so lucky. I just finished a huge project. My bosses were happy. I like to please people. Even if it's just bosses. They're both women. One is kinda chubby and has bad skin. The other wears pointy shoes and paid someone else to give birth to her twins. Where's our waiter, it's been, what.

KHALIL

Not that long. Um, so you're like, actively looking for side projects, or...?

RAMONA

Not really. No.

KHALIL

Oh. Okay.

RAMONA

I'm so hungry. What should I get!

KHALIL

The specials are on the board.

RAMONA

Look at those desserts! I'm a dessert person. Ooh, pheasant, I've never had that.

KHALIL

You should get it.

RAMONA

I will. I might.

(beat, with a loud funny accent)

"The party doesn't end just 'cause you leave the room."

KHALIL

Um.

RAMONA

That statement. So full of bravado. I've never said that to anyone but I think it sometimes. Why is bravado so appealing?

KHALIL

Not always. Like in action movies--

RAMONA

Oh right. Like with the hero.

KHALIL

Right. All this crazy turmoil, it's full of incident and pomp, you're bludgeoned by incident, but where's the content?

RAMONA

Sure?

KHALIL

I find things that are not substantive unappealing. I'm a bit of a content whore. I hope I don't sound like a dick.

RAMONA

Well. You have to be. For your work. Not a dick, I mean. A content whore. Or--

KHALIL

No, I do. Yes. Both, actually.

RAMONA

A dick?

KHALIL

Sometimes. Sometimes. I've managed people remotely before. And sometimes people are unmanageable. Especially when you're not like, actually there. Fuck, sorry.

RAMONA

For what?

KHALIL

I'm just, I'm hearing myself, and it's like, "shut the fuck up you pretentious bag of ass, / I mean

RAMONA

What, you're doing *great!*

KHALIL

No, see this is the problem. Before it didn't matter, I was just "that guy." But now... I'm not used to alienating people in person. I want them to see the *work*, not the *man*.

RAMONA

Um what exactly is your work again? I mean currently?

KHALIL

Right. Well um technically this isn't "work" because I'm not like, getting paid, or, but. Basically I try to understand the way we form community online in order to to make existing communities better.

RAMONA

Like, how?

KHALIL

Um, okay I wake up every morning at like 5am and make my yerba mate and turn on my computer, then I just... I watch what all the kids are talking about. "The kids!" Ha! Am I old? I'm old.

RAMONA

Ancient. You're decomposing.

KHALIL

(touches his head, self-conscious)

No, that's—I have a flaky scalp.

RAMONA

No no, I didn't / mean

KHALIL

It's worse in the fall. I'm trying a new shampoo—

RAMONA

I was just riffing. I'm not very funny.

KHALIL

No, yes, you're funny. I'm just. Dry. It's okay.

Awkward beat.

RAMONA

So you, you were / saying

KHALIL

Yeah, so I form narratives based on the activity of the community. And then I use those narratives to help script a more evolved code.

(small beat)

I think that's what I do. Now that I don't have a job.

(small beat)

Um I'm a bit um. Lost, actually? Which is why I feel like I could use some perspective on myself. Professionally.

RAMONA

What, like a therapist?

KHALIL

Um.

No.

Like a PR person.

RAMONA

Oh.

(small beat)

I'm always interested in how people get into things. I've been at my job eleven years. I started as a temp. I never thought... you know?

KHALIL

Totally.

RAMONA

Time slips away.

KHALIL

When you're having, um. Fun.

(to the waiter)

Oh hi, we seem to be having a pheasant deficit.

RAMONA

Hee!

KHALIL

(a little bravadoey)

Just, menus when you get the chance. She brought her drink over from the bar. Thank you.

RAMONA

(suddenly dizzy)

Whoo.

KHALIL

You okay?

RAMONA

Yeah. A little... um, serrated. Like--

KHALIL

Is it the wine?

RAMONA

No. It's delicious. It's a red zin. It goes with everything. I mean not everything. It's jammy. But American foods. And barbecue. Do you like to barbecue?

KHALIL

Um I like the *idea* of barbecue. As an *abstraction*. We didn't do much barbecuing in my family, growing up. It just wasn't a thing. And now, you know, the city...

RAMONA

Totally. Hibachi on the balcony. Do you have a balcony?

KHALIL

My apartment actually has a little yard. In Brooklyn.

RAMONA

Really?

KHALIL

And a grill. I never use it.

RAMONA

You should use it.

KHALIL

I should. I should. It's a lot of work, though. I should, though. The outdoors. Fresh air. Parties. Bllegggk--

He shudders. Small beat.

RAMONA

Sure you don't want even a sip?

KHALIL

No thank you. Even a little is... I get blotchy. It's bad. Like you'd start to feel sorry for me.

RAMONA

Oh, I don't want to do that. I'm having such a good time.

KHALIL

Oh good. That's important.

Slightly awkward beat.

KHALIL (cont.)

I'm always impressed when a company manages to successfully market a niche field to a mainstream audience. I read about this, ha! This dog club in the east village, like this exclusive club for dogs, and there's a screening process to get in—

RAMONA

What like a written test, or--

KHALIL

No, just, is your dog anxious, or obnoxious, does he intimidate other dogs--

RAMONA

Ha! No! / No!

KHALIL

And the dogs were all named after pharmaceuticals. Zoloft, Xanax--

RAMONA

No! No no no!

KHALIL

Yes!

RAMONA

Should we go there?

KHALIL

To the dog club?

RAMONA

Yes! Do you have a dog?

KHALIL

Yes.

His name is Fisherman.

RAMONA

Fisherman!

KHALIL

That was his name when we got him. A fisher of men. He's a rescue. We just got him last week. He has cataracts. Keeps running into things.

RAMONA

Oh, sad! Poor thing.

KHALIL

Yeah. Always running into walls--

RAMONA

Who is we?

KHALIL

My roommate and me. My buddy Owen. He's a writer.

RAMONA

Ah.

KHALIL

He moved in recently. Lady troubles. It's temporary. Occasionally we'll run out of almond milk and he'll crumple onto the floor sobbing, but. He's great.

Sound of a low growling, moves into higher pitch.
Coming from beneath the table.

RAMONA

Whoa! I have a charismatic digestive system.

KHALIL

Scary.

RAMONA

Right?
Have you--
Have you ever been to somewhere?

KHALIL

Like---

RAMONA

Abroad.

KHALIL

Um sure. I speak places. Used to.

RAMONA

Where?

KHALIL

Munich.

RAMONA

Munich!

KHALIL

Munich, yes. *Munchen*. Last time was Switzerland. This was years ago. I've been kind of a recluse lately—

RAMONA

Switzerland!

(wistful)

Gosh, I'd love to go somewhere.

KHALIL

Anywhere in particular, or...

RAMONA

Yes.

Beat. She stares at him oddly.

KHALIL

Um.

What are you--

RAMONA

I'm tracing the edges of your gaze with my own
I'm signaling to the superman across the superchasm

KHALIL

Ha! Helloooooo...

RAMONA

Hi. Hi there.

KHALIL

Hi.

(small beat)

Um.

RAMONA

Um, so.

I have to ask... Your profile didn't mention...

KHALIL

My profile.

RAMONA

It's totally okay if you do, I'm not one to judge, I'm not judgey at all, my sister is the judgey one, but you didn't mention if you were um, divorced, or married, or—

KHALIL

Oh. Ha! *My profile*. Right. No. Neither. No. Not even.

RAMONA

Because you seem totally almost normal.

KHALIL

I'm. Put it this way. For someone who works in social media, I'm not particularly social.

RAMONA

Oh okay. I get it--

KHALIL

My roommate's pretty social. I'm just. I just.

RAMONA

You hover. Over humanity. Like a mothership. Waiting for people to board. But they never do.

KHALIL

Yeah. I mean I'm functional. But in the immediate one-on-one I tend to like... forget that I have a body. I don't mean like, during sex—sorry—

RAMONA

No it's fine—

KHALIL

No but my point is. What's my point. Okay I have to be honest. I didn't write that profile. My roommate did. I didn't even realize this was a date until a minute ago.

RAMONA

Oh. I'm confused.

KHALIL

He set me up. He's been threatening to do this. He told me to come here and ask for a girl named Ramona. Told me you were an aspiring publicist looking for work.

RAMONA

Oh. I'm not that.

KHALIL

I should have realized the second I walked in and saw the attractive pendant lighting--

RAMONA

I've been catfished!

KHALIL

No! I mean I guess, yeah, but look, you're very sweet, and I totally get why he did this, but I'm not gonna be around for much longer and it makes no sense to start up a whole like, *shebango* with anyone—

RAMONA

Why? Are you dying?

KHALIL

I'm attempting to sell the exclusive use of my identity to a corporation for three years.

RAMONA

What does that mean?

KHALIL

Um okay so the Supreme Court declared that corporations should be treated as persons, right?

RAMONA

Really? When?

KHALIL

1886.

RAMONA

Oh.

KHALIL

But it's gotten press recently because of um, protest groups and stuff.

RAMONA

Okay.

KHALIL

So I'm curious what happens when a person assigns his identity to a corporation. Like, can it be used to raise awareness about the issue of corporate personhood, *and* create a, you know, a spectacle in the process?

RAMONA

Okay.

KHALIL

So basically the corporation will assume **both the real world identity and online identity** of myself. It'll **re-imagine my own personhood as a brand**.

RAMONA

Um okay. So for three years the corporation is you.

KHALIL

Basically.

RAMONA

So what happens to *actual you*?

KHALIL

I cease to exist.
As a person.

RAMONA

What do you mean? You're still you.

KHALIL

The corporation is leasing me. "I" am whomever they hire to *be* me.

RAMONA

But *you*, the guy sitting here with the flaky scalp and the twitchy knee. Who's that?

KHALIL

No one.

RAMONA

So what do people call you?

KHALIL

Nothing.

Beat.

RAMONA

That's crazy.

KHALIL

I guess--

RAMONA

No that's, it's just. It's nuts. Are you a nihilist, or...?

KHALIL

Maybe? It's all meaningless anyway. Until I get bought. So.

RAMONA

When will you?

KHALIL

Soon. I hope? I'm glad you don't seem. Upset?

RAMONA

Why would I be?

KHALIL

Because this isn't, you know. I'm not like, on the market? Don't feel like you need to order dinner, though. Unless you're hungry. I'll understand either way...

She unwraps the scarf around her neck. Her skin bulges at the collarbone in a strange synthetic way.

KAHLIL (cont.)

What is, what's--

RAMONA

My port.

KAHLIL

Port? What's a--

RAMONA

For my chemo.

I'm dying.

I usually take off my scarf earlier but I was having such a good time and I wanted it to last.

Longish beat.

KHALIL

(to the waiter)

Oh hi again. How's the pheasant?

Black out.

RAMONA's apartment. JUNE tidies the place.
RAMONA reads the paper.

JUNE

You are not dying, Ramona, why do you keep telling people that.

RAMONA

Everyone is dying.

JUNE

But not everyone whips out her port over cocktails to scare her dates away. What was this, number seven?

RAMONA

I'm not trying to scare anyone--

JUNE

Then what's the point? You've been so-called dying for four months. Very unsuccessfully. Most people would call that recovering.

RAMONA

I just don't think it's fair to not say anything--

JUNE

No. You didn't "just don't think." You keep doing it. I mean why bother going on dates at all?

RAMONA

I like it. The beginning part is always exciting. People are so interesting. This last guy was an internet person. His name is Khalil.

JUNE

"Khalil?" Is he ethnic?

(tiny beat)

Well that didn't sound racist at all--

RAMONA

He's very attractive. Smokey eyes. Delicate hands. And, he's famous I think.

JUNE

He said that? "I'm famous?"

RAMONA

No--

JUNE

"Nice to meet you, I'm famous." If he had to alert you to that fact, it might be an overstatement.

RAMONA

Just with internet people I think. He's really smart. He's starting this corporate personhood project—

JUNE

(re: the apartment)

You never clean. Look at this filth. And these curtains--

RAMONA

They were mom's.

JUNE

She had atrocious taste.

RAMONA

I like them--

JUNE

They look like someone ate a bunch of French macaroons and vomited sideways.

JUNE cleans something vigorously. RAMONA watches. Beat.

RAMONA

Do you think I shouldn't be dating?

JUNE

Did I say that?

RAMONA

Not exactly--

JUNE

Not remotely. Not once have I suggested you should not be dating. Because I do not think that. You should be dating. You should be having delightful adventures with astonishing young men. Absolutely.

RAMONA

“But...”

JUNE

But nothing.

(tiny beat)

I am just, I am... concerned... that you may be using your... your situation... as. Chump-bait.

Beat.

RAMONA

“Chump-bait?”

JUNE

Because you're afraid or. You need validation, or.

RAMONA

I'm not afraid.

JUNE

The frequency, though. Recently. Is a little alarming. And also you're suddenly this like, bubbling fountain of flirty charm and frankly it's disconcerting--

RAMONA

I'm a late bloomer.

JUNE

People who show drastic behavioral shifts in very short periods of time generally wind up on medication--

RAMONA

I'm a *late / bloomer!*

JUNE

Okay, Monie. All I'm saying. Is maybe you could bloom a little more slowly.

RAMONA lays back on the couch. Beat.

JUNE (cont.)

I didn't even tell you about *my* news.

RAMONA

You have news?

JUNE

I finally got up the nerve to talk to Sideburns.

RAMONA

What!? Oh my god. Oh my god.

JUNE

Right?

RAMONA

After or before your coffee? Wait, stop. You walk in...

JUNE

No. Even before that. I wake up. And I'm crabby. Go to my closet with the new Elfa system I just installed—which I fucking *love*, by the way-- and pull out my new underwear basket, and I'm looking at all these thongs, all laid out like a beautiful vegetable garden, I never wear thongs, but I have this collection, I keep buying them for special occasions, and I realize. I won't have enough special occasions in a lifetime to get through them all. So. I pick the eggplant-one with the lace--

RAMONA

Eggplant! You're wearing it right now?

JUNE

As we speak.

RAMONA

Eeeee!

JUNE

And I say, “June. You are gonna talk to Sideburns today. You are gonna talk to Sideburns today because you are wearing an eggplant-colored thong in daylight.”

RAMONA

Fuck yeah! So you walk in.

JUNE

So I walk in. He’s sitting there in the corner as usual. Navy Paul Smith suit, coral tie. Reading the Times. Sideburns crispy as ever. I take a couple yoga breaths. I mosey like molasses right up to him, peer at the paper over his shoulder, and say oh-so casually. “I see the Islamic Fundamentalists are at it again.”

RAMONA

You do not!

JUNE

Oh I do. I completely do. I say just that. “I see the Islamic Fundamentalists are at it again.” And he says, “I haven’t gotten to that yet.” And I say, “Looks like a doozy.” And then there’s like a pause. And I see in his eyes he’s perceiving me anew. The well-dressed woman with the side-swept bangs who stands in his coffee line nearly every morning... she has *gravitas*.

Small beat.

RAMONA

So what do you say?

JUNE

Nothing. I allow myself to be beheld.

(beat)

So then. After like a million seconds. Of him beholding me. He goes, “Would you like the arts section?” And I go, “Only if you haven’t read it yet.” And he goes, “I rarely get to it anyway.” And I go “Maybe you should try reading it first.” And he goes “Maybe I should.”

Beat.

RAMONA

And then what?

JUNE

He hands me the Arts section.

Beat.

RAMONA

I mean, does he like. Is there like, desire in his eyes, or is he just like, who is this chick, or...

Dunno. JUNE

This is huge. This is huge. RAMONA

I know. JUNE

I mean it could be. RAMONA

I know. I know. JUNE

It's been months, you stalking him. RAMONA

Seven. Seven months. Every morning. JUNE

You did it, Junie. RAMONA

I feel good. JUNE

I'm so proud of you. RAMONA

I'm relieved, honestly. To have finally done it. JUNE

He could be the thing that erases Jeremy. RAMONA

I don't want to erase Jeremy. JUNE

Oh. RAMONA
I know, I mean—

What. I don't. JUNE

RAMONA

No I get it.

Totally.

I mean.

Not erase. But, like. Shrink him down. To like the size of an acorn. So you can place him in a small box lined with tissue paper. And then slide the box into the storage nook beneath your apartment building, behind mom's blankets and your old wedding china.

And then one day when you're organizing some crap, you'll find the box. "What's this box?" And you'll open it and see the acorn. And you'll go, "Gee. That's so small. That's so much smaller than I remembered it." And then you'll close the box and go back upstairs and nuzzle into the torso of the person who you've *actually* been pointed toward for centuries, but never knew.

JUNE

Huh.

(longish beat)

When is your CT scan?

RAMONA

Next week.

JUNE

I *know* next week. What day?

RAMONA

Friday.

JUNE

(checking watch)

Should I make coffee?

RAMONA

Sure.

JUNE

I'll put a little cinnamon in it.

RAMONA

Fun.

JUNE disappears.

RAMONA absently fondles her port. It glows beneath her fingers a little.

Blackout.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!
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to read more