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 terribly 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.

I live next door.

LOUISE

FRAN

We’ve seen you. Not seen as “seen” really. We didn’t know where you loved. 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.

I suppose I don’t.

LOUISE

DAN

We’ve seen you. In your bedroom.

LOUISE

Ah.

DAN

You have guests sometimes.

LOUISE

Indeed.

DAN

Men.

LOUISE

I do.

DAN

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

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

FRAN
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?

Yes

Equitable.

FRAN

DAN

FRAN

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.

I’ve lost something.

Cramp.

I’ve lost something. Am I dead?

Cramp.

I feel dead

NOLAN begins slapping something beneath the sheets.

Is this my leg or yours

How long have we been here

Eleven days.

Have we been eating?

Each other.

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?

APRIL

We ate the phone.

NOLAN

I hear ringing.

NOLAN
I don't.

A long beat.

APRIL

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.

APRIL

Okay.

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.

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.

Leaving The Bed.

APRIL

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.

NOLAN

Should we anoint it?

APRIL

No… it has become toxic.

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

APRIL (cont.)

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

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

FRAN

I know

DAN

Fran

FRAN

I know.

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.

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

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

Fuel.

Good thinking

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

Maybe we should sleep.

Not until she comes home

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.

I’ve never seen this

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 lovemaking.

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.

Hee. NOLAN

Would either of you like some tea? LOUISE

No/ APRIL (overlapping)

Tea would be great. NOLAN (overlapping)

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….

Sure. NOLAN

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

NOLAN (cont.)

Crunchy. NOLAN

How was your drive? LOUISE

We ran. APRIL

Sixty miles? That must have been a poignant outing. LOUISE

It was awesome. APRIL

Splendid. And how's school? LOUISE

Where is it, Louise? APRIL
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...

LOUISE
Are you an exceptional student as well?

NOLAN
No.

APRIL
Louise, we CALCULATED.

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.

APRIL
And the business?

LOUISE
An all-time low.

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.

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?

Um, no.

NOLAN

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. 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


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.

You understand?

APRIL (cont.)

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

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?

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…

We’ll wait.

On their lawn?

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

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.

Wow. Why did she sell all your stuff?

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

When are you gonna tell her?

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

What business.

I feel so weird. Like dizzy, kind of…

What business.

And my teeth feel heavy..

What business

Consulting.

What does she consult?

What time is it

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

She's a beauty consultant. For rich people.

Oh.
This forest is haunted, you know

Yeah?

With the soul of my father

Yeah?

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.

Um, okay, so what happened to him?

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.

A closet?

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

Don’t ever leave me.

I won't.

Ever.
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.
NIKO
You been eating?

YOUNG LOUISE
Clothes.

NIKO
Whose?

YOUNG LOUISE
Yours.

A long beat.

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

NIKO
Most of 'em.

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.

NIKO
Well. Got your wish.

A beat.

YOUNG LOUISE
Where have you been sleeping?

NIKO
Back of the van. Somewhere off the highway.

A beat. YOUNG LOUISE touches the lamp.

YOUNG LOUISE
Thought I'd never see it again.

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
THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!!

Please check samuelfrench.com for the published version.

Thank you for reading!