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TOMATO

Kathie Giorgio

So you fuck him and then his wife sends you a bag of homegrown tomatoes. You wonder what this means. Does his wife think you're a tomato? A hot tomato, a sassy redhead, meeting her husband in mid-line hotels, letting him drop 40 bucks just to fuck you for an hour? Forty bucks, a hotel room, a bag of tomatoes, just so you can come sometimes and sometimes not. Or is she just thanking you for tutoring her husband in French, taking him from a community education class to private sessions so that he can achieve his lifetime goal of speaking French like a Frenchman? Does she know that, while you are supposedly at Starbucks, conjugating French verbs over ice-cold venti frappuccinos, you are actually in that forty-dollar room, your red hair spread on a pillow, while her husband kisses you the French way, in your mouth and between your legs?

Tomato, you think. *Tamate*.

You've never been to France, but you speak French fluently. You can whisper it in his ear from the back of your throat or shout it during climax, real or faked. You tell yourself that the French don't believe in monogamy, *monogamie*, and neither do you, and that makes you more than a *tamate*. Sometimes you come home from the hotel and fuck your husband, *votre mari*, before you even take a shower. And he doesn't even notice, doesn't comment on the scent of another man on you, the Frenchman's semen still soaking the panties that *votre mari* peels away and tosses to a place where you'll have to pick it up later, with all the other tossed clothes, and stuff it in the laundry because, if you don't do it, no one else will. And you delight that he doesn't notice because that gives you justification. *Justifier*. You don't believe in *monogamie* and *votre mari* is a fool. *Un imbécile*.

So you continue with the tomato tryst. *Tamate liaison*. And you listen as your lover, the Frenchman, calls out words above you, words in a guttural English that names your body different things you can never shout out loud. You whisper them after

him, a soft echo, an *écho*, but in French so that you can say that you've taught him a lesson. *Plunge, chatte humide, baise, twat serré.* Your body spreads open beneath him, and you take him in again and again. You whisper these words, these tomato words, and you try to stay with him, in that bed, in that forty-dollar hotel room. You try to be the tomato. *Tamate.*

But with the Frenchman as well as with your husband, you fall into memory and you are a young girl and you are with him again. Your father. *Votre père.* He squeezes your new breasts and parts your legs and, after the first time when there was red blood, *sang rouge*, on the sheets, he leaves you breathless each and every time. When he is there, when he is in you, when his tongue enters your mouth, your ear, licks the tip of each nipple, you forget he is your father, and you sink into the deepest part of your body where all is red and warm and gentle undulation.

It was only during the day that he was *votre père* and you blushed at his touch, a pat on the back as you left for school. But then his misplaced hand dropped lower, pausing on your ass, and you always wished for the night. *La nuit.*

So now with the Frenchman, you whisper his words and try to stay in the forty-dollar room. With your husband, you think of the Frenchman. But with both, sometimes you weaken, and your mind falls away, and you think of *votre père*, and then you come. Then all is red again. *Tamate.*

So you try to keep up, hotel room to bedroom to hotel room, and the tomato ripens, it fills with juice and seeds, *jus et graines*, the skin growing thin and dotted with beads of *rouge*. And then it bursts and you burst and there is rouge and jus and graines everywhere.

You wipe it all up and put it in the laundry because, if you don't do it, no one else will.

And you move to France. Where you learn of the freedom, *liberté*, of being alone.

Seul.

Green on the vine. Until you ripen again.