

Andrew

Hello everyone. This is Andrew Pond, Artistic director of Eclectic Full Contact Theatre. Welcome to Season 2 of The Half Hour Audio Hour. Every month, we'll be featuring a different playwright, allowing you to not only hear their work, but to find out a little more about them and their process. This month's production is *Salacia*, written by India Rodgers, directed by Rachael Proulx, and starring Rebecca Gallagher.

Before we start, we'd like to briefly introduce you to India. After the production, stay tuned for an interview with India for more insight into the play and this process.

"India Rodgers is a writer based in Bristol, UK, who enjoys exploring the female experience through new lenses. She spent the latter part of her childhood in Cornwall, a coastal area of the UK, which serves as a pool of inspiration for the themes within her work. India has a masters degree in Scriptwriting from Bath Spa University and has had her work produced by The Bath Fringe Festival, Bloom Theatre and The Lightship Theatre and she has had several short stories featured in online publications *Shorts Magazine* and *Round Lemon*.

India is currently working on several projects that are in research and development, with hopes to debut her play *Girls Just Wanna Have Funds* in the near future."

And now, *Salacia*

(Sounds of rough waves and seagulls)

NARRATOR: SALACIA is sitting on a picnic blanket. A basket of food and wine is next to her, with two glasses laid out but not yet filled with wine. The sound of waves crash and seagulls call. Its sunset, turning into night, she waits. She is in modern clothes, but there is a mythological vibe.

(Waves calm, then die out)

Salacia: I sit by the shore and wait. I sit by the edge and I wait. Waiting. Waiting. Listening. Most days I am here staring out to sea and wondering. Wondering about all things and every things, but mostly why my husband no longer loves me.

When the thunderous waves crash onto the cliffs their sound commands it, as if Neptune himself rises up from the depths swinging his trident "WAIT!" An order from the gods. I feel

the full force of the water hitting the rock, it hits my chest but I can breathe, my lungs filled with water long ago.

Of course it wasn't always like this. I was always fascinated by the sea and the creatures that live within it.

I grew up by the seaside, we moved away from the city when I was young and I still remember the sense of freedom. Fresh air, laid back attitude and a vast expanse of space to run and dance and play. We spent long summer days on the beach running in and out of the ocean trying jump over and outrun the waves. The sea was mine before it was his. He took that away from me too.

When the waves claw forward on the shore and then recede back it tugs me closer and it whispers, "wait" like a lover teasing you and drawing out the anticipation of the euphoria to come. Murmuring delights into your ear as you wait patiently to be pleased. The sand melting beneath me, anchoring me to the spot and making it harder to leave.

He was one of the first people I met on my very first day. We were queuing up to get the keys to our rooms and he was behind me. We had a brief conversation and parted in different directions. Now, if you knew my husband you would know that once he sets his eyes on something and he wants it, he has to have it. The story goes, as he tells at many dinner parties, that he saw me and he knew that I was the girl that he wanted to be with. He was hooked.

(Sound of wine being poured)

NARRATOR: Salacia takes a wine glass and fills it with wine.

Men are typically visual creatures and my husband falls into that stereotype perfectly. He saw me, a young woman coming into my own, slim figure, cascading blonde curly hair, full of hope and excitement for the future. Who you see before you now is not the same woman who started the journey.

The problem with my husband is that he is charming. Everybody who meets him falls under his spell. And although I did resist for some time, he managed to catch me in his net. I'm not really sure how it happened. It was a slow process. He kept chipping away and eventually I gave in. Women typically aren't adverse to flattery, and unfortunately I fall perfectly into that category.

One evening I was dancing. I was dancing when he saw me for the second time. Free as the seagulls gliding over the waves. That exuberance of youth, the opportunities endless, the path not carved, the floor unmapped. Not watching anyone, just dancing and feeling the music. I was uncharted territory. I had secrets lying within me waiting to be discovered. A terrain to be analysed, understood, then conquered. He was going to let me go this time.

The sound of drums. Salacia starts to sway with her arms in the air.

It was the toga party at the student union. I had my arms up in the air praising the old forgotten gods. Wine was flowing, grapes were being passed around, the gods and goddesses took mortal form for that night. He sees me dancing and makes his way through the crowd, eyes locked on me. This was his chance to strike.

The sound of the drumming intensifies. Salacia is up grinding and gyrating.

I was young, I felt like a woman for the first time, I felt primal, I felt wanted. I was away from home for the first time. He walks towards me, one of his hands sweeps my golden hair and holds the back of my head, the other grips my waist and we kiss. I felt like Venus, no not Venus – I felt the waves crashing in my belly-

Salacia, goddess of the sea!

Sound of quickening heartbeat

And then we went back to my room and

(heartbeat stops)

had the most awkward sex I've ever had in my life. But over these past ten years we've worked on it. You become the most sexually compatible partner for one another. You learn to please.

After our night of awkward passion, we were in this weird zone. Called the 'seeing each other' zone. I'm sure you're all familiar with it. It's a dangerous time. No boundaries have been set, you're not boyfriend and girlfriend, you're not official. You're trying to impress. Constantly. Be the perfect partner, be cool about him having female friends, trying new positions every night to convince him he's managed to tame a wild spirit for even a moment. It was during this time that he slept with one of our friends.

I found out in the most casual way, one of our mutual friends just said it. Like everyone knew. Like there was nothing to hide. Like I wouldn't mind. Turns out he had told everyone that I already knew but best not to mention it because I was upset about it. A clever trick. It was also during this time that I realised he had an explosive temper. I confronted him about it and he exploded. And somehow we ended the conversation with me apologising. He has a talent for turning the conversation around, to make me laugh or to make me sorry.

We stayed together. In hindsight this event was probably a foundational moment in our relationship. He had successfully managed; in one fell swoop, to justify his actions, assert his independence from me and to drop me into a cycle of wanting to keep his attention. I am and always have been a people pleaser.

Skip forward a few years and university is coming to an end, a flash in the pan of elation, colour and wonder and my now husband decides to carry on for another year and do a

masters in marine biology. And of course you encourage your loved ones with acclamations of 'follow your dreams' but you don't ever think about the fact that their dream will inevitably lead them away from you.

He studied hard for a year; I got a job in a local coffee shop. I had absolutely no idea what I wanted to do, so I thought the easiest thing to do would be to go along with his plans for the time being until it occurred to me to pursue something. I waited for passion to enter my life like it would drop out of the sky and upon my lap. I grew frustrated. I was supporting us. But you never want to leave your comfort blanket when the winds of uncertainty are blowing.

We spent our days talking and dreaming of what the future might hold. Planning things as a pair, for our joint life.

He finished his masters, passed with flying colours like I knew he would, like I said – once he sets his mind to something – incredible really. He immediately started looking for jobs. I don't think at this point the thought had entered my mind – *marine* biology – the potential for him to be away at sea for long periods of time. Such excitement he had when he got it. He started immediately. He packed and was ready to go. His excitement didn't let him look back at me waving him off. He was an intrepid explorer off to find an undiscovered part of the sea. You don't want to snuff out your partner's excitement; I was excited for him, but a little voice at the back of my head was questioning 'what about me?'

I was kidding myself that maybe this would just be while he got experience. Or maybe he would miss me so much that he couldn't possibly go back to sea. I secretly hoped his flame would fizzle on the water. I selfishly wanted him to come home and for me to be enough.

And so it's been this way for a number of years, he goes out to sea for six months and comes back for three. He maps the sea floor. He searches the sea for rare creatures when there is a rare creature at home searching the sheets for him. He comes back and all routine is thrown out of the window temporarily, he takes over. Like he's come ashore to conquer a new land, he plants his flag in the ground and claims the soil his own. In the chaos he also expects everything to have remained the same, as if time stands still the moment his boot touches the floor of his boat.

I'm the rope that moors him and he is the little rowboat that floats on the surface of the water, dancing around in the playfulness of the waves. If the sea distracts him too far then the rope gives a little tug and the boat abides by the length of the rope and reluctantly inches back to shore.

His first return from sea was blissful. I had missed him so much and he had missed me. But he had also grown closer to the sea and fallen in love with her. That much was clear. He would tell stories of stormy nights and going weeks without seeing land and how he pined to go back. Coming home was like tying the rope to his rowboat again. He was built for the sea, but I was keeping him bound.

He's gone again. Half the year at sea saying he can't wait to be home and half the year at home wishing he was at sea. His mind never truly in one place, living two lives, his body in one life and his heart in another. I take comfort in the fact that for at least half the year he is longing for me. He calls me sometimes when he is away, its never for long, but long enough for him to profess his great love for me. He has to bellow his love, to be heard over the relentless thundering of the water. I think maybe if he says it loud enough I'll feel it travel across the ocean to me.

In his determination for discovery he is stripping the ocean of all its mystery. He is making the world a smaller place. He is rationalising a body of water. He is stealing magic. He is denouncing the enchanted.

Every time he comes home I have changed. Shifted so slightly that it is not noteworthy, but there is a newness somewhere lying within me. Over time the small newness that begun has now flourished into a more substantial part of my being. He maps my floor, the terrain within me. What has shifted and what has stayed the same? Testing the water. Sending sonar waves. Reconnecting.

Enough has displaced to excite and intrigue him, and enough has stayed the same that he feels he has come home. He overturns every stone in my soul until I return to being a comfy pair of slippers. His heart leaves before his body. At night I see him staring out the window at the sea, longing for her. He may as well be gone.

She's a bountiful expanse of otherworldly inhabitants that reaches as far as the eye can see. There will always be more of the ocean to trawl, more seabed to map. I am one woman. No matter the news I have to tell, the small adventures I go on, the modest risks I take – it is nothing in comparison to his tales of the sea. His big adventures. His great risks.

They say that distance makes the heart grow fonder, but I don't think that's always true. I think this distance has given me a chance to breathe unassisted. To look at my life from an outsider's perspective and possibly given me some level of bravery. But as soon as I sink into his embrace I am healed. I am comforted. My comfort blanket. Why can't he just stay?

I have grown used to being alone and grown used to sharing him with another. I'm jealous of his easy decisions. The way he follows his passions without a second thought. Of course he would do what he loves. The thought begins and ends in a sentence. The quiet whispering thought I once had now takes flight "But what about me?" I ask him, confusion lapping across his face. "You do what you want to do. Whatever it is I'll support you." he replies holding my hands. This isn't permission to run off, you see, there is a pivotal clause in our unspoken contract. The assumption. Wait. The prerequisite. Wait. The expectation. Wait.

I take comfort in knowing that women are creatures of the sea. What he loves about her, he must love about me. Both ruled by the moon, both have some level of mystery, both mothers to aquatic creatures. I felt it swimming. It was at home in its own tiny ocean and kicking to leave and come home. Waiting. Now it will be forever waiting.

The longer our pattern went on the further I drifted. Like when you make a hole in the ice on top of a lake and swim underneath, you can lose the hole and scramble to find your way back. I was harder to find. The rope got longer. The home he pined for no longer existed. Too much had changed. Each time he returned the void between us grew bigger.

Although I was alone and I had time to think about developing myself, it was difficult to envision another life where my focus wasn't seaward. I had to be here when he came back. I couldn't just leave. Imagine if he had come home and he hadn't got anyone waiting for him. It would break my heart.

I'm not waiting for him to come home. I'm waiting for the lost part of him to come home. To change his mind. To choose me. That's why I wait. For his mapped piece of sea floor to come back to me. I'm mourning the time not spent. I'm mourning the life we could have had. I'm mourning for me. For our little squid who never left its tiny ocean. For its father who was three months at sea when he called to bellow his love to me and instead bellowed his grief out onto the water. His love might not always be strong enough to cross oceans, but his pain flew directly to me and nested.

The seagulls find their mate and make a nest. They look after their eggs and when they hatch they teach them how to fly. Their calls carried on the wind. Seagulls mate for life, which I'm always surprised by. Even the vermin of a seaside town's high street can keep it together. Maybe they don't have to worry about conflicting paths. They find each other, find a nest and hatch a chick. They don't leave for six months at a time and expect to come home to the same nest.

Grief surrounds me. I am a microscopic island in his sea. He hardly said a word when he came back. I thought I had not spoken. I thought that I had been too terrified and the words never left my mouth. I had to ask if he had heard me. He had but he did not want to. He went out alone and I waited for him to come home alone with our grief. After I could not wait any longer I went to find him. He was staring out at her as if she would give him the answers. As if she would comfort him. He didn't look at me.

I needed him to tell me it was going to be okay, to say that we can get through it. To comfort me. To heal me. He isolated himself for the rest of the time he was home. He was dealing with his grief by himself. I was dealing with our grief alone. His time to leave soon came around and he got packed and ready to go. As he walked out the door I said "I'm not going to be waiting for you when you get back" without looking back he said "Yes you will".

I think about my younger self, standing in that queue for my room key, full of life and aching for adventure. And I can't find her. I feel shipwrecked on a shore that isn't mine. Like a dolphin tangled in a sea of plastic netting. What is mine he has invaded, whilst keeping his own world pure.

He has made me this way. He has ruined what he once deemed perfect. He started out with his ideal and set upon creating his nightmare. I have blamed him completely for the way I

feel, but I have been asleep at his side for years. Quietly drowning myself a droplet at a time and now I wonder why he does not see me.

Sound of waves

I'll return myself to the sea. I'll become part of the sea floor. Maybe he will see me then.

Sound of footsteps in the water

NARRATOR: Salacia walks into the sea, returning herself to the water. The wait is over

Waves fade out

Andrew

Thank you for listening to *Salacia*, here on *The Half Hour Audio Hour*. Next up is a brief interview we conducted with India Rodgers after the recording of this show.

ANDREW: First off, India, thank you for being part of this podcast, and also for allowing Eclectic Full Contact Theatre to be part of presenting *Salacia*. My first question for you is, how long have you been writing?

INDIA: I've always enjoyed great stories. I wrote a few short stories when I was little and that developed into a love of theater. And then eventually in my final year at university, I took a class called British new writing, um, where we studied all the great British plays of the 20th century, and I decided that in that class that I was going to give writing a go. Um, I really enjoyed the process, um, and almost instantly fell in love with it. Um, and then I decided off the back of that to apply for a script writing masters a day before the closing date, no less. And I got a scholarship to do the course, so I was absolutely made up, uh, and I honed my writing skills over that year and read a lot of scripts in that time as well, and just fell even more in love with it.

Um, So I first started writing plays probably about seven years ago now.

ANDREW: Wonderful, wonderful. And what inspired *Salacia*?

INDIA: *Salacia* was inspired by a conversation that I had with my sister in a supermarket car park of all places. And we'd just been shopping and we were just chatting and setting the world to rights.

Um, and we both discovered that at this point, I mean, this is going back years now, but at this point, we were both in romantic relationships and we were both feeling a bit of resentment, um, around relationships. And both of us would consider ourselves

quite independent, uh, women, uh, feminist. And, um, we always were brought up to follow our dreams and be independent.

Um, but for whatever reason, we found ourselves actually going along with what our partner wanted to do with their life plan, rather than going along with what we wanted to do. And something clicked in my head. And I felt that I had to get this feeling down on paper. Um, this slow process of changing your worldview or what you want out of life based off of what your partner wants.

Um, and that it's not a overnight change. It's a really slow change. And I thought that a lot of other women would be able to relate to that. Um, so yeah, I put it down on paper and that's how Salacia was born.

ANDREW: So tell me, is this the first audio drama you've written? And what differences or challenges are there in writing for audio versus for stage?

INDIA: I have written a radio play before, um, this is going back a couple of years now, but I co-wrote a 45 minute radio drama for the Bath fringe festival in the UK in 2016, it was called When Will It Be Me? Um, I headed a team of four writers and edited the final script for production. I also directed the performance, um, which was a really great experience and we received a four star review so I was really happy with that one. I would say the main differences between writing for stage and for audio is that with audio, you can play with atmosphere, I feel a lot more within the script, and create this real richness with your words that feeds directly into the ear of your audience and stimulates their imagination.

So each audience member is experiencing the material slightly differently. Um, so I call it theater of the mind in some ways. Um, and I find that really interesting. Um, and really exciting to write in that way. Stage performances have have different mediums to play with, um, and are driven obviously by dialogue and also physical action.

They both have their strengths. Um, but I find that with audio drama, you can make the words almost poetic, almost like prose, um, which I really enjoy as a writer.

ANDREW: Excellent. And do you have any projects coming up that you'd like to promote?

INDIA: I do have several projects in the pipeline at the moment, but they are all in R and D stages at present, but if you would like to keep up with my writing journey, please follow me on Instagram. My handle is @Indiawritessometimes I do all of my updates on there of shows, um, that I'm involved with, um, and my creative process as a writer.

ANDREW:Excellent. And this is, of course, the most important question of the entire interview—what, if any, is your fondest memory of the ocean?

INDIA: So I grew up in Cornwall in the UK, which is pretty much all coast, so it's all by the sea, so my childhood is full of memories of the sea and of the ocean. Um, which is probably why I like writing about it so much. Um, So I have a lot of fond memories of the sea. Um, definitely a lot of summers spent with our family and friends down on the beach. Um, but I think that my favorite memory of all time about the sea is when I taught my granddad to surf, uh, or bodyboard. He was a very quiet man, so I was shocked that he even wanted to have a go at it. Um, but I could tell that he absolutely loved it. And I felt like it was a real bonding moment for us. Um, I must have been maybe like 12 or 13, um, but I was really into it at the time. And I think that he could see that I loved it so much, so it was really special to me that he wanted to get involved and give it a go himself. Um, I remember us having a real laugh doing it. Um, and I remember us coming out of the water, uh, and he held my hand all the way up the beach, which is a really, really fond memory of mine. Um, he didn't say anything because that wouldn't really be in his character, but I don't feel that he needed to say anything.

But yeah, I cherish that memory that I have.

ANDREW: Well thank you so much, India, for being part of this. We really do appreciate it and I can't wait for everybody to hear *Salacia* on *The Half Hour Audio Hour*. Thanks very much.

Andrew

We hope you enjoyed *Salacia*. Next month, we will be presenting *French Beans and Inner Peace*, written by Natascha Graham

If you enjoyed what you heard, please remember to like, follow, and subscribe to our podcast. And feel free to leave a review! You can help us out in continuing this work by heading over to redcircle.com/shows/half-hour-audio-hour, where you can sponsor us through a onetime or recurring donation and become our partner in highlighting the voices and stories of women, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ artists. And head over to eclectic-theatre.com to find out about our serialized audio dramas, *Deep Shadows*, *Bloody Bay*, *Clusterf**k*, *Monocyte*, and *Throwing Shade*. On behalf of myself and everyone here at EFCT, thanks for listening.