

## We Met at Elephants

We met at Elephants Club downtown. She posed for the pictures and I stared from a far barstool near the emergency exit. Everything was fair about her appearance. That is what made the world seem so unfair to me. She looked cut out of a magazine. Her hair was thick, black, shiny and luxurious. Her eyes were strong and slanted and contained secrets. Her cheekbones were pronounced, her eyebrows neat, her skin was radiant and smooth. Worst of all, her big red lips looked so evil. She was a painting. She was a painting, no a sculpture, no a machine, that all of the great and deranged minds of science, art, and torture could only have created in their oddest nightmares. Like the playthings in the window of a goldsmith, she knew well that what the eyes of Eblis looked upon was not her, but the dreaming child afraid to face the darkness. She was truly too much for one world or one galaxy. So I flew away with her, in the mist of my mind. The days could not be more beautiful afterwards; life can only lessen, day by day, like waxy candles drip away. Anyway. She could scar you with a glance. She could burn you with a word. How deeply and dearly I wished to be burned at that moment. How very pitifully poised atop my tiny barstool by the emergency exit I wished to singe and scald if only I could touch that entrancing flame. I was so helplessly hypnotized. And the night inched onward, like a centipede crawling towards infinity. And where would the creature go when the earth reaches the sea. The night dragged itself through another shift, it fled from danger like an inchworm climbing a rod emitted from a tree branch inching forever onward up, toward sunlight as far as it can carry its magically dead body until a sparrow bites down upon it with the greatest advantage, size. There

were other men covering her. Her socialite disciples orbited her and I could only briefly see around them, but she sometimes twisted her neck around to speak or flipped her hair away from her face and then her diamond earrings would catch a glimmer from the green lights. And her jewelry would twinkle white like a momentary snowflake that combusted in the haze of love. One man had his arm around the beautiful girl. He wore sunglasses. His haircut looked expensive, his suit looked expensive and his shoes looked expensive. His smile looked expensive. But he had no backbone. He said the right things and he made the right moves. But he had no power. His mouth was full of sweetness and saliva but he had no steel when he spoke.

Because when he spoke everyone else looked in his eyes and they laughed at his jokes, but she did neither. She had never once looked into his eyes like two lovers in the Hollywood films do, (forgive the film reference, I suppose a good story should be grounded in the real world, not California fantasy, but love too must surely have aspirations, and what purer a dream is there than the Academy Award's artificial illusion? I am speaking of the American dream as it is portrayed in the hero gets the girl movie. Surely, you know the one. Like the green light on the other side of the harbor staring back at Gatsby and the letters on the blimp that read "The world is yours" and the prophecy of Macbeth. Bubble, bubble...) Certainly, I have lost you, but her eyes were not fixed on his. They were affixed, instead, to a giant fish tank across the room. Her eyes followed every fish and were captivated by their condition.

The fish tank was massive with green lights echoing the ambiance of this drinking hole. The lights illuminated the fish and the bubbles and the artificial setting that tried to fool them into feeling at home. The fish swam about looking for food, freedom, or

friends. One tapped the glass ceaselessly. It seemed the most possessed by liberation. It was the smallest and carried special markings that made it beautiful to me. Perhaps in its tank it was the strangest of the colony. No matter if that fish clawed at the glass with its face for food or for freedom, it had an enviable determination. Then, I realized that this minute was the longest time that I had spent with my eyes off of her since she walked in. I knew that she must still be there because the chaos and noise that she carried with her had not abated. So I looked over to her crowd. When my eyes reached their destination, I was melted by what I saw. As my sight felt its way around the walls and the corners all the way to her face, I found that her eyes were staring back at me.

So that is how we met. For thirty seconds each, we watched one another watch a fish tank. Perhaps it was presumptuous of me, but I have no doubt that the same considerations crossed paths in the dimension of the thought realm where such transverse mental cross-connection is possible. The realm which hides in the dark rift between reality and reverie and the Goblins of God call us into the shadows. The thought that we shared while watching the tiny fish break an invisible glass force field molecule by molecule was this: Never stop trying little dreamer. You will sprout angel wings and fly through a sea blue eternity before I ever know the happiness of love. The laws of man, you need not abide and your dreams will never be crucified.

The goblins of God cleared a place for her on my heart shelf.

I stood from my stool. She was in conversation. I walked toward her crowd. Her conversation continued. I may have turned around at that point or acted as if I was only looking for the restroom, but the fishes urged me forward. I pushed my way through the thick crowd, they glared disdainfully. They talked loudly to be heard over the music and

each other while cold sparkling drinks spilled out of their glasses. I smelled the cologne and perfume and I imagined that a man such as I was quite foreign to them. Just being a man, that is. Not a doll with tiny billfolds and prerecorded phrases attached to its plastic lips. The crowd grew silent as I approached their shrines to perfection, the Adam and Eve of their socialite Utopia, the man who looked the most expensive and the woman who was priceless.

Everyone stared when I got to the center and faced the pair. His arm was still behind her hip and he spoke now as he had all night long. But now he saw a stranger walk toward him and stop before him. The stranger standing before his eyes was his opponent, the stranger's eyes told him. The stranger meant to steal the treasure that he knew he was too weak to defend and too mortal to withhold from me. When the stranger stood in front of him, his back was straight and his chin was held firm and all eyes in the crowd were on mine, including hers. The crowd behind me grumbled. I was a stranger, so they scorned me when I approached their king and queen and they would delight in my downfall. I paused before I spoke. Our eyes were trained on each other; the man, the woman and me.

The words that abandoned my lips were, "excuse me, but I want to talk to her."

My palms sweat and my legs stiffened. I was worried. I was flustered from worry. I was not frightened by him, I was frightened by her. Would she reject me? Would she laugh at me? I still felt like I was sitting alone by the emergency exit. Alone, away, estranged, losing what has not begun. Then I looked at her. I looked into her face. Her eyes were glowing back at me. I felt blinded. Her eyes were not evil. They were my protection, they were crystals. Her dragon eyes glowed in the heart haze and I had to

feel my way through it to reach her scaly, winged soul. If I had to run through a million years of this heart haze then so be it. I would be like the fish breaking through a glass prison molecule by molecule to reach her.

His sunglasses came off as his head tilted forward; daring me to repeat what he thought I said. He replied “what?” with his eyes squinted and his arm was still unmoved from around her hip.

I shivered. But before I could repeat what I said before, with a voice controlled, she placed her drink in his hand and leaned toward me to say in my ear, “let’s dance.” And the glass prison was shattered. I loved her voice. It was just barely too deep for a lady’s and scarcely human, a little soft, a little sweet, a little wavy like the wind. And her throat created the most elegant melody. As from some throats, sounds are squeezed out like fruit in a juicer, from other lungs, words tumble out like boulders. From her mouth, they galloped or trotted stately like the horses pulling the sun or leading an army of brutish, apelike men.

She took my hand and guided me across the arena, past the fish tank that divided the club between a dance floor and a bar. She must have pulled me along like a balloon because my toes scarcely hit the floor. She watered my heart on a summer night.

We danced closely. At least she danced; she compelled me along, pulling my limbs from above like a puppet master. She then faced me and put her long arms around my neck. She leaned against me, her wonderful chest, which rose and subsided like the ocean, against mine, her beautiful smell like music to my nostrils, and asked me, with her celestial voice plus a tone of curiosity and enjoyment, what I do. I did not understand. She smiled and politely, rephrased her question, “what do you do in the world?”

I answered, "I am trying to be a writer."

She responded, "You want to write movies or something?"

"No," I clarified, "I write poetry and stories and stuff."

"So you're sort of a poet." She asked

"I am a poet, just not big yet." I replied.

"Then you should introduce yourself as a poet, not a writer." She stated.

"Why is that?" I asked.

"Because," she explained, "a 'poet' sounds much more fascinating."

So began the brief courtship of the angel and the goblin. Both had compiled a decent resume of life experience in quite dissimilar worlds and neither had emerged wiser for it. One was a dreamer and an artist of words and the other, a dream and the greatest masterpiece of the Artist of Worlds.

We danced forever and before the night was over a pretty girl pulled her aside to tell her that they were going to leave. I asked the beautiful one if she would like to hear my poetry, over lunch perhaps, she quickly declined and I felt as though I had been given a treasure and then had it stolen away. I was already consoling myself, telling myself that it is better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all, when she smiled and said "it would be more romantic and thus fitting for poetic conversation in the evening. Let's do dinner instead."

What an above average mind, I said in myself. She was masterful with diction and knew how to compel people to do her animal bidding, as well as toy with one's delicate sensitivities. She could outthink Einstein and a man must fear the beauty of her mind foremost. Her loveliness was her lure and acumen, her trap. She played upon

temptation like a musical instrument. I loved her and the game that she played on me. As long as she could grace my dreams then I would do all that I could to keep her near.

We agreed on meeting for dinner two nights from then, in the evening. She left with her pretty friend like a planet and her moon. The beautiful one brushed the man who had previously held her as she walked towards the door. She put her hand on his cheek and my heart sank, but it meant naught, I knew. She was a flirtatious honeybee and it would be senseless for one flower to get jealous of the other because her skirt passed by. I would have to beat him at the game. Thus, the mysterious sport had begun.

His eyes followed her through the heavy doors as she passed the giant men guarding the entrance, one of whom I met recently when he escorted his kids to the zoo. He got me into the club tonight. I would thank him later. Soon everyone was emptying out. The expensive man from before came over to me. He sat beside me at the bar. I was in the same seat as I had sat in earlier. He ordered us both drinks, it was my first of the night. He had drunk plenty. He asked me what I thought of her. I told him that she was fine. He laughed excitedly. He put a hand on my shoulder and leaned in close, “Take my advice. I can see in your eyes that you think you love her, so does every other person in here and out there,” he motioned toward the door, “she is a performer. The show that she put on for you today meant nothing. If you have got love on your mind, then you would do better with some of the other girls here who are just as pretty.” We both knew that they were not. He continued, “I can even set you up with some.” His eyebrows rose and he tilted his head waiting for a response. I was silent. He laughed a second time and confidently brandished a folded, crisp fifty dollar bill out of a clip in his pocket with what were, presumably, his initials engraved on it. He folded it and settled it

under his glass to tip the bartender. “You have a long way to go, kid. I am just trying to look out for you. You know, you almost remind me of myself when I was working these girls,” he paused, searching his mind, and continued, “now *they* work me (smiling). If there is something that I can do for you, give me a call.” He handed me his business card. I did not read it then, just nodded and tucked it into my pocket. He rose from his seat and stretched out his hand, I shook it. He waltzed toward the people of another group and made the transition from older brother to social charmer look quite easy. I did not finish my drink. I did not leave with a woman on my arm but I had a woman on my mind and she rested there for the night. I thanked the porter for letting me in and he waved my gratitude off kindly and asked me when I would return. I told him that I was meeting a girl here two nights from now. He looked at me blankly and blinked twice, I asked him what was wrong.

He told me that he was not working on that night so he could not let me in. This was an elite club and one had to be pretty or important to enter. I was worried for a moment too, and then I remembered the business card that was in my pocket. I told him that I could find a way and we shook hands and I departed. I walked along and I said in myself, “she and I, a perfect match, at the walls of happiness we scratch.”