

RATCHET RETAIL by Kevin A.M. Lewis

So there I was. Nineteen, sharp cut, resume in hand, sitting in the manager's office for my first job interview. The manager leaned against the desk adjacent to the security monitor, his arms folded, studying me through crossed eyes and spectacles. He seemed to really like the cut of my jib. I had the perfect build for someone who should lift heavy boxes. The prevalent blackness of my skin must have made him feel doubly comfortable. Beside him sat a short, stocky woman without an expression. She stared at me as if... Well, I have no clue. As if I was there. She was the assistant manager. After the pleasantries, the routine questions, and the scheduling, I was hired and ready to box-lift my way to stardom. I rose, shook the manager's hand, and turned to leave. "Hey, wait," said the manager. I paused with my hand on the doorknob to look back at him. I briefly noted that the assistant manager now wore a Cheshyre-cat sort of grin. "Now that you're hired, you're going to see a few...changes...around the store," the manager said. "What do you mean?" I asked. I idiotically, unwittingly asked. "You'll see. People who pass through retail stores as customers only ever see products and aisles. But to us, the employees, we see the reality. The mazes. The jungles. Most people quit at aisle eleven. You? I think you'll do fine." "Okayyy," I said, not sure what else to, and then turned the knob and exited the safe haven that was the manager's office. What the--? was my immediate thought upon exiting the office. The place previously known as "Asile 11: Pet Food and Pet Appliances," was now a jungle--literally, a jungle--full of foliage and vines and crawling with wildlife. Thick, lush trees lined my path. The heat was unthinkable; the smells were a tapestry. So this is what the manager meant. Well, I'm not quitting because of this. I found a nearby cutlass and sliced my way through, seeking the refuge of the center aisle that ran through the others. The world of Aisle 11 swam past through the gaps in the leaves on my left side; it was a world of shrieking monkeys loping through trees, trumpeting elephants sipping water at a lake, lions chasing legions of zebras through a savannah, and vultures swooping down on corpses in a wasteland. All the while, on my right side, I saw shelves of pet goods hidden under the foliage, their corresponding sales signs hidden beneath overgrowth. Christ, how are customers supposed to find what they're looking for in this? I wondered. Finally, after about twenty minutes, I made it to a wall of bushes with light on the other side. With a few good wacks I severed a path and tumbled out of the aisle into the one opposite it: "Aisle 5: Shampoo and Hair Conditioning." The smell of dung and pissy wilderness was replaced by that of an Herbal Essences-stained carpet. I power-walked to the front of the store. Maybe this was all a dream. Maybe I was just imagining that I would have to work in these conditions. Surely a simple retail job wouldn't entail venturing to foreign places or hunting down for-sale items in overgrowth? I made it to the front of the store and paused again. It turned out retail involved much worse. The front of the store had a row of three cash registers facing aisles four through six. Only one employee stood at the middle register. Her line of customers? It ran past aisle six and straight into aisle ten, the last aisle at the front. And lo; the line consisted of

very few humans. Behind the old lady at the counter, bears and gargoyles stared at the ceiling or flicked through the pages of their circulars. A fairy in a tutu hovered in place, staring longingly at Kiera Knightley in one of the magazines on display. At the end of the line that I could see, a dark knight sat atop his evil steed, his basket of items--including toilet paper and Snapple--slung comfortably over the crook of his arm. Though I could only guess where they came from, I understood full and well that these were the kinds of cretins I would be serving. There were other cretins I would have to work with too. There was a two-flight staircase leading to the second floor next to the last register and opposite aisles seven through ten. Two employees leaned on the banister sucking queer brown lollipops and then testing each other with breathalyzers. One of them caught my eye. I motioned to the line. The employee looked at the line, then slapped the other employee's arm and motioned to it too. I then blinked, and they both vanished into thin air. "What do you mean it's not on sale?" I turned to find a commotion starting up between the old lady and the cashier. "I mean it's not on sale," the cashier, a young woman with heavy-lidded eyes, said droningly. "It is on sale! The sign said--" "It's not on sale. That's what the computer says." The pair continued their litany for a brief eternity, then finally the old lady's face turned beet red and she drew a brick from her purse and threw it at the cashier. The cashier suddenly had a shield. I don't know where it came from, she just had it. And a sword. She blocked the brick with her shield, then swung her sword wildly and aimlessly. What had seemed to be an old lady sprouted wings and launched into the air, breathing fire down on the cashier. I slipped past the commotion and ran for dear life. I entered civilization--a city street, with human crowds and human automobiles darting past--but from that day forward, my view of the world was never quite the same.

END

Don't Tell Grandpa

Ashley R. Carlson

Word count: 1,000

"Are you ready to get your drink on?"

"My what?"

"Oh geez. What twenty-one-year-old doesn't know what that means?"

"I've been twenty-one for less than a day Grandma! And you

should be glad you don't have some 'seasoned' drinker on your hands," Bernadette says. Her friend Macie laughs.

"It's true though, Bernie. You're a bit of a nerd," she says, lumbering over to put the dishes in the sink. "But tonight, that's *all* gonna change. I'm gonna check my makeup, then to the Watering Hole we go!" Macie flicks her trunk in Bernadette's direction.

"Ooh goody. Let me get my purse," Grandma Hess says.

"Whoa, hold up there. You're not coming," Bernadette says. "It's embarrassing enough that I have to wear some ridiculous 'birthday tutu.' I'm not also gonna spend the night with my sixty-year-old grandma."

"What, you don't think I can hang with the kids?"

"Correct. I do not."

"Well, you are one hundred percent *wrong* missy! Here, have a lollipop."

Grandma Hess fishes one out of her purse and tosses it at her granddaughter.

"One of your 'relaxing' candies? I thought these were only for after a long day. Plus, you never share," Bernadette says, unwrapping the paper with her trunk and tentatively licking the edge.

"There's a reason I've never shared before honey; because they're quite expensive and—"

"BLECH!! What *is* that?" Bernadette shouts, flinging the lollipop away.

"—an acquired taste," Grandma Hess continues, picking up the candy and handing it back to Bernadette.

"Ready!" Macie shouts in the doorway, holding the dreaded turquoise tutu.

"Ugh. I was hoping you'd forgotten about that thing."

"Nope!" Macie says victoriously as Bernadette steps into the tutu, wiggling it up around her rotund midsection.

"What's in your mouth?" Macie asks as the three elephants stomp out of the house and down to the bus stop.

"Itz-ah-wowwi-pop," Bernadette replies, her voice muffled by

the candy.

“What?”

“It’s one of my candies, dear,” Grandma Hess says, offering another to Macie. “I have them sent here from Madagascar. They’re made with a rare brand of beer; virtually no hangover.”

“*What?* Your grandma buys alcoholic candies?! Ha!” Macie shouts as she takes one.

“Ahpah-went-ly,” Bernadette replies.

“Don’t tell Grandpa,” Grandma Hess says as they board the bus. “Next stop, the Watering Hole!”

“The music’s so loud in here!” Bernadette shouts.

“If you’re competing in a contest for the lamest twenty-one-year-old ever, congratulations. You’ve won,” Macie says, returning from the bar with three shots.

“Oh, no thanks. I think I’m pretty drunk already off that lollipop.”

“Ooh, jackalberry juice. My favorite!” Grandma Hess shouts as they toast.

Bernadette takes a sip. “ACK! This is disgusting!”

A hyena suddenly appears next to her. “Hey there sweetie. Nice tutu. Is it somebody’s birthday?”

“Oh, um. Yes, it’s mine. I’m twenty-one today,” she says as he looks her over from trunk to toe.

“So you’re legal,” he murmurs, grinning to display a row of yellowed incisors. A moment later a beige blur whizzes past his head.

“Keep it movin’ bucko, or the next time my purse won’t miss that giant noggin. And there’s a brick in it,” Grandma Hess says with venom.

“Geez, what the hell? What crawled up your butt old lady?”

“From the smell of it, I’d reckon it was you,” Grandma Hess snorts. “Go on, get. Be sure to tell your friends how you just got told off by this ‘old lady.’”

The hyena’s nearby friends roll on the floor in hysterics as he

retreats, their shrieks echoing throughout the bar.

“Grandma! You have a brick in your purse? *So you can swing it at people?!?*” Bernadette hisses.

“Of course I do. Can’t tolerate my youngest being preyed on by some mangy animal,” Grandma Hess replies.

“This is literally the best night of my life,” Macie laughs as Grandma Hess turns to leave.

“Let’s blow this joint. Grandpa and I’ve got a favorite place down the way, where they *know* their jackalberry juice.”

The three elephants leave the bar, stopping as a herd of young males stumbled by, arguing over whose trunk was longer.

“They’re all too small!” Macie cries after them.

“Grandma, I don’t think I can drink anymore,” Bernadette says. “That beer-lollipop was pretty strong.”

“Nonsense! You’ve barely had a thing,” Grandma Hess says, spotting a young, lithe lion in uniform nearby. “Officer! Officer!” she crows.

“Is there a problem?” he says.

“Yes, there is. My granddaughter here is twenty-one today, and claims she’s already drunk off one beer-lollipop.”

“Beer-lollipop? What’s a beer-lolli—”

“Nevermind that. Would you be so kind as to breathalyze her for me? To prove how paranoid she’s being,” Grandma Hess says.

The lion hesitates, then nods. “All right ladies, fine. I’m assuming it’s you who I’m testing? The one in that weird...skirt thing?”

“It’s a tutu,” Bernadette frowns, watching the officer pull the breathalyzer from his belt.

“I’m telling you right now, it’s gonna be off the charts,” she says before taking a giant breath and blowing into the device.

Beep beep beep beep...beep...beep...

“You have a blood alcohol level of...0.02,” the officer says as he discards the mouthpiece in a nearby trash. “In some areas, that’s not even high enough to be considered by law enforcement.”

“What?!” Bernadette says as Grandma Hess and Macie dissolve

into laughter.

“Are we finished?” the lion asks.

“Yes, thank you officer,” Grandma Hess says. “You feel better now? Come on. That bar’s callin’ my name.”

She trundles away as Macie and Bernadette trail behind.

“Your grandma is like...way cooler than you. You’re lucky to have her,” Macie says.

Grandma Hess waits for them at the entrance. “Live Rhino Revue tonight girls! Those muscled bodies and giant tusks...can’t get enough. Don’t tell Grandpa,” she says to Bernadette with a wink.

“I won’t. Love you.”

“Love you too honey. But not as much as those performing rhinos!”

The three elephants squeeze into the doorway to continue enjoying their night, with Bernadette feeling like she may be pretty lucky after all.

A Night Out

by Kyle Eggleston

Lisa was an elephant. It was of no consequence to anyone what she was. She enjoyed her days walking and running around the circus. Eating peanuts was her specialty. She was a tall elephant and different than others. Instead of being gray in color, she was a deep rich brown color.

Most of the other elephants thought her strange and ignored her. Even other circus performers refused to work with her. Lisa shrugged it off and went about her days without worrying what others thought of her.

One day as Lisa was prancing around the circus she met up with an odd looking fella. He announced himself as George. George was anything but normal. He fancied himself as a magician of sorts. Something out of the world yet managed to stay in the world. He really was a bit different. George was a midget roughly three feet tall. He saw himself as a funny man. Someone who wanted to help others out and cheer them up when down.

Lisa looked at George. She didn't know what to think about him. He looked at her and smiled. "Oh Lisa my favorite circus animal, you are indeed a good elephant." George had

been watching Lisa for months from his wee little cave at the edge of the circus. He watched all the circus performers and found her to be unique. "I think you are the best elephant of all."

At the sound of praise, Lisa rose her trunk up in gratitude. It wasn't everyday she was praised let alone adored by a midget. The strong man tried it once but he didn't quite get the hang of it. He ended up tossing Lisa into the tiger den, who weren't happy to see an elephant trying to walk a rope.

George handed Lisa a pink frilly tutu. "I made this for you" he said.

Lisa sounded her trunk. A gift! He had brought her a gift! Oh how excited she was. It was a gift like no other. Putting the tutu on she twirled around and around. She wished there was something she could give the midget in return, what she wanted to give him was beyond her power. She was an elephant after all.

George smiled and nodded. "Your wish is my command." With a snap of his fingers and a flick of his hat Lisa turned into a human. She had dark brown hair and green eyes. Picking up a mirror she smiled at her cute little button type nose.

"What?!" Lisa asked "How?"

George flicked his fingers again and turned into a much taller human. George smiled. "Oh lass you look amazing. Come with me. We shall dance."

Danced they did well into the night. Beer lollipop after beer lollipop they ate. Strange odd looking candies with the taste of ones favorite beer as they tasted it. Lisa had never had such an amazing delight. The red ones tasted like an apple ale, the blue ones tasted like something from the deep. The others just tasted like beer of many flavors. She preferred the red ones herself.

It didn't take long before the two became intoxicated. They continued to dance. Lisa would pick up George and toss him about left and right like a rag doll. George in return would laugh and snort at the sight. It was as though he hadn't lived before this. Another beer lollipop down and he couldn't walk straight.

Lisa twirled around in her tutu on the dance floor until she couldn't twirl anymore. She got so carried away tossing George around the room. He flung against a wall knocking a brick loose.

The bartender picked up the brick and looked to the two. "Alright you two that's enough!" He dialed for the police.

When the police showed up they scratched their heads as the two tried to explain they were just having fun. One off the officers pulled out a breathalyzer and handed it to Lisa. She blew into the device. Poof she was no longer human but an elephant again. Still

wearing the tutu she curtsied at the officers who looked at her in shock.

"Man, that's an elephant." The officer said to his partner.

The other officer nodded in agreement. "Yeah, and she's wearing a tutu!"

"How astute of you two fine gentlemen." George smiled.

The two officers were too occupied to do anything further. The bartender looked at them. "Aren't you going to do something..." his voice trailed off as he looked at it. An elephant in a nightclub. Who would believe such a story?

Sitting down at the bar, the bartender grabbed a drink and downed it. He too indulged in a beer lollipop. Poof, he turned into a brightly colored fruity dinosaur candy.

George looked to the bartender and smiled. He didn't think it would do that. "I do believe this is where I exit." Grabbing the elephant by the trunk he started walking away taking the brick with him as a sort of souvenir. He bowed gently and exited the night club.

On their way out George tripped over a light green purse on the ground. He fell hitting his head on the brick. Poof. The magic was gone. He was no longer tall but was a midget again.

Lisa she'd a tear. Her wish had been broken. They were back to their normal selves. George smiled at the elephant. "No worries lass. We still have the beer flavored lollipops!"

They laughed and carried on down the street back to the circus where they belonged. The two remained friends for a long time after that. They would have other adventures but none as fun as the night at the club.

The red fruity dinosaur watched them go. "Come again!" He yelled out after them. "You'll need to come back again soon!"

He was stepped on by a passing lizard who smirked. "Oops sorry sir, didn't see you standing there. My you look tasty." The lizard gobbled him up.

'NEGOMBO ROAD.'

A MAD TUTU STORY.

By Gary Brooks.

The sun rises every morning, and then stays there for as long as its interest is kept. Which, given how much the sun can see from way up there, is usually quite a long time. It was distracted by events taking place on Negombo road, the long stretch of boiling tarmac which connects Colombo to its ailing airport.

Wooden shacks and tin-shackle shops presented smooth surfaces to be seared and singed as the traffic crept along like a series of automotive elephants, bumpers nudging bumpers instead of trunks grasping tails. Distorted music metalled out of ancient radios and reedy voices chanted piety from junk shop megaphones.

Sampath stood in a rare patch of shade, small and brown and ten years old, watching the cars and tuk-tuks, and watching closer still the looks of harried resignation on the faces of those behind the greasy wheels. It wasn't the most exciting thing to look at, but was a thousand times better than staring at his creepy Aunt Harshi.

She stopped being normal after the tsunami had washed away her house down south. She came to live with Sampath and his mother, her only possession being one brick she had managed to salvage from the wreckage. Now she spent all of her time wearing a blue tutu, poised with a watering-can over the brick. Sampath asked her what she was doing, and she had stated simply that if she watered the brick enough, her house might grow back. Sampath thought that that brick had probably seen enough water.

So he stood and stared at the traffic trundling to the airport. He liked to imagine where the people might be going. Sampath's problem was that he had a less than elementary grasp of geography, so in his mind everyone was just flying to other parts of the island. The mean looking drivers, he decided, managed to get as far as the shore before eventually crashing into the ocean. This ghastly fate was reserved especially for those people who beeped too loudly and too incessantly in the perpetual traffic jam.

At that moment a cacophony of horns erupted. Sampath looked down the road and saw an elephant had rudely stomped onto the road and kicked several tuk-tuks out of the way. The little vehicles lay upended in the ditch, their drivers standing and staring with hands on hips, each waiting for the other to do something first. The elephant, meanwhile, was showing far greater initiative and had inserted itself into the new traffic vacancy. It stood patiently behind a Lada.

Sampath had, of course, seen elephants on the Negombo road before, but they were usually standing by the side of the road, and not stuck in the traffic jam. Also, this one had two very odd people sitting on its back. He ran down the road to get a better look, flip-flops flapping and kicking up dust behind him.

Drawing level with the side of the elephant, he stared up and saw a red-headed girl leaning back, balancing with her hands on the elephants haunches. Auburn sunglasses rested on her face. She had on short shorts and a short t-shirt too. Sampath winced. She was white like a seagull's belly, and here she was in direct sun on an elephant. There was a man in front of her, also wearing the worst stuff possible for the heat – clad in a black leather jacket, he smoked a beedie through a huge unruly beard. His hands alternated between putting the cigarette, and what looked like an ice-lolly, in his mouth. It was dripping on the elephant.

'Sir! Madam!'

Sampath's eyes widened. He had shouted out without even meaning to. He couldn't help it – things had suddenly got so interesting.

The man and the woman both peered down. The woman smiled and had kind eyes behind the auburn. The man's eyes were hidden behind silvered shades.

'Hello mate, what's up?'

'You are sir. Up on an elephant. How did that happen that you have an elephant to ride here? How is she not burning, and you not suffocating?'

The girl laughed, and fetched a purse from her side. Slender fingers made to open it up. Sampath stepped back and looked down, cheeks burning hotter than the street. He did not intend for these people to think he was after money.

'Little boy?'

Grudgingly he looked up. The girl had somehow taken a very large ice-lolly from the very small purse. He frowned, then smiled – he could accept a lolly. He held out his hand.

'Now listen mate,' the man continued, 'this lolly is special, yeah? It's got beer in it. And. . . other things as well.'

'Nothing nasty,' the girl said.

She leaned down to him.

'It makes magic happen when you blow into this.'

She pulled out another unfeasibly large object. It looked like a whistle. Quickly, she threw them down to him, and he was pleased to find his arms and hands do their thing and catch them before they hit the dusty floor.

'Bored now,' said the man. He patted the side of the elephant, whose legs then grew by ten metres and became excessively skinny. The elephant ran off down the road, leaping over the cars. The girl cried 'Wooooo. . . ' as they went.

Sampath didn't even have to think about it. He sucked on his lolly and put the whistle thing into his mouth and blew. He puffed hard, so hard he stood on tiptoes and felt his stomach touch his spine. He waited. Nothing. He sucked the lolly and again he blew, so hard he felt faint and dots danced in the sand.

The whistle beeped. He looked down and a little message appeared on the screen:

THAT'LL DO IT.

He looked up, just in time to see the roof and driveway of Aunt Harshi's house explode out of his garden and into the sky.

'I told you!' she cried, pirouetting on her still-moist roof, tutu taunting the sun.

PEPITO'S ELEPHANT by Rachel Barnard

“Aye no Pepito, not that.”

Silviana snickered at him, so Pepito stuck his tongue out at her. He lowered the awkward tube tv to the ground, looked at it longingly and pat it on the top with a hollow thump thump. A sizzle of static noise echoed back.

“Mami! Papi!”

“Sh!” His Mama held a finger to her lips.

“But-” he whined in a lowered voice.

All of the Mendoza’s paused as the sound of a window opening from up the driveway drifted toward them. Pepito’s brother and sister held onto an old dresser as it teetered halfway onto the bed of the old red pickup truck. Mama held onto a three legged stool and Papa was appraising a ratty off-white splotched couch. Half a dusty brown purse peeked ominously from the garbage cans. Papa made a motion for them to proceed. The dresser was set down. The couch was left where it was and the three legged stool was hefted up onto the truck. Pepito watched the house, waiting for the owners of the ratty furniture to appear. A crackling from the old TV caught his attention again. The sun was bright and there was a glare on the dusty screen. As Pepito watched, he could faintly make out the outline of an elephant on the screen and then it was gone into the reflection of palm trees. He rubbed his eyes, staring wistfully at the TV.

“Come on, Pepito, vamonos.”

A curtain swept aside in the house and a girl, pigtails framing a tanned face peered out at him. She glanced toward the TV and then back at Pepito. She jumped up and down and waved her arms, the tutu around her waist bouncing up and down with her.

“Let’s go, mijito.”

Pepito glanced back at the window, but the girl had disappeared. He jumped into the bed of the truck with his brother and held onto the loose furniture. Silviana pulled the bricks from behind the back wheels and hopped in next to him. The truck sputtered to life, backing up before moving forward with a cough. They had only to go halfway down the road before more discarded furniture came into. Pepito sighed as he hopped down to help his parents lift long-abused chairs and tables into the truck until it was heaped full of the wrecks.

Friday night. Other boys Pepito’s age would be skateboarding or going to the dollar movies, or maybe even the real movie theatre and he was stuck picking up used and forgotten furniture with his family. The faint image of the elephant came to Pepito’s mind.

It was dark by the time the Mendoza’s truck was fully loaded and they were headed back to the trailer park they called home. Flashing lights lit the sky. Pepito, Silviana and their brother Jorge ducked under the furniture, crawling further beneath the mass of legs and dust. The truck stopped and swayed back and forth without the anchor of the bricks.

“License and registration,” drawled the voice.

“Yes, yes, here.”

Scuffling.

“Please step out of the vehicle.”

The car door creaked open, causing the truck to back up another foot.

“Please blow into the Breathalyzer.”

A silent moment passed.

“Hm, it’s clean. Well I guess you can be on your way... Mr. Mendoza.”

The door shut and they were on their way again, arriving in the trailer park neighborhood grimy and tired. Pepito hopped onto his bike and pedaled as fast as he could.

“Right, left, left, straight past the big sign,” Pepito muttered to himself. The streets were lit by long slanted poles of light and he raced up and down the streets until he found the tv. He dropped his bike onto the grass and stared at it. Nothing happened. He ran a finger across the screen, accumulating a fine fingerstache of dust that was promptly wiped onto his pants. Without anything better to try, Pepito pressed the ‘on’ button and the screen lit up, sound blasting out of the set. Pepito fell over and scrambled quickly to his feet, looking up and down the street to see if anyone had been disturbed by the sudden onset of sound.

“But wait, there’s more! If you call within the next five minutes we will include an extra set of gourmet lollipops for free, you just pay separate processing and handling.” The man in the TV winked at him, “You may even get the beer-flavored lollipops! Not for the kids. Har har har.”

The screen blanked out with a pop and something flew at Pepito. He picked it up and started unwrapping it, but thought better as he sniffed the stale stench of beer through the thin paper. Throwing it to the ground with a “yuck” he glanced back at the TV in wonder.

His finger quivered as he pressed the button again.

“Never have you seen such a fine collection of earmuffs, I daresay these are collector’s items.” The pop of the screen shutting off hit him at the same time as a pair of fluffy yarn-yellow earmuffs.

Huh? Pepito pushed the button again and again.

“I want something good,” he sat cross legged in front of the TV, waiting. Nothing appeared on the screen, except Pepito could hear a growing trumpet of sound blasting from deep within the TV. He waited. The elephant flashed in front of his eyes and then, with a horrific bang and a sickly crunch, crushed the TV underneath its domed foot.

“Aw man,” Pepito said to the elephant.

He got back on his bike and pedaled home. Maybe he could convince his mama to let him keep one of the other, newer TVs they had found.

I AM DOCTOR – HEAR ME GURLE by Corey Barker

“Dispatch says we’ve got a 586 on the corner of 5th and Lombard,” said Theo, the bald officer in the passenger side of the cruiser.

His partner Dave said, “I can’t understand you with that stupid sucker in your mouth, Theo.”

“Come on Dave, first the booze and now I can’t even enjoy a good ale-flavored sucker? Fine!” He removed the lollipop and said, “Dithspak siss whrv gal a filv-enty-slichs on Filvth ant Lawbrard.”

“Oh, a 586. I bet it’s Eugene causing trouble again. Well let’s get to it,” said Dave.

Dave switched on the police issue lights-siren-ham device and shot out of the alley and onto the sidewalk. “Did you read that great humanitarianism piece in the Times?” Dave asked as he ran over a group of three pedestrians fleeing from the ham on top of the cruiser.

“Yrgh, ert wusn a bety gerd rid,” Theo said. He absently put the sucker back into his mouth then looked out of the side window to make sure none of the pedestrians were still hanging on to the car. “I understand that people will make a movement out of anything, but honestly – we all eat humans so it just seems like a waste of time. Oh! Sorry...” He removed the sucker again and said, “Serms lak a werst ouf teem.”

Dave chided him and said, “Theo, you really should be more in touch with pop culture. I never feel more alive than when I’m enjoying a good bit of art or literature.”

They exploded out of the lobby they had been driving through and Dave slammed on the brakes a block later when they reached 5th Ave. The flashing lights projected pictures of smiley faces onto every surface in a pattern specifically designed to send at least 30% of bystanders into petit mal seizures. As several onlookers collapsed, Dave turned to Theo and said, “Looks like we’ll have some 507’s to take care of once we’re done here.”

Theo shook a brick he had picked up at the rest of the crowd and shot them a menacing glare. He spoke into his radio. “Despeeth, re nerd a crerd contrel vaen at Filvth ant Lawbrard.”

The dispatcher radioed back. “Copy that Theo, an eli-van is on its way.”

With this bit of crowd control resolved, Dave and Theo advanced toward a man who was draped over the curb. Eugene had obviously been unconscious for some time – various bits of litter had been placed on his back as if he had been mistaken for a garbage can. Theo crouched next to him and picked up a ruffled tutu that had been soaking in some unidentifiable liquid.

Dave said, “Maybe there’s hope for him yet, Theo.”

Theo replied, "I dernt thig sa. He wartn werink it Darv."

Dave said, "Yeah you're probably right. I was just hoping the treatment had finally gotten him over his issues."

Theo shot an appraising look at Eugene while he put the tutu on and adjusted it around his police issue Gucci purse. He looked at Dave who said, "Welp, I guess it's wakey-wakey time."

Theo nodded and stuck the lollipop in his mouth long enough to build up a good bit of spit. Then, sticking it into Eugene's ear, he shouted, "Frangthahl grumbleblurts!"

Eugene convulsed away from the offending object and then opened his eyes. When he saw Dave and Theo he shrieked and tried to execute a backwards somersault into the street. Not realizing he was lying on his back, he only succeeded to the point of a flailing lurch which caused him to insert his head into the gutter. After righting himself and getting on hands and knees, he lifted his face and stared wildly at the two officers.

Eugene shouted, "You stay away from me you lunatics! I'm not going back to that place, I'm a doctor!"

Theo said, "Derklers dernt egsit. Yer nalt doong yersep erny fivens sprutin tha kernt erf ninsers."

"What did he say?!" Eugene was jerking around spasmodically. "I'm a doctor! I was sent here to observe you all and decide the kind of treatment YOU would be getting!"

Dave began to speak in a reasonable, reassuring manner. He said, "Eugene, the judge sent you to Happy Valley to cure you. The happiness technicians there could help you a lot if you'd just let them. I mean, look at Theo here. He hardly ever thinks he's a 'real estate agent' anymore. It's done wonders for him! And it only took what, two or three months?" He looked at Theo who nodded in agreement.

Theo said, "Lerk ant me. Irm a pronducive mermer erf sonsietee egerm."

Eugene's eyes bugged and he said, "That - that's what I'm talking about! He only talks nonsense! Those freaks broke him!" He spun around wildly and saw the storefront the officers had driven out of.

"He's gonna make a break for it," Dave murmured.

Theo readied his standard issue horse tranquilizer and toggled the safety off. Before Eugene had made it five paces, a dart whistled out from Theo's direction and hit him in the left buttock. Eugene was down and unconscious again within seconds.

Dave said, “Hate we had to take him down again, Theo.”

Theo nodded and said, “Est fern tha berst.”

They stood for a moment and surveyed the scene, fixing it in their minds. A thief stealing the breathalyzer out of their squad car. The eli-van picking up convulsing crowd members with its huge trunk and placing them in a dumpster tethered to its withers. People in surrounding buildings staring nervously at the ham on the roof of their cruiser. And finally, the unconscious man with a dart sticking up from his buttock. The man who called himself a ‘doctor’. The man who had the gall to say that everyone else was crazy.

Under the Influence

By Lynn Bauman-Milner

Humming along to the radio, I was flying toward home. It had been a good good night, and the song confirmed it. I was enjoying the calm, clear night, driving and tapping out a rhythm on the steering wheel. My bobble-head elephant on the dashboard wasn’t just nodding along because he’s agreeable, he was doing a little soft-shoe dance. I giggled at the sight the magic fumes were having on Elmer the Elephant.

It took a few moments for me to realise that the rise-and-fall whine I could hear was not a feature of some new radio mix of the song, but the siren of the police car behind me. *Oh crap*. I pulled over to the side of the empty country road, tires kicking up a lazy puff of dust from the shoulder. Elmer was still tap-dancing across the dash, even after I switched the radio off. “You’d better stop now.” The elephant looked disappointed, and slumped back to his stand, his bobble head nodding in reproach at me. I reached into my purse on the passenger seat, riffling for the lollipops I usually kept in there – beer-flavoured ones covered the smell of magic better than any mint or gum. I kept getting handfuls of scratchy netting and taffeta but no lollipops. Panic building, I

pulled out an acid yellow tutu and flung it into the backseat, followed by a neon green tutu. Still nothing.

I glanced into the rearview mirror, checking for the cop. At least he seemed to be taking his sweet time, still logging details from my licence plates.

I ducked over to the side and popped open the glove compartment. Digging through papers and receipts and – *a fucking brick? How the hell did that get in there?* – I finally found a bouquet of beer-flavoured lollipops tucked in the far corner. I unwrapped one and jammed it in my mouth, leaping a foot when the officer tapped on my window.

I rolled the window down, sucking on the lollipop with a suggestive eyelash flutter, then extracted it slowly from my puckered lips. In my huskiest voice, I asked, “How can I help you this evening,” I glanced at his name tag, “Officer Blunkett?” I looked deep into his eyes, adding as much seductive intonation into his lurching name as I could.

He cocked an eyebrow at me, and his lip sneered at an echoing angle. He nudged the brim of his hat back and cleared his throat. “Have you been doing magic this evening?” He was struggling to keep focused, I could tell, but his disapproval was evident.

“Why, no, Officer Blunkett. What makes you say that?” I rolled the tip of my tongue around the circumference of the lollipop, keeping eye contact.

His eyes widened – *in horror*, a traitorous part of my brain insisted – and cleared his throat again. “You were flying.”

I giggled a little. “Oh, officer, I know I was going a little fast, but –”

He held up a hand to stop me. “Your car was hovering a foot or so from the ground. I have it on video. Please step out of the car.” He opened the door, standing back to keep it between us. “I will be conducting a breathalyzer test.”

I struggled out of the car, tottering on my high heels, and grabbed at the car to steady myself, looking down as I did.

That’s when I realised that – somehow – I had been magicked into a man.

I ducked down to look in the wing mirror, and was horrified by the reflection gaping back. A thicker, more jowly version of my own face, complete with a five o’clock shadow, and mascara half-way down my cheeks, my lipstick a smear of red. *Well, no wonder the cop flinched!*

I chucked the lollipop back into the car, and straightened up, tugging my purple tutu further down in a vain effort to cover my hairy legs. There was no hiding the effects of the magic, but I hoped to be able to deflect the culpability onto someone else. *It must have been Ashley. She’s always hated me.*

I squared my shoulders, cleared my throat and prepared to speak man-to-man with the officer. “Officer, there’s been a mistake. I have not been doing magic, though it is more than obvious that I have been in the company of those who were.” I waved a hand at my masculine body. “My name is Anna Black and I’m usually a woman!”

With his forehead furrowed, he asked for my license and registration, and took the papers back to his car. While I waited for Officer Blunkett to verify my identity, I slipped off my shoes and threw them into the car, because I was going to need to stand firm in a few minutes.

“Well, *Miss Black*,” he said, “everything is in order. It appears that you are the victim of a terrible crime. You could come to the station with me and press charges.” Any kind of sympathy disappeared from Blunkett’s face, as his expression turned unforgiving. He held up the breathalyser, and said, “Or you could come clean and admit that you’ve done this to yourself to avoid being charged with driving under the influence of magic.”

I gawped at him, goggle-eyed, and he thrust the black box into my hands.

“Take a deep breath, and blow into this tube. Begin.” Blunkett’s attention was on his watch.

I took a deep breath and blew as hard as I could. But not into the breathalyser. Blunkett’s hat flew off into the night, and his hair whipped hard in the gale force, but he remained on his feet. His face rippled under the sheer G-force of the wind, and kept rippling even after I ran out of breath.

I glanced at Elmer, perched on his hind legs as he watched the proceedings. “What do you think, Elmer? Another elephant friend for you? Or something different?”

Designated Dumbo
By: S.R Thomas

Rick woke up early to cook breakfast for his daughter and his wife, Mindy. Then Mindy was off to court listening to every minor charge that the city of New Orleans had to offer. Everything from public nudity to minor in possession charges, Mindy was there, meanwhile Rick had to find his daughter, Lamy’s, pink tutu and Patsy Patch purse that she couldn’t go anywhere without. She didn’t even like dancing; she just thought it added extra flair to her wardrobe. Then Mindy, headed out the door smiled at her daughter and said “remember what your Mamma Audrey always said ‘when the carnival and circus come to town better hope those mischievous voodoo spirits hadn’t picked you,’” she said in her best Cajun accent.

“Please don’t get her worked up honey,” said Rick.

“It’s her heritage, it isn’t my fault you married into a Creole family,” she said with her devilish smile.

Rick was already disappointed that he wasn’t going to get to stay home and work on his “Jonesy Ale,” but his wife talked him into taking Lamy to the Orlean Parish Carnival where *The Booming Babers* circus was performing. Mindy being a former trapeze artist with *The Booming Babers*, which is what paid for her law school tuition, wanted Lamy to see what her momma’s glory days

of performing where like. Unfortunately she would have to be late because being a judge she was obligated to appear in court. Rick being still out of work (what he would say if someone asked him, but he was really for all intensive purposes a stay at home dad) had time to take Lamy everywhere.

"Well I hope you can appreciate me taking today off from work to do this for y'all," said Rick.

"Honey, let's stop calling your hobby work. Good heavens you are the whitest person I know! Who brews beer in their garage?!"

"But Sam bought a case of it!"

"Honey, Sam is your best friend."

They finally arrived at the fairgrounds where a strange man with a top hat greeted them.

"Y'all here for the show?"

"Yes, sir."

"The show doesn't start for 30 minutes, come by my candy stand and get some flavor and maybe ride the merry go round."

"Candy!" screamed Lamy.

"We got every flavor you want and I do mean every flavor. seem like a guy who like's his brew, have you ever had 'Jonesy Ale' at Sam's Bar and Grill?"

"I made that brew!"

"Well I got something for you then good sir! Here is a beer-flavored lollipop for you mister! Only two dollars! And this for you little lady."

He gave her a cherry tootsie pop to which she immediately stored in her purse.

"The name is Reuben Goodfella, sir. If there is anything I can do for you on your journey please let me know. The Merry-go-round is over there."

Rick and Lamy sat together at the Merry-go-round and right when Rick bit into his beerpop he found himself in a circus tent.

"Who here has had a few drinks tonight?" asked the ringleader to which the crowd responded with thunderous applause.

"Well I think someone has had more than most. Look under your seats ladies and gentlemen. You will find a breathalyzer and I'd like you all to blow into it. Don't worry they are all sanitized." Everyone blew into his or her breathalyzer, but Rick's was the only one that began to whistle loudly.

"Grab that man!" yelled the ringleader.

Lamy just sat there laughing as her daddy was forced in front of the crowd.

"You smell like you've had a few drinks sir," said the ringleader.

"Actually no, I had a beer flavored lollipop."

"Beer flavored lollipop! Ladies and Gentlemen I can't make this stuff up! This man has clearly had way too much fun juice if you know what I mean."

The crowd continued laughing.

"Looks like someone needs a DESIGNATED DUMBO!"

With those words the jokers and the harlequins mounted Rick on top of a giant elephant that appeared out of nowhere. The elephant began to walk out of the ring and then everything went black.

"Daddy!"

"Rick!"

Rick came out of his daze.

"What the heck happened? When did you get here Mindy?"

"They said you and Lamy sat down in front of the Merry-Go-Round, where you found a brick underneath the bench and began blowing on it saying it was a breathalyzer. You then said that

you needed a ‘designated dumbo’ and hopped on the merry-go-round where you rode the plastic elephant screaming that you’d had too many beerpops.”

“Is everything ok Mi Mi?” said a man who looked very similar to the ringleader.

“Yes, everything is fine, thanks again Mr. Booming. Sorry it’s been so long since I’ve visited,” said Mindy.

“Well it’s good to see you again Mi Mi, there is always some case like this every year, I’m sure you remember.”

“Oh yes, this fella is lucky he’s my husband. I usually fine these folks.”

“What was his name this time?”

“Who?” asked Rick.

“Honey, did y’all meet someone right before the show who offered you something to eat, usually something they know you’ll buy?”

“Yeah! The guys name is Reuben Goodfella. Said he’d had my beer before!”

“That’s what I thought, come on honey let’s get you some water and watch the real circus. We don’t even use animals in our acts, it is too cruel.”

“But he’d had my beer before!”

“I know honey, I know. My trials where cancelled and I ran into Sam on the way here, he said they hadn’t had time to open your first case”

“But he gave Lamy a tootsie pop!”

“Honey that has been in her purse for two weeks.”

“Reuben Goodfella,” laughed Mindy, “so this year he is a Shakespeare pun.”

“Those spirits are getting more clever year,” said Mr. Booming.

“Ain’t that the truth,” said Mindy “and my husband was just too damn easy.”

They entered the tent laughing, dragging Rick who was still dazed and confused.

Lamy turned around and waved to the man in the top hat sitting on the merry-go-round elephant.

“Y’all enjoy the show now, you hear?” he said in response.

When the ride came around again the plastic elephant was vacant. Lamy then ran into the tent after her parents eating her tootsie pop.

Horace

By Mike Marlow (@MikeyGeek)

My Aunt Sandy used to keep a brick in her purse. By itself this is not unusual, but the brick’s name was Horace, and she was madly in love with it. Him. Whatever.

Now, you have to understand that Sandy was that aunt that everyone has – you know, a little left of center. The one who made her fortune by inventing something that everyone uses and no one knows why. In Sandy’s case, she invented beer-flavored lollipops. Well, they were around for a while before she came along, but she’s the one who perfected the recipe. She’s the reason you can get the exactly perfect amount of wasted on them. That special kind of drunk where you can’t remember a damn thing from the night before, but without the headache that feels like your head had been used as an artillery shell all night long. But I digress.

So now you're probably thinking, hmm, she's one of those. DTs and all that. Elephants wearing tutus and dancing ballet in the streets. But it's not like that at all. Okay, maybe there was an elephant, but it was definitely Sandy wearing the tutu. Let me explain.

She had gone to Paris, mainly because all newly wealthy people end up there at some point. I guess she decided to get it out of the way early on, which was how she thought about these things. Anyway, she's sitting at one of those stereotypical cafes, drinking wine and being American at the waiter. You know, just having a good time. After a while she pays her bill and walks down the street to catch the bus. It's one of those new busses where the driver has to blow into the tube every ten miles to prove that he hasn't been stopping off at those same stereotypical cafes. So Sandy gets on the bus.

Being newly wealthy and unsure of how to amuse herself, she has concocted a plan to head over to the Louvre and run through the museum wearing nothing but a tutu, mainly just to see if she can get arrested in Paris. So as the bus nears the Louvre stop, she changes into said getup in the back row of seats. The bus stops, she disembarks, and that's when she sees the elephant.

An elephant on the loose in the Louvre might not seem all that strange, but this guy was hanging around the glass pyramid thing outside, and he was wearing a beret. She never mentioned what color the beret was, at least not to me. The other odd thing was that he was holding a brick and appeared to be having some kind of argument with it. This distracted Sandy, so instead of taking off running toward the priceless art, she walks calmly over to the elephant and introduces herself.

The elephant, whose name was Laurence, was beginning to get visibly annoyed over the thought that the fellow they were waiting to meet was most certainly not coming. He was already an hour and a half late, Laurence added, and it was generally unwise to trust wizards of his caliber entirely. Horace, the aforementioned brick, however, was much harder to read in an emotional sense, and seemed to believe in the absent magician. He'll be here, Horace exclaimed, and we just need to have a little patience. Once Sandy realized how upset Laurence was getting, she tried to change the subject, asking about the nature of magic and how it was that Laurence came by his lovely headwear. And so the conversation meandered.

Though it apparently didn't bother Laurence and Horace in any way, Sandy's attire (or lack thereof) did eventually become a subject of note among some of the other patrons of the museum. As Sandy was a fairly attractive woman, there seemed to be very little rush to remedy the situation, though. There was even one family who, when asked later,

admitted to thinking at the time that the conversation was just a piece of performance art sponsored by the Louvre.

But after a time a cop did finally come over and ask “what’s all this then?” or the French equivalent. Thinking quickly, Sandy jumped in and asked him if he’d seen anyone matching the wizard’s description in the area recently. My friends have been waiting for him, she said, and he may have simply missed them or may have been waiting in a different corner of the museum. At this point Laurence became visibly nervous, and as Sandy and the cop discussed the appearance of the mage, the elephant passed the brick off to Sandy and backed quietly away, then turned and made for the street, where he tried to hail a taxi. Tried in vain, that is, because oddly enough there didn’t seem to be a taxi in the area willing to take on a bereted pachyderm as a fare, no matter the distance. This forced Laurence to make his escape on foot.

This particular gendarme was not the type to be distracted for long, and quickly got back to the fact that Sandy wore noticeably less clothing than was normally acceptable, even in the Parisian arts district. Sandy looked down and seemed genuinely startled at her nudity (or so she hoped). She accepted the officer’s kind offer of the loan of his trenchcoat until clothing could be obtained. Conveniently, the Louvre’s gift shop was able to provide.

And that’s the story of how Aunt Sandy met Horace, the love of her life and a rock solid fellow, one might say. They never did find the wizard, and if she ever met Laurence again, she never told me of it.

Magic Circus by Brie Haddock

A cold May morning, the sun is barely peeking through the clouds and the rain has seized to a drizzle. The traveling train full of circus people has settled into one location just outside the city with more than enough room for the elaborate red and white tent that is beginning to go up, parking included. A few of the doors begin to open one at a time with a few of those a part of the acts carrying whips, outfits and instruments.

At the end of the train, several cars are full of circus animals, huge elephants, camels, a giraffe and a few goats, eating their breakfast noisily. Penny walks by to Elle the elephant and instantly, she waves her huge nose in the air and her ears begin flapping in excitement. Elle is waiting for her beer flavored beer lollipop. “Tisk, tisk, Elle. Not until the show.” Penny whispers.

The crowd is growing larger by the hour and the strain to prep for the show is growing with the parade. The clowns roam in cars with tires on backwards and as the car drives, it looks like it should be a boat waving in the ocean. The clowns are honking their bike horns and dancing. One particular clown looks as though a bomb went off in front of him, judging by his hair and he holds a blow whistle above his head, and magically, it begins to play all by itself. Several little kids are thrilled to see the Magic Circus, others are just petrified at what they are seeing, turning into a tear-filled mess, screaming and begging to head back home.

Alec yells over the megaphone, "The show begins in ten minutes! The show begins in ten minutes!" As the time arrives, Alec nods to those around him, alerting them all of the time and walks into the tent with his megaphone.

"Ladies, gentlemen, children of all ages. Your eyes will be amazed with the one, the only...ELLE!" Elle the elephant bursts into the circus ring wearing a bright cherry red tutu. She dances to the center of the ring and Penny meets her in the middle with her matching cherry red ball gown and red lipstick. Penny nods twice and Elle uses her long nose to wrap around Penny, picking her up and placing her upon her head. She stands swiftly on top and begins to balance on one foot. Elle the elephant shakes her head side to side, picking up one leg and then sets it down to pick the other up, all while Penny is holding a perfect balance on one foot. The audience is in awe of the act. Elle walks around the ring and Penny grabs onto a pole, acting as if she is caught. Elle gallops back and roars loudly. Elle plays sad when a man walks in dressed as a robber holding a brick in his hand. Elle stands up, uses her trunk and grabs the brick and pretends to smash it on his head, crushing it while he falls off the platform. The audience is applauding, adoring the act. Elle grabs Penny from the platform and places her back onto the ground next to Alec.

Penny holds up a finger signaling for a moment and walks out of the ring. Several men begin yelling in the stands for cold drinks, popcorn, cotton candy and nuts. "Hot salty nuts", one man shouts.

Penny heads back with smudged red lipstick into the center of the ring with her beige purse and opens it, digging inside. Elle sits and then moves into begging position. She then plays dead and rolls gaining acceptance and a huge applause for the audience with loud laughter. Penny looks back up at Elle, dumbfounded at her actions and out comes the beer flavored lollipop! Elle nods vigorously and grabs it right out of Penny's hand and places it in her mouth, eating it in one bite. Elle stumbles to the opposite of the tent and falls over as a drunkard would. Her cherry red tutu becoming loose nearly falls off.

An officer storms in with a breathalyzer. "Wait a minute. You are in trouble young lady." Elle uses her front legs as a barrier, closing her eyes and her ears fold over, embarrassed. Placing the breathalyzer to her mouth, the officer panics, "How did you get to three percent with one lollipop, young lady? I am bringing you in." Elle shakes her head and stands up. She steps back, turns around and uses her nose to pull a large amount of water out of the pool, turns around

and showers the officer in several gallons of water. The audience is hysterical and applauding for Elle the elephant.

As the audience is enjoying the act, the same group of clowns are gathered in wobble car, several on top, others inside, packed in like a can of sardines. The few jump off the top, the driver and passenger hop out and open the truck when six more follow out, in the end, all switching positions and head back out of the ring, honking their squeaky bike horns.

The lights cut and after several seconds of pure quiet, Mike the magician stands there. He holds a quarter over his head, it's shiny. He can bite it, when dropped, it clinks. He picks it back up and moves it swiftly from one hand, to the other. A young girl, about ten comes from the audience and is escorted by Alec to Mike. She stands next to him and she holds her hands open to show there is nothing there. She closes her hands and holds them extended in front of her. Mike shows the girl the coin, places it into his left hand, shakes his arm, spins twice and opens it. The coin is gone. He asks the little girl to open her hands and there is the same coin.

"It's yours young lady. Enjoy!" The little girl looks up with smudged red lipstick.

Our trip to the foreign countries

A long journey

By Vincent Le Quang

The sky is bright and it starts to get warm. Jack wakes up feeling nausea. He wonders if it's the rocking or the smell of the elephant he's riding that is causing that.

"Elephant. I'm still inside that dream?"

In fact, the cold fact that this is not a dream starts to sink in for Jack. Sophie is still lying next to him very comfortably, in a deep sleep. There is no sign of civilization or anything at all within Jack's line of sight. His cell phone is almost out of battery and without signal since he embarked on this trip. He records his voice.

"Guys, friends, everyone I love. If I don't come back alive from this trip, just know that I love you... so much. I am now on an elephant, in the middle of literally nowhere...with this crazy ass girl still wearing that stupid pink tutu. There is nothing but grass around.

Not a tree, not a soul, not a chipmunk. I'm on a big giant freaking lawn! Where the hell are we? I guess we are in France or something!"

He stops the recording, and tries to use the camera, but the phone shuts down.

"No! My proof! My only proof that I'm not crazy!"

Jack looks at Sophie, wondering why yelling this loud did not even wake her up. He picks up a lollipop sticking out of her purse and angrily sucks on it. Approaching from the horizon, a silhouette appears on a horse.

"Sophie, wake up."

"Hum, five minutes more." She softly says.

There is a man completely naked on a horse. He first speaks in French then repeats his sentence in English.

"Come down from the elephant. I am here to inspect you."

Upon hearing that sentence spoken by the naked Frenchman, Jack shudders with fear.

"Sophie! There's a crazy naked French guy on a horse. Wake up!"

Sophie frowns looking at Jack's face.

"You have breath smell. Did you eat my lollipop? Why did you touch my purse? You didn't ask me, you punk! I thought you didn't like beer flavor!"

"Please come down from the horse, both of you", asks the Frenchman.

Sophie looks down. She notices that the man is holding a familiar black device with a blinking red light, and he keeps putting his nose on it. She suddenly panics and takes off her tutu.

"He's got a breathalyzer. Quickly, put this on", she whispers to Jack.

"Your tutu? Hell no!"

"Quiet! Just put it on, discretely."

"No! I'm sick of you telling me what to do without explanation."

Sophie forcefully pulls out Jack's pants and shoves the pink tutu into his crotch. She comes down from the elephant to hear what the naked man has to say.

“This breathalyzer tells me that one of you has been drinking. Smell it.”

“Oh, I can assure you, officer. It’s not me. Let me show you”

Sophie puts her mouth into the French guy’s mouth. Jack’s face turns red and his stomach turns as he witnesses that.

“Jack, you can come down”, yells Sophie.

“I’m not kissing the naked French guy!”

“It’s ok, he knows you’re the one who’s been drinking. Just come down and show yourself.”

Jack hesitantly climbs down the rope ladder, wearing Sophie’s pink tutu. The French guy smiles, and then laughs loudly.

“Haha! I didn’t know you were here for the show. Well, you’re fine then, I’m sure you’ll make a fine ballerina. Enjoy your visit to France.”

The naked horseman rides away to the horizon.

“You hear that Jack? We’re really in France!”

“Hihihi hahaha” says Jack. “We’re in... France... Can you explain why you had me wear your stupid tutu?”

“Because of your breath smells like beer, you idiot. That’s why.”

“Oh but of course, that makes perfect sense. Now, can I get back my pants?”

After the exchange of clothes, Sophie takes out her pamphlet. Jack rolls his eyes, briefly waiting to hear what burst of nonsense will come out of her mouth this time, and tells her:

“Sophie, look around us. How is this France? There’s nothing, empty, nada, niet.”

“Well, that’s what I am trying to figure out. I think...”

She pauses for a few second.

“I think...”, she continues.

“I want to strangle you”, mouths Jack.

“I think we’re supposed to be near the Château de Versailles ...”.

Jack's puppy eyes show signs of desperation. Sophie says:

"Oh that's right, look over there"

Jack just realized he was wrong. There is something around. Not far away, there is a red brick lying on the grass. Jack expresses his astonishment.

"Oh, splendid. That's a brick. We're completely saved. Halleluiah!"

Sophie keeps staring at her mysterious pamphlet. She then stands on the brick and looks far into the horizon.

"Oh, I'm so excited to meet the king of France!"

Jack walks towards the horizon and sights at the emptiness. He turns around. Sophie has vanished.

"So... Sophie! Oh no, what the..."

The brick is still there and the elephant too, but no sign of Sophie or anything she was carrying. Jack talks to the elephant.

"Where did she go? Did you see where she went?"

Dah!!! What's happening to me? I'm talking to a damn elephant!"

Jack runs around in circle but still sees nothing until the horizon. He tries to put his head into the elephant's mouth but gives up quickly. He then attempts to pick up the red brick but that doesn't budge, as if it's been glued to the ground. He tries to stand on it. He puts one foot on but loses balance and tumbles. Somehow, hitting the grass hurts a lot more than he expected. Lying down on the ground, he closes his eyes. Upon reopening them, he sees bright chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, walls covered in lush tapisserie, stained glass windows, and bring glowing ornaments. He contemplates the view above him when Sophie suddenly appears, smiling at him.

"Look Jack, we're in a French castle!"

To be continued...

"Mud Tutu"

a short story by Andrzej Tucholski

(An Entry for Ksenia Anske Super Competition)

The Purse sucked on her beer-flavoured lollipop as she was preparing to study the new dead item that had rolled into the morgue an evening before. It was already clear to her, that it wasn't the case she would later like to recall. Straps tucked in inner compartment for more movement freedom, she decided it's high time for general examination. No more idle screwing around.

With a long, polythene stick she lifted up the lacy part of a stained Tutu. It looked like a piece of garbage. Used to be green, supposedly, now only presented the entire palette of shades of mud brown. Purse chuckled. Mud Tutu sounded in her mind almost like mad Tutu. She wondered, how mad Tutu could be like. The laughter paused after a moment. Purse, raised on the streets of Detroit, wasn't soft. Yet she never had anything in common with junkies or dealers. That was the final frontier of an item life in her eyes.

Apart from the dirt, the Tutu looked... okay. Purse played with her studs for a bit, bewildered with the mysterious cause of death of that particular green thing. She left the piece of cloth as it was and went upstairs. Brick stood next to the coffee machine, pouring espressos, shot after shot.

With crooked notches on his head he looked like he wasn't exactly sober.

"Tough night?" asked Purse and get her a coffee herself. She preferred flat white, but the milk wasn't anywhere around so she clicked for an espresso as well.

"Tell me about it," said Brick and gulped down the final dose of caffeine. He scratched the place below the gun strapped on his back and leaned against the wall with loud crunch of pupled plaster. "How's that poor little thing down in the deathzone?"

"It's a morgue, Brick. I hate to go there while it carries its real name, you really don't need to make it even less bearable."

"Sorry, Pur. It's just, I knew that Tutu, you know? She was a daughter of a friend of mine, old Coat. Actually you can know him too."

"That prick who got drunk at the annual police party and tried to sleep with an old Fridge?"

"Yep."

"Shit. I didn't like him but I wouldn't wish losing a child to anyone."

"Yep," said Brick once again.

They stood in silence for a bit.

"Hey, listen," started Purse in weary voice. "Do we at least have the weapon?"

Brick frowned.

"Yeah, we do. Or at least I think we do. This is when things get really ugly."

"What do you mean?"

"Go and check yourself."

They went outside and crossed the street. Brick swiped his identity card against the reader and they both entered The Official Police Warehouse, XIXth century building with ruined ornaments above the door.

The main space was occupied by only one object. Enormous, grey shape sheathed in the biggest ziploc bag ever created. Bag had some weird looking holes on one side. Purse snorted.

"And this is what, now?"

"An elephant, I suppose. That's what the professor from the university said."

"Is it... alive?"

"We don't know. It was the only thing found on the crime scene. Apart Tutu, that is."

"It can't be. Tutu wasn't shattered to pieces and this huge eyesore wouldn't be able to do any less than full destruction. I mean, look at its feet!"

"There are lots of things that do not fit together here, Pur. We have young Tutu killed in a mysterious way, extincted elephant coming back to life only to be found at the crime scene and absolutely nothing else."

Suddenly, the elephant trumpeted. His massive body moved a little as he was waking up from sleep. He opened left eye and looked at Purse and Brick standing frozen in deep amazement.

"Hi there," he said in weird, deep voice.

"You... you..." stuttered Purse, "you can talk?"

"Of course I can. I'm an elephant."

"Oh dear. That's unexpected," noticed Brick.

"To say the least," added Purse.

"Why am I held in captive? Is that a bag?"

"You are suspected. We think that you killed an innocent Tutu."

"What's tutu?"

"Uhm, a tiny skirt with lacy decorations."

"I do not know such thing."

"Every suspect always says so."

Elephant smiled, his tusks pointing in different directions.

"You can interrogate me, if you want. I weigh six tons. And you two combined?"

"Well, he has a point here," said Brick and backtracked a little.

"No. Elephant, if you're innocent, could you please help us solve that mystery?" asked Purse and raised her clasp to look as tall as she could get.

"Oh, and that's better. I'd like to help you."

"What are you doing?" whispered Brick, still unconvinced.

"Hush. I know what I'm doing. Elephants are proud," moulder Purse in return.

"What are you two plotting there?"

"Nothing, dear elephant. Are you able to free yourself?"

"Yeah, I should manage to..."

The storage door interrupted with loud explosion. Elephant got back to pretended sleep. A squad of skilled Guns ran inside and secured the perimeter.

"Purse?" said the leader, huge Shotgun with two barrels loaded inside.

"Yeah?"

"You will come with us."

"WHAT?" shouted Purse as one of the Guns went around her and was now trying to bind her straps together.

"You are suspected of an attempted murder of the green Tutu."

"Attempted?" she asked and stopped moving altogether.

What do they mean: attempted?

Then the green Tutu appeared from behind the back of the old Shotgun. She was still dirty but... alive!

"It's her! It's her!" she screamed and pointed at Purse with one of her laces.

"OH YOU DIRTY LITTLE LIAR!" roared Purse.

"LET HER GO!" Brick finally put himself together and entered the scene.

Shotgun killed him with single blow.

„Now, would you kindly use that breathalyzer?" asked one of the Guns.

Frightened Purse saw that Tutu sucked on a stolen beer-flavoured lollipop and understood that she's in deep trouble.

There was a window by Niko Staten

Antonia Suzanne Ludvark had never seen the sun. Born at midnight on May 22nd, 1982, in a Portland basement to Goth parents, Antonia was destined for darkness.

(And eyeliner.)

The albino shut the door behind her and stared in wonder at the sparkling squared glass. Her blackened heart skipped a beat as she took a timid step closer.

It was there.

She could see it. She could *feel* it.

Each step brought her closer to danger, closer to enthrallment. Each breath took her closer to anxiety. Shouldn't she turn back? Shouldn't she return to the depths of despair, the Emo Land from whence she came?

Her pale fingers stretched slowly, aching, towards the golden beam that threatened her very existence.

Is it safe? Does it matter?

"Nothing matters. Only...this."

Antonia took a deep breath, adjusted her black tutu, and took a large, mad jump into the sunlight. She cried out softly as the warmth washed over her.

The heat was new, inviting and exciting. Every pore began to sweat. Every nerve tingled.

The stories she had learned as a child, the warnings from her parents, were all but forgotten. What cared she for the old tales? She was ready for a new story-hers.

But the hours passed too quickly and the sun began to fade. Antonia stared at her reddened skin, her tears like fire.

"No! You cannot leave me! Take me with you!"

Without realizing it, she pulled a loose brick from the pile in the corner of the attic and chucked it at the window with all her strength. Glistening shards burst forth, kissing her face before they clinked to the floor. The scents of sunscreen and Strawberry Daiquiri filled the room, overpowering her. Antonia toppled forward and grabbed the paint-chipped windowpane.

She could hear them. She could see...

And suddenly, unaware of what she was doing, Antonia Suzanne Ludvark put both knee-high leather boots on the ledge of the pane and jumped.

(Nothing else happened, so you might as well stop reading.)

(Just kidding...)

There was sun. There was sand. There was...

"There's elephant poop on my boot."

A tall man with an angular nose dressed in a purple velvet coat quickly ran forward. He tipped his straw top-hat and made an apologetic gesture with his hands.

"Oh dear, I am terribly sorry about that! My wife and I had lunch at the chili-dog vendor over there, you see, and I'm afraid it gave her dreadful diarrhea."

He pointed across the beach to a twenty five foot tall, 1200 pound elephant. The man waved. Antonia waved. The elephant waved and walked towards them. The ground danced around them with every step she took.

"I was just telling this young woman about the mess of a lunch we had, Cordella."

"Oh my, yes. Those chili-dogs were expensive, too," the elephant sighed. She flipped her ear to the side with her long trunk and gave a devilish grin. "I suppose you could say, it gave me a *run* for my money!"

Cordella chortled through her trunk and Antonia decided that it was the best sound in the world.

"But Frances, darling, you haven't introduced me to our new friend."

Antonia made a little curtsy, as you do when you are introduced to a top-hatted man and his elephant wife. She smiled. "My name is..."

Wait. Who was she?

"I seem to have forgotten."

Cordella waved her trunk. "Names do not matter, my dear. They are cheap, plastic-y things which are easily replaced. "

"Massed produced in China," her husband said with a nod.

"You should choose a name for yourself."

Antonia set down her spiked backpack purse and gave this idea a serious

thought. Although she could not remember her old name, she knew that it was part of her other life, a life that she did not cherish. Skulls, black-lights, and 90's grunge music no longer held a place in her heart. She no longer wanted that black lipstick. She no longer wanted the thigh-high pleather boots that farted every time she moved.

She pulled the boots off and dropped them onto the sand. They melted, twisted, into wiggly black snakes. The snakes wriggled around, contorting themselves into a word:

Freedom.

She pulled off her stockings and more snakes appeared, spelling the word *Dream.*

Her corset spelled *Release.* Her tutu spelled *Create.* Her long-sleeve top became the word *Become.*

Antonia stood on the beach of Life, naked, and inhaled deep, taking it all in. The words slithered one by one up her body, nuzzling her sunburned skin. And she knew, at that moment, that she had all that she would ever need.

She did not need clothing. She need not need food. Truth would be her apparel. Words would be her sustenance.

She was Fire. She was Beauty and Light. The very Cosmos dwelled within her bosom. She would not be controlled. She could not be contained.

"My name is Stardust," she said at last.

Top-hatted Francis gave a wink and knowing smile. Cordella waved goodbye as they waltzed, oddly enough, towards the chili-dog vendor.

Stardust jumped over a large dung pile and made her way towards the ocean. The bubbly bubbles ticked her toes and she was about to plunge in but was halted by a rotund man with a badge on his jacket and a whistle in his mouth.

"Stop!"

"Is there a problem, Officer?"

"I'll say. You can't go in the water like that, Missy."

"Naked?"

The policeman rolls his eyes and pulled out a breathalyzer . He made a grunt and searched his pockets.

“Jus’ what I thought! Your alcohol level is at zero. Did’ya think no one would notice? Here,” he pulled out two large lollipops. “They’re beer flavored. Better than nothing, I s’pose.”

Stardust put both suckers in her mouth, closed her eyes, and dove into the water. She relaxed and let herself float upon the Sea of Life, drifting calmly towards Forever, towards Everything... towards Herself.

Brick Throwing Type

By Holly Lowe

As I walked past the elephant at the zoo, I couldn’t help imagine what that might be like, a life in a pen. I’m not being cynical. I would appreciate people adoring me, having three square meals a day, children smiling, perhaps even a monkey dancing in vibrant yellow tutu. The monkey might be taking it a bit far; I’m beginning to sound like my old Uncle Sergei, and his incident with the breathalyzer.

Maybe the monkeys wouldn’t have tutus, but the thought makes me smile. Now an elephant in a yellow tutu would be down right hilarious.

Realizing I had been standing in front of the elephants daydreaming, one of my favorite past times, I hurriedly started walking. I was supposed to meet my Uncle Anton fifteen minutes ago. He was going to be cross with me or he may have even left.

I sped past the cheetahs and was just nearing the edge of the park. I could see my Uncle talking to a woman. I wouldn’t have thought much of this except she carried a very peculiar purse. As I moved closer towards them, I wasn’t sure if I should run, grabbing my Uncle my by the hand, dragging him away or ask the woman “What is that?” That being her purse.

The weirdest part is that my Uncle was casually talking to her, as though that purse were not alive. But it was. Now from a distance, I'm not sure how I knew this, I just did. But as I came closer, I was confident, that purse was breathing.

The look on my face did not seem to register in Uncle Anton's mind, and I gazed carefully into the woman's face. She gave me a look, as to say, "I notice you seeing this purse."

Anton finished what he was saying and greeted me with his familiar "Hey kiddo, want a lollipop?"

I took the lollipop, grape I think, but it could have been flavored for all I knew at that moment. I couldn't stop staring at the purse. Uncle Anton then introduced me to the woman. "Elena, let me introduce you to Ms. Grimoire. Ms. Grimoire, this is my niece Elena."

"Please Elena, call me Celeste."

I looked at her, wanting to demand, wanting to scream, "What is that thing?" but I held back. This was very difficult for me. I was the candid one in my family. Some might say I'm the loud, obnoxious, brick throwing type. I prefer to think of myself as the one who lives life to the fullest. Or the fullest I'm allowed to live in my twelve-year-old life.

As I met her eyes, I realized that this woman might have more in common with me than I originally thought. Maybe it wasn't something in common, but it was like I knew her. Her eyes, blue with yellow flecks, twinkled at me. I'm not just being cute, those goddamn eyes actually twinkled. She smiled at me, as if she had

known me since my baptism, liked she had changed my dirty diaper when I was a baby. And I began to wonder if perhaps we did know each other.

“Anton” she said,” she looks just like your Aunt Alina, it’s remarkable.”

Great Aunt Alina, I thought to myself. She looks like a shriveled up wombat. How could she compare Great Aunt Alina to me?

“When she was a young woman,” Celeste continued “ she was quite a beauty.”

So here we are, three people, chatting carelessly about old people, while sitting right in front of our eyes, was a live, breathing purse. I couldn’t help staring at it, the breathing purse. Could you help yourself from staring at it?

Celeste noticed me, noticing her purse and she said, “ Well Anton, I think you were right about this little one. She does have the sight as you have suspected.”

Anton stared at me, wide-eyed, curious, with wonder. “You can see it, Elena?”

Now I was just freaking out. What did they want me to say? That I could see this purse, or whatever it was, breathing. That I knew it was alive. They would think I was crazy.

Celeste tenderly gazed at me “It’s ok Elena, we’re not going to think you’re mad. Tell Anton what you see.”

I shook my head, confused, waiting, and wondering if this was really happening. This day had gone from a grape lollipop, or was it beer flavored, to twinkly eyes and purses that breath.

“Really it’s fine, Elena” Celeste urged me on.

Do I dare say what I could see?

Uncle Anton, contemplating me with the most wondrous look on his face. I don’t think I’ve seen that sight on his face since before my Aunt got sick and died three years ago. His eyes intently searching my face, appearing as though he had a thousand things to say but wasn’t saying any of them. He reached out, and touched me cheek kindly and said, “Tell me Doll, you can tell Uncle Anton.”

And with that, knowing it would be received; I said those four beautiful little words that would change my life forever, in all ways that I could never imagine. “The purse is alive.”

Uncle Anton cheered, and grabbed me tightly in his arms, proclaiming, “I knew it, I knew it”.

I stood breathlessly, and allowing this hug but really wanted to shout “You knew what?”

Wait a minute; I’m the boisterous one in my family, why hold back now. “Uncle Anton, what are you talking ABOUT? WHAT DID YOU KNOW?”

He bent over, a gleam in his eyes, and with the most love, exhilaration and glee I have ever seen on his face, he said, “ You,

my dear Elena, are magical. You have been born with a great gift that has a dear purpose in this life. And that goddamn breathing purse is just the beginning. Hold on tight, Doll."

Dirk McAwesome the Smuggler by Richard Junk

Dirk McAwesome looked around at the terrible spaceport. "This is what they call a spaceport?" he asked as he joined his companions, the lovely Sophia Magicblade and another woman who looked like a pretty average tourist. Dirk was only there to move them off-planet, a mission given to him by the Supreme Galactic High Counsel Council.

"Don't be obtuse," Sophia said meanly. She hated working with Dirk because she felt like he was often a huge jerk, but by getting so defensive about it already, she was sort of being the jerk. "They're a tiny planet whose culture doesn't believe in technology."

Dirk huffed as he looked at the customs guards, each of them wearing a freshly-pressed uniform and wielding a standard military-issue rock, gray and weighty in their hands. He removed a lollipop from the pocket of his jacket.

"Just be cool," Sophia said. "The last thing we need right now is to be detained, for any reason."

Dirk glanced at the other woman with them. She had notepad on a chain around her neck for sketching pictures of the beautiful landscape, and she wore a red tutu, which Dirk would have thought odd if every store on this planet wasn't selling fudge, knives, leather goods, and tutus. Tourist planets were all the same.

Two customs guards waved them forward to Checkpoint A.

"Did you enjoy your time on PBY-6?" the guard asked politely.

"It was wonderful, and we look forward to coming back," Sophia answered.

The guard etched some data into the rock in front of him. Sophia smiled, and the woman with her smiled, and Dirk didn't smile because he was too busy looking cool.

"And you sir, what is your favorite color?" the guard asked Dirk.

"Black," Dirk said.

"Black's not a color," the guard answered, frowning.

"Sorry, umm...silver," Dirk corrected himself. The tension was super thick.

The guard sniffed the air. "Sir...is that beer I smell on your breath?"

Dirk did his best to look innocent, even as Sophia was shooting him daggers looks. He was used to being recognized when he travelled, but he had registered in the Spaceport Registry as "McAwesome Dirk" so nobody would know he was here. He was sure his reputation as a hard-drinkin', hard-shootin', hard-talkin' SGHCC agent couldn't have followed him here.

"Of course not," he started, but the guard was already waving him toward a side station where two other guards stood. They were standing by a circle that had been drawn into the dirt.

"You'll need to step off to the side and take a breathalyzer test. Go on," the first guard ushered them away from his station as he chiseled furiously on his noterock.

"Did you drink before you came to get us?" Sophia whispered.

"Of course not," Dirk answered quietly. "This is a beer-flavored lollipop, though. Flying spaceships is hard and I needed to relax."

"You idiot," Sophia hissed loud under her breath as they walked. "That's an anti-magic circle over there! If we have to step through that, we're in trouble." She was so angry.

"What's the big deal?" he whispered back. "So you lose your magic powers for a second. I'm not even buzzed from this lollipop, so we'll be through quick."

Before Sophia could answer, they were standing before the two guards at Checkpoint B. The first guard motioned for the second guard, who held a fancier brick, to step forward.

"Charliexylb, do the breathalyzer," he said. Charliexylb sighed, because he totally hated having to be the breathalyzer all the time. He crouched down a bit to get his nose close to Dirk's face.

"Blow," Charliexylb said to Dirk, who complied. Charliexylb sniffed the air a few times. "Just a lollipop, nothing to worry about," he said as he stood upright again and stepped back to his previous position. Dirk flashed a smile at Sophia, one of those see-I-told-you-everything-would-be-fine-and-we'll-be-going-home-before-you-know-it smiles. Sophia looked crabby because she hated when he gave her that look.

"Ok everyone, step into the circle please. We'll make this quick." Dirk stepped in, nothing happened, and he waited for the others. Sophia stepped in slowly, holding her breath, and her image shimmered for a moment. No doubt the most powerful magic user in the galaxy could somehow defeat an anti-magic dirt-circle, though it was obvious it took massive concentration.

The tourist stepped into the circle, and that's when things got crowded.

The moment she set foot into the circle, there was the sound of a pop like a balloon, and the average tourist was gone. In her place was an elephant in a shimmering tutu. Everyone was a little shocked except Sophia, who kind of knew that this would happen.

"What the..." Dirk started.

"Elephant smugglers!" the smaller guard yelled. "Get them!"

"Uh oh," Charliexylb said as he dropped his fancy brick, because he was startled and a little clumsy and he'd been smelling alcohol-breath all day.

Dirk seized the moment and swung at the larger guard, knocking poor Charliexylb out with one punch.

The smaller guard held his rock threateningly, ready to strike. "Hold it, buddy!" he said, pants-poopingly nervously.

Dirk raised his hands. "Whoa, buddy. Easy," he said, don't-hit-me-with-a-brickingly.

Suddenly, Sophia was behind the guard, and she hit him in the head with her purse. The guard fell, and Dirk was surprised that the purse made a "thunk" and not a "thwak" sound.

"Good job," Dirk said. "Now, to the ship!" The elephant stepped out of the circle and became a small tourist woman again.

They turned to run toward their ship, only to find a wall of rock-wielding guards standing between them and their freedom.

Sophia grinned and flashed the inside of her purse at the guards, the larger guard's brick peeping out. She began to swing the purse around menacingly, and the guards panicked.

“Their technology hopelessly outstrips ours!” one of the guards squealed, and they all dropped their rocks and ran away.

Dirk, Sophia and the elephant were leaving the planet in no time.

Carola Wolff: SHOWTIME

I had just dipped my trunk in the third whisky of the evening, contemplating my next move, when the frog stumbled into my room. He wore a pink tutu and cried like a baby. Never nice to see an old frog cry.

„You've got to help me, Big O.“

„Why? Because it's not easy being green?“

„Not funny!“ He bawled some more. „The pig is dead!“

I scratched my big ears. Sooner or later we'll all snuff it. Most of us, sooner. That's why we were here. Still...

„Some...somebody...killed her“, the frog croaked.

I was surprised at how much it hit me, hearing it like that. I always took great pride in my thick skin. But she got to me. I'll never forget that. I never forget anything.

“I...I want to know who did it!”, the frog howled.

That pig had been no lady, but a damned fine woman. I drank a quiet farewell drop while the frog calmed his pond waters.

“What's in it for me?”, I wanted to know.

“My pudding, every day, for the rest of the year.”

“Your pudding, every day, for the rest of your life.”

He croaked, his eyes bulging out. Said “OK”, and then I knew that he must have really loved her.

“Tell me.”

“We were playing. Downstairs, in the kitchen.”

Risky. But I knew the frog liked it kinky.

“She ordered me to my room to get dressed. And when I came back, she...”

More bawling.

I looked at my watch. Dinner time was long over, most of the residents would be in bed by now, sleeping, or being glued to the telly screens. They were showing a rerun of 'Take Manhattan', in which most of the residents once starred. Even the night nurses would be watching, popping a pill or two.

The frog's tongue shot out and picked a dead fly from a heap of paper on my table. He chewed absent-mindedly.

“Let's go”.

We took the back staircase, just to make sure.

The blue guy jumped at us from a dark corner on the second floor: “Hey, wanna buy some cookies? The finest shit cookies you ever tasted!”

“Cookies?” the frog shouted excitedly.

“Shush!” the blue guy said and looked around. “I also got lollipops, Big O. Special lollipops. They're not only beer flavoured, they are made of beer! The nurses will never find out!”

“I'll get my purse!”, the frog said.

"No, you won't!", I said.

Blue grinned. "Hey, Big O, don't need a breathalyzer to know that you've been on the whisky again. No more AA meetings? Never mind. These cookies will make you fly!"

I can't fly any more. Grown too old, too heavy. And sick of the circus. I made enough money, I didn't need to fly any more. Playing detective was more of a hobby. Still...

I whacked Blue over the head. Only lightly. He backed off.

We walked down and into the kitchen.

A strong smell of cooking lingered in the air, grease and fat. Overwhelming, but still better than the odour of disinfectant and piss which permeated the rest of the building.

"I...I can't come in any further", said the frog.

The first thing I saw were her black stilettos scattered on the floor. Next to them, a whip, handcuffs and the black leather dress that used to cling to her curves so nicely.

I knew she was into this shit. Some of us still liked a good spanking. The bear, for example. Nothing as queer as old Disney movie folk.

Then I saw her. The pig had been a looker, even at her age. Now she was dead meat. She had been butchered by an expert. Sliced up and deep fried.

Fifty shades of bacon.

I looked around and saw, on the table, her head resting on a platter, an apple stuffed between her blood red lips. She was staring at me reproachfully.

My Whisky came up.

"Pork de dooh da, de porkyporkydooh", somebody was singing in the pantry. "dedooo bananadidooh, banana split!"

The chef appeared, wielding a big knife, grinning madly. "Hey, Big O, look what I found. Couldn't let that go to waste, could I?"

He wasn't Swedish at all, they only made that up because they thought it was funny. But he was mad. Even then he had been a lunatic in the kitchen. Now he was completely gone.

"Call the others! We'll be having a feast! We are all sick of this tasteless, bland rubbish they serve us every day and call food!"

He had a point.

"Murderer!" Something flew past me and hit the chef right in the face. A big, brown brick. The chef fell down and his head made a dull cracking sound as it connected with the corner of the iron cooking stove. He was dead before he kissed the ground. Just like the pig.

Only, I didn't throw a brick. I just whacked her lightly. Didn't really expect her to die. Didn't expect the chef to turn her into a meal, either.

"Nice throw", I said to the frog, "Where did you find that one?"

"Never you mind, dumb ass. She's dead!" He started crying again.

The pig really wanted to marry him. She told me, when I came down for a nightcap. Him, this pathetic old loser. Him, not me. And why? Because he made her laugh! And she never loved me. I wasn't cute any more, anyway. Just a fat, old, stupid elephant who couldn't fly any more. And then she called me dumb.

I picked up the knife and ran the frog through. He looked utterly bewildered and died. I contemplated skinning and boiling him. Never have tasted frog's legs before. But then I decided to go upstairs and finish my whisky.

Don't call me dumb.

Ever.

The Mad Tutu by Christopher Mahan

So, sucked in by a torrent of variously-themed tweets, I find myself at the sending-end of a writing contest, organized by none other than the coffee-fueled, sock-wearing Ksenia who, despite her otherwise kind and accomodating nature, managed to cruelly prod me along with "If I say you can be funny, YOU CAN", despite my weak "mmmm, that's interesting" and my laughable attempts at humor conflating wolves, bears, and writers. OMG, I forgot about the strict one-thousand-words limit. Since I'm writing on paper, better go count. Ninety-two already? Fuck, I'm dead. There is no way.

Ok, ok, pull yourself together man! She said funny. That's easy: just don't be French. Then it's got to involve magic. That's harder. I'm a software developer. We don't believe in magic, us scientific types. Where is Gandalf when you need him?

I'll come back to magic later, if at all. Sorry Ksenia, I can explain how iPhones, wifi, and cloud storage works. There is no magic left in the world for me.

Now we come to the ridiculous list. An elephant, a tutu of any color, a breathalyzer, an unspecified number of beer-flavored lollipops, a brick, and a purse. Was she watching a Miley Cyrus video on YouTube when she came up with that?

Ok. A story. A tale. A funny magical tale. One that involves a policeman, on account of the breathalyzer, and a drunk, or seemingly drunk ballerina who, still in her tutu, sits legs outstretched in the middle of the sidewalk outside of the Rescue Mission, pulling chalk out of a tiny purse and drawing Ganesha on a cracked brick. Yes? Does the story hold so far? Onward then!

The squad car slid along skid row, lights low. Persons of no residence averted their faces, shielding their bleary eyes with leathered, swollen hands. The black and white jerked to a halt, slightly askey. Officers Fern and Woodhall stepped out, flashlight halos snaking ahead. She was still there, muttering to herself, sitting in the middle of the sidewalk, her once-pink leotard leggings and tutu irreparably soiled.

She looked at the law with resentment and crackled "You again? Leave me alone, I ain't done nothing wrong." Her beer-flavored lollipop nearly fell out of her mouth as so many of her teeth had before.

Ignoring the uniforms, she pulled another piece of chalk out of her tiny cocktail party purse and continued drawing on a cracked brick.

Officer Woodhall looked down, feigning interest, to catch her breath. "What are you drawing? An elephant?"

Her laughter crackled down the street followed by sickly wheezing. "It's Ganesha!"

Woodhall stood again; motioned to Fern: "Put away the breathalyzer, she's drunk as a skunk."

From a shadow, a tiny mousy voice piped in. "That's Mrs. Muller. She's not harming anyone!"

Fern pointed his flashlight to the voice but lit only a strewn alley, glittering with broken glass.

"Well, Mrs. Muller, let's go." And they grabbed her arms and lifted her to the car, then sat her down in the back seat. She let them, even when they took the brick and tossed it down the alley.

In the car, officer Fern drove. Officer Woodhall ran her ID, an expired New Jersey identification card. From the back seat, they heard her hum, over and over: "omm Ganesha omm ganapati omm."

Fern drove in silence, toward the station. Woodhall searched the computer system in vain for Mrs. Muller.

"Omm Ganesha omm ganapati omm."

Woodhall turned to ask Mrs. Muller when she had come to Los Angeles. The words did not pass his lips. Instead he shouted: "Stop the car!"

Fern slammed on the brakes. "What?"

"She's gone!"

Fern too turned around. The backseat was empty. Woodhall got out, then opened the back seat door. On the floor was a single cracked brick with a chalk drawing of an elephant, its eye looking straight at him.

From a distance, faintly, over the bluish roof line, the low hum of "omm Ganesha omm ganapati omm" echoed still between the buildings, followed by a deep silence that unnerved the policemen as they returned to their car and sat, stunned, wondering what the hell had just happened.

A city bus stopped across the street, either to pick up or unload early morning commuters. Splashed across its side, in vibrant colors, the face of an elephant, trunk raised, tusks gleaming, advertised a new Disney movie. The elephant's great eye seemed to stare into Woodhall's.

The engine revved and the city bus pulled away. Standing on the sidewalk, a lone rider with dirty pink leggings and tutu stared at them, holding a cracked brick in her left hand. The crackling, wheezy laughter followed them as they sped away, swallowed up by the dark shapes of bleak brick buildings.

Albert's Ride

by KN Schultz

Placing the credit card slip in my pocket, I meander towards the storefront from the gas pump and company car. Needing to squirt another pot of coffee to the devil gods for reasons I no longer remember, I saunter expediently.

"Hey, Mate. Spare a minute?", some low whispering voice speaks from behind the dumpster.

I wrinkle my nose at the stench of the rotting refuse and at owner of the voice lurking behind that rubbish bin. "Sorry, I don't have any change."

I stop at the sight of the voice's owner, a rotund hairy brown elephant wearing four neon colored tutus and a garish amount of eyeliner. A purple frizzy haired wig sits askew on its head as if put on hastily.

"In a pinch and need a favor, Mate.", the mastadon says as looks around for witnesses, "I'm in a bind with my gorilla."

My need to urinate washes away. "What?"

"My fucking gorilla. What are you, dim? I've got gorilla problems. *Big gorilla problems.*"

I shake a cube of gum out of its tin. "Fine. Spill it, then. I'll just piss myself."

The elephant hands me a clutch purse it pulls out of its assortment of tutus. "I need you to buy me some beer flavored lollipops."

"You've got to be funning me." Grinning, I look to my sides as I shake my head. *A strange elephant asking me to buy him beer flavored candy behind the dumpster of the filling station, like I'm the type of guy help circus animals go on a bender.*

He hands me the argyle purse bulging with many bills of different denominations. "As

much as they got on the stand."

"Sure.", I say as a play along with this mad pachiderm. I honor his request and emerge with a shopping bag fills with the sinful treats to see him already sitting in the passenger seat of my new convertible delivery pickle mobile. "Hey, I can't take you along. I'm on the clock. Pickle deliveries."

His trunk, snorting hard, snatches the brown paper bag from my hands.

I slide into the driver's seat and give the ignition key a twist.

"Thanks, Mate. Name's Albert by the way."

"Lovely. Albert the Talking Elephant."

"Just one more favor. I need a lift back to the circus."

Rubbing my eyes, I lean my forehead against the steering wheel. I beat my noggin against, wishing I just ignored this clear hallucination.

The elephant smiles, batting his exaggerated eyelashes at me as his wig bounces in the breeze.

"Fine. But I have to finish my route first."

"Ooo does that mean take away?", Albert says, hopping in his seat, forcing the crates of pickles in the trunk to clatter, "I just love take away! Some Thai? Or Ethiopian? I'm *so hungry* for Ethiopian."

I motion for him to settle down. "I can't deliver broken pickles or on broken axles."

"Sorry about that, Mate." Albert rolls his head to the side as the car moves into traffic.

"I'm just a bit peckish."

"Eat a lollipop then.", I mumble.

Albert looks indecisively into the bag.

Blood flushes my cheeks. "Just one until we find some place to order from."

Wrapping me around the shoulders with his trunk, Albert licks my face. A large swath of drool and wiry brown and purple hair covers my cheek. "I'm buying."

"Hey now, I'm trying to bloody drive here." I wipe the goo of my face. "If I may ask, what's problem with this gorilla?"

Albert rolls his eyes and trunk. "Lost in a game of cards."

"I see.", *A talking elephant with a gambling addiction?*, "In for the beer pops, then."

Albert removes a treat from the bag and sticks it in his mouth, plastic and all. I remove the lollipop and its cellophane.

"Thanks.", Albert mutters before blasting a loud round of flatulence that rumbles the car and hangs low amongst the seats.

Finding a restaurant, I order boxes of Thai noodles in peanut sauce for Albert. I return to find him urinating on the car next to the convertible. He sways, obviously drunk off the candy. A mortified woman shrieks inside her car. Enticing him with the food, I get him to stumble into the car as he farts a chain explosions that sounds like machine gun fire.

Quickly, I speed away before the police arrive.

I yank the lollipop from his mouth to discover he ate the whole bag while I was inside.

Absentmindedly, I stick the candy in my shirt pocket as I scold Albert for his shenanigans. "*What is wrong with you?* Pissing on some poor lady's car like a dirty hobo."

Ignoring me, he dumps the boxes of noodles into his mouth, spilling it all over the upholstery.

"Bloody Hell.", I mutter as I swerve the car as I try to keep the damage to the company

property to a minimum.

Lights and siren flash behind the convertible. I pull over and two officers approach.

Leaping out of the car, Albert flees. One of the officers pursues with arms flailing. Bright purple hair bounces frantically.

"Have you been drinking?", says the officer approaching my side of the car with his hand on his side arm.

"No sir."

"I smell beer."

Remembering the lollipop in my pocket, I groan.

"Step out of the vehicle."

Slowly, I follow the officer's instruction. As he searches me, I see Albert and a gorilla wearing a bikini and sunglasses crawl into the squad car with the other cop still running after them.

Shots and yells fire. Pop. Pop. Pop. I'm thrust to the pavement. Albert's trunk waves out of the window as the squad car speeds away with a gorilla arm that flings a brick out the other window.

"Thanks for the ride, Mate!"

The police shoot at the squad car's tires and miss. I feel the crushed beer candy against my breast as I stare down the plastic tube of a breathalyzer.

TITLE: Mistranslated Magic
WORD COUNT (excluding title): 997
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"Devils of light . . . mend the moon," Ryu repeated aloud, one long, black nail trailing words, a fleshly sentence-ninja of sorts. The edges of some of the book's pages crunched like a chip, where others disintegrated or sent up a geyser of dust that made Josie think of dead people's skin. *Cellular confetti*.

Josie, Ryu's friend since first grade, had her doubts. "Are you sure that's what it says?"

"Positive. Remember, I use to live in Canada."

"Yeah, but only for a couple years. When you were a little kid."

He tapped a finger at his left temple and drawled *steel trap*, whose action reminded them both of a shared bonding experience: dredging up a spliced copy of the "Terminator 2" movie scene where the T-1000 shape-shifts its arm into a steel blade to casually spear the man's skull.

Both teens erupted, with Josie just managing to croak out "Aluminum, maybe" amid snickers.

“Seriously, Ry, what does that mean? I **don’t** think it’s French.”

“It’s a magic book, I’m certain of it. Anyway, let’s take it for a spin, shall we?” A black eyebrow quirked.

Josie knew better than to argue for reason when he had that green-eyed gleam. And that grin.

She instinctively dragged her dark purse closer, and it scuttled a path through the pebbles. The hinterlands behind the school bordered cornfields on two sides and several acres of semi-thick woods on the other.

It was unlikely any Fogues were around with a breathalyzer to check for magical utterings, but you could never be completely sure. So Josie was at the ready to ensconce the book within its labyrinth of fabrics.

In the waning sun, the *Magie ist verboten* sign creaked from the tops of the metal swings. Neither had a clear idea what the sign meant, but Ryu thought it probably translated into permission to use magic as long as you were sitting in a boat whilst wearing fur.

“See, Joze, this part says *la petite mort*. . . . I think we can conjure some dead people. Possibly midgets!” His excitement evaporated. He looked furtively around. “But we need to go somewhere . . . secure.”

Simultaneous whispers of *the shed!* After triangling the corner of the decrepit page, Ryu grabbed Josie’s purse and shoved the book in. Soon, echoes of the slaps of their shoes could be heard as they cut across the solar ten-ball courts.

* * * *

About a mile in, just past where two hills mingled in a cove of blackberries, crouched their hideout: the thicket-smothered shed. Josie and Ryu liked to think of it as a shed, but it didn’t even approach a shack. It was more a collection of boards, many pried open by time and barely held up by a tent of tangled brush and thin tree trunks. The only sight marker, a nearby decoy, was a purple brick with lettering approximating gold. Ryu had painted “not all those who wander are lost,” along with an arrow pointing away from the secret hideout, in art class when he should have been doing robot animations.

“OK, let’s get started,” he said over cracking knuckles. Both scrunched under the awning and let the remainders of light that splintered through the air-dancing

spiderwebs be their guide.

"This one about Hannibal looks good, Ry," Josie offered, pointing to a picture of an animal she'd seen only on the extinction lists. She thought she remembered it was called an *elephant*.

"It seems like the spell might be voice-powered." So Ryu began to chant, in what he thought was French.

Nothing happened except the flinty chirping of a nearby bird.

"Try it again," Josie urged.

"Still nada."

"Can I try it?" she asked, gesturing for the book.

After stumbling over the accents a couple times, she got the line to where she thought it sounded right.

A burst of some kind of creatures engaged in either a chase or a speedy seduction crashed through the nearby thorns.

It could just be the Adderlees' dog, Josie turned to meet his fear-stretched face.

"Or it could be me," a male voice calmly informed them from a few feet ahead.

Cornflower-blue eyes seemed to make apparitions of Josie and Ryu's lupine forms as they emerged cautiously from their haven.

"You British?" Ryu questioned, faking toughness.

"Oh, rahther," the man in what seemed to be a finely tailored suit and bowl-style black hat, responded, not bothering to smile. "But the pertinent question is, who are you?"

"We live nearby." Josie jerked her head to the east.

"Yeah, real nearby." Ryu quickly added.

"I suspected as much. Pleasure to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Live-Nearby. I am Doctor Lecter. Hannibal Lecter." He offered a hand so spotty and bone-bound, Josie felt one would be unwise to take her eyes off the man.

“Wait. *The Hannibal Lecter?*” Under his breath Ryu side-mouthed to Josie, “he’s a cannibal. Saw it in a graphic once.”

“Young chap, I am merely an *a-flesh-ionado*, and, by the prick of my thumbs, I think at least one of you might be likewise.”

Did he just call me a prick, Ryu thought. The guy just wouldn’t shut up.

“You might have heard that I ate people, but that wasn’t spot-on. I in fact ate their livers with pork’n’beans and beer-flavored lollipops, not any chianti rubbish.”

Slurp, slurp, slurp.

After the doctor whipped the skull-and-crossbones tutu from an inner pocket, it all got too weird, and both teens turned and sprinted out of their now-unsecreted place.

His “*Après moi, le deluge*” thundered in their ears, but as Ryu glanced back through the receding trees, it seemed the clone . . . ghoul . . . whatever was not attempting to follow.

What being an ape in the rain had to do with anything, Ryu didn’t know.

Damn, we’ve got to widen our spheres of reference, was all Josie could think as a crepuscular rain began to pulse salt-and-water rivulets down their strained faces.

Tutu Noir

By Courtenay Stallings

Jack Halperin couldn’t even remember her face. She had been taken from him years ago—not taken in the “six-feet-in-the-ground” sort of way—no, she had disappeared completely. She had been the first woman he had ever loved. Heck, she was the only woman he had ever loved. Will ever love? His mind clouded and his brow furrowed as he thought about it. Jacqueline. That was her name. Although, she made him call her Jacques, after the postmodern philosopher Derrida). She got a kick out of his hatred for all things Derrida and postmodernism. Jacques always cited that New York Times article, in which the reporter who flew all the way to Bangladesh to interview Spivak, the critical theorist who translated Derrida, only to have Spivak reply, “I just came here for the mangoes.” The response became an inside joke and their reply to all things absurd. He chuckled at the thought of her quick wit and gregarious laugh. He missed her, but he couldn’t remember her face. She never liked to be photographed, so he had retained no memento of her.

On this particular day, Jack was doing his Kinhin—his walking Buddhist meditation—around his North Hollywood neighborhood. In a trance, he retraced the steps where he last walked with Jacques, where he last saw her. Their last moments were spent ambling beside a graffiti lined wall along a back alley behind the old Federal building. While they were chatting, she saw a shadowy figure at the end of the alley. Jack jerked her hand, planning to turn around and skirt the dangerous unknown form, but Jacques pulled away from him and ran toward the shadow. Then, she was gone. Just like that. Poof. He imagined that she had mob connections, since she was always so secretive about her family and her former life. Jack retraced the steps along the alleyway, trying to locate some clue as to where and with whom she had gone.

After tracing the slow roll of his feet upon the gum-tainted cement sidewalk, Jack looked up to the location where the shadowy figure had beckoned. Instead of a shadow, he spotted a food stand on the corner. A small, slight Hispanic woman was manning the stand, selling those old-fashioned brightly colored lollipops. When he approached, she handed him a lollipop.

“No, thank you,” Jake replied.

“But no, you don’t understand. It is a gift. It’s free. Here, take it.” She thrust the large, multi-colored lollipop in his hand. Perturbed but amused, he took the lollipop and proceeded around the corner of the alley. He dabbled his tongue upon the candy flesh and recoiled. It did not taste like what he expected. It tasted like beer—not just any beer, but Pabst Blue Ribbon beer—the cheap beer all the hipsters drink. He shuddered. Jake felt a tap on his shoulder. “Sir, I’m going to have to ask you to turn around.” Lollipop in hand, Jake slowly turned toward the voice. It was a policeman.

“Sir, I’m going to have to ask you to walk this line. You appear to be publicly intoxicated,” the Cop said.

Jake was mystified. He hadn’t had anything to drink. It was ten in the morning for Christ’s sake. Jake dumbly walked the line and looked up at the officer after he had carefully traced his steps. The officer pulled out a tube-like device and asked Jake to blow into it. “That’s what I thought,” the Cop replied, “You’re over the limit.” The officer reached into his breast pocket for his paperwork. While the officer was distracted, the small Hispanic woman approached Jake and handed him a brick. “Here,” she whispered, “Throw this at the wall. Trust me. This is your way out.” Dumbfounded, Jake didn’t know what to do, but he blindly followed her direction, and, against better judgment, flung the red brick at the stucco wall of the alley. A large, round opening formed on the wall. It seemed to vibrate. Jake stuck his finger inside and felt his finger quiver. The woman pushed him from behind and he fell into the quivering hole.

Once inside, he glimpsed a shadowy figure at the end of a dark hallway. The hole that was open to the street closed up behind him. He made his way forward to the shadow. In front of him sat a large elephant in a purple tutu with a pink rhinestone purse. The elephant grinned and proceeded to sashay toward him while her round, gray rolls spilled over the crinoline of the tutu.

“What’s that old line from that CCR song—‘Memory’s an elephant, playing in the band’—at least that’s how I remember it,” the elephant told him knowingly. Jake was about to argue with the elephant regarding the lyrics, but then realized how absurd the whole situation was. Jake was sure there was something more than cheap beer laced on that lollipop. He rubbed his eyes and looked at the elephant again. The voice was so familiar. The elephant sounded exactly like ... Jacques. “Jacqueline,” he said, using her real name, “Is that you?”

The elephant grinned and carefully laid down the pink rhinestone purse, straightened out her purple tutu, and twirled. “Of course, it’s me!” she exclaimed as she twirled about the room and around Jake. “You don’t remember my face, but I never forget a face,” the elephant laughed. Jake was sure he had lost it. He hadn’t been this messed up since his older brother fed him that special brownie in high school. “I’m not sure what to believe,” Jake said. “Forget it, Jake, it’s tutu town. You’re one of us now.” The elephant laughed. Jake looked down at his feet, which had turned into large, crusty cushion pads. His skin was now a toughened gray. In dismay, he reached for Jacques and said, “But I just came here for the mangoes!” The elephant laughed. Jake shed a tear. Then they both twirled. And twirled. And twirled. And twirled.