

# 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 breathalizer, 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 breathalizer, 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.