

Elephantine

by Dale Marlowe

Seth led me through the Commons' grid of trailers toward the strip mall. We veered South, through a gash in the chain link, down into the culvert. It had not rained in weeks; the culvert was dry, but for a tiny stream of rusty water, deep enough to have a current, but so low it didn't rise past our sneaker soles. Wisp of methane: from the standpipe, nearby.

We ascended a gravel path leading from the culvert's edge to the levee's rim. Then we sat, our shins dangling over the river. In the distance, Toledo rose high and lit-up, hulking over the twin suspension bridges. PORT OF TOLEDO floated on the horizon, stenciled in white on a massive silo at the river's mouth. Beyond that, nothing remained but suggestions, industrial silhouettes. The Toledo Zoo was across the river. My stomach growled.

I leaned in: "Dude, later you think we can get some Taco Bell?"

Seth faked worry over the question. When finished deliberating, he nodded, pinching his chin.

"Yes, Ozzie," he said. "Yes, I do."

I tossed him the rolling papers. He took a Zippo and some weed from his jacket pocket. He removed a sheet from the box and made a little gutter, bending the sheet in half longways. Then he sprinkled some crushed-up buds in the crease, twisted up the joint, raised it to his lips, flicked the Zippo open and lit the joint. When he'd taken a total milkster, he passed me the joint. I drew, swallowed the smoke. It settled in my chest; I held, blown up, bloated, scratchy in the throat.

Cough & exhale~

I lay back on the grass, looking into the sky, twisting the Milky Way into fancy animorphs: giraffes, lions, palm trees, spinning wheels. Each glyph held its shape for a moment, sparkling like a fistful of sequins flung against plum velvet. Then the form lapsed. Gone. Just like that. I closed my eyes, ground my molars and fell, looping backward through my skin, through the grass, through each blade, through the earth, back. Again.

After like forever I remembered Seth was there, too. He was still on the levee's edge, but had drawn his legs up and crossed them, Indian-style. All of a sudden he was laughing. Big, wheezing cackles.

"You okay?" I asked.

"Hey man," he said, pointing at the zoo. "Did you know you can hear the elephants bleating from here?"

