

Water for Old Bet

by Jackelope Random

Running from the big mob boss the elephant head gave him new perspective on his life. For one, he now knew that when they said big elephant head, it was the man's name. Not a nickname, or a clever reference to crappy mob movies or bad cartoon parodies with a Mr. Big who is either enormous or small but never regular sized, but a name. And a name that described the thing exactly to which it referred. The elephant head had an elephant head. And it was pink.

As she left the circus tent, the elephant trumpeted. It was no unlikely trumpeting, but it was not a meaningful one either. In her purse, she held the three thousand dollars she robbed from the sticking cream cone stands, along with one big jewel: the dung of Carpy the Gem Crapping Monkey. The elephant that trumpeted was content to be intent, and pretty well pleased at his trumpeting too. A treat could not be far along. Perhaps something from one of the sticking cream stands?

He'd first met the elephant head while drunk. So he brushed it off at first, seeing its pinkness, and having watched a good number of Disney films. So many, he would often say of and to himself, that mouse's got nothing on me. And so it was, for his name, which described him, was Mr. Mickey. And while outheroing that mouse through his life as a triple sec agent and a quadruple double agent (a double agent in four different conspiracies), he often did make people woozy, sleepy, and just fall down. People said of him, when awake to say things, that Mickey often slipped them.

The woman, in all her pride, dressed in blood. Red paint gashed mink stole, slowly in process of the mink stealing it right back. Sequins shined ruby star murder down long legs. And the dollars dripped too. For she knew the truth about that scurrilous circus. That appalling purpose. The crustaceans that lurk us, deep below the waters we can see.

The elephant, and his gang of regular looking people, cornered Mickey on main street. He slugged him, drugged him, and put a dozen lead slugs in him. Mickey fell into the river.

WITHIN THE HEART, WITHIN THE MIND

Lobster: I went to the fish races.

Lobster: How did the fish race?

Lobster: Black.

Lobster: Color-ed?

Lobster: Midnight. Couldn't see.

Lobster: Murky depths?

Lobster: Darkened steps.

She took one look back as she left, sirens blaring, trunks flaring. No sticking cream ice box dream for the elephants tonight, the dance started tight. She skidded across the ice floor of the middle of winter, moving through her spring meadow, passing fall through graveyard, back to the summer pool heat of her long youth. Seventeen and never kissed. A hundred, and hardly missed. Crawling, on long legs, spider like stepping striding, through the mansion.

It was the Garden of Love, as it was styled. The pretentious writer lived there, on half baked literary dreams, and cream puff children tales (bobbed off in infancy and baked into the bookish treats). He called himself Elexamir Stole, a name he took from a mink by force. He did this by giving up the location of the woman. E. Stole lived alone, but for butlers and nubile young foxes, which he kept penned up in a cage, them being far too racy, when they should be hidey. (No good for hunting either, say he would.)

This whole house, the large garden-- they all said Aphrodite walked through the place, a goddess ghost—was laid out as a parody

of the Versailles. (the Versailles, the one of dreams and legend, but not The Versailles, the one which tours-of are available made daily.) Large rose bushes lined every direction, where paths shot out like forks into labyrinthine dreamlands.

And they did. Shoot into a thousand stories, told, retold, fashioned, unfashioned, and unfashionable, like the perfect first vomit of a sickness and a day in a submarine. They began and ended down these dark paths, lined with evergreens and those rose bushes, and the bushes of roses, and the hedges green with English pride. They began with the dirt slipping down down down. One way would a persephonic symphony begin, descending into the crevices of Helios-bright hells. The other way could twist towards an underwater sunken, brimming with the pitchforks of old gods and specters of choked civilizations.

Three or so days later, the infamous private eye (not famous at all, either) Mr. Dick Privitt, private dick, and that's what his job description was too, found the body floating in his soup. He called for the waiter, but there is no waiter when you dine in the river. This he forgot because of his old habit when he was not Dick Privitt, Private Dick, which is his job description as well, but Dick Privitt, Multimillionaire. His company had folded with risky investments, incitements, indictments, and of course, the stock market crash of 2010. Perhaps that most of all.

He found the body floating in his soup, and called for the waiter, but the waiter did not come. This has already been told, but it important to make the point again, having diverged so long into the back story of Dick Privitt, Private Dick. Since no waiter came, Dick Privitt, Private Dick, which was his job description as well, decided he would have to deal with it. He was the best at dealing with this sorts of things, he said in his head to no one, and took out a flask. He took a sip of the alcoholic drink that was unshockingly in his poor Raymond Chandler detective stereotype kit flask.

This is unshocking as well, as the poor Raymond Chandler detective stereotype kit is all over these days, franchising out into most forms of media. The reader is most likely unshocked as well, and will only be shocked when someone writes about the poor Raymond Chandler detective stereotype detective who does not drink and refuses to fall in love with the dame. This is not, however, that story.

This is the story of how Mr. Dick Privitt, and all the rest of his title, found the body of Mr. Mickey floating in the river. He took a sip from his flask, and he knew just what to do. He went home, leaving the body floating around for someone whose job it was to pick up the many bodies floating in the river to contact the police and so forth.

Still, he sat thinking about the body in his office that day, for he'd already had a grand thought about life. Besides, his philosophy went, you can only really afford one of those a week, if you didn't live in a penthouse like a movie star. But he never saw himself wanting to be so pent up with rage as to have to house himself for it. Stardom just wouldn't work for him. That was his grand thought, he would just be as he was. It was a good one, and one he saw in quite a few movies these days. But this was the first week he dared entertain it, having spent the last three weeks on a special double grand thought about life, indulging in a two-parter about being able to pick up great education on the street, and his reading more than those educated at frivolous universities for the rich. The first two weeks he considered the thoughts in turn, and on the third week he really blew himself away by misusing the Hegelian model to pretend that the two thoughts were thesis and antithesis and squash them together as a synthesis. However, he almost burned himself, while using the model while thinking about how poor and inadequate the model really was.

The place spread out, unfolding like a map that with always another side to open up. And the woman walked from the circus in. She waltzed in singing screeches of that bastard Casey and his

damn blond. Through the grove of golden apples she danced, picking the polished fruit, and biting horse hungry down.

She antlered, sauntered, jumped, and generally made her moves to the grand house, a large white affair in fake plain style. The inside was all gold and grottoes, hidden rooms within hidden rooms. One never new down from sideways inside, but she marched right through on towards the top, the bell tower. From outside, it looked like nothing. Not invisible looking, not like a hidden tower looking. But like nothing at all. An infinite nothing. The nothing you cannot think of right now.

He stole a sip of champagne from the nursery, E. Stole did, leaving the children without their quietus, and a ruckus for the Nanny and her other help. Sitting in his study within the hidden tower looking without, and looking at nothing too, he sipped long and hard at the champagne, having hoped it would taste less like the placebo.

"Damn," he said. "I'll have to have the Real Pain instead." So he laced his boots, as the woman booted her way past the locked door, cracking all the wood. E. Stole's hardness flew out the window, too, as she walked in. He watched it go and made a pathetic grasp for it. But, anything like that is ephemeral.

"Give me your report, Matilda," said he.

"I stole the diamonds," she said.

"No. E. Stole. The diamonds," he said, indicating her bag.

"No, I took the diamonds," said she. This cleared up the confusion pretty quick, and she laid the bag down on the table. E. Stole kicked off his boots, and they went on for a good season, gaining many fans. He offered to pour some Champagne for the lady, but she declined. "I prefer the real stuff, you know," she said.

E. Stole stood, and lit two cigarettes. He offered one to Matilda, and she took it readily, her face flushed. They stood there, paused, smoking, and looking out the window down into the midst of the garden.

"Have you ever seen my Dwarf there run that labyrinth?"

I was sitting in my office, not thinking nothing. It was pretty painful, as I was trying one of those new Buddhist meditations, and kept having all those thoughts. Pushing away from the desk, I stared at the wall, by back hunched and turned intently toward it's white presence. But I considered it, which made me think. As I said, I really wasn't doing very well. In my study, I didn't notice the dame come. I should have heard. But I was deep into thought, when I was supposed to be deep into non-thought. She also entered my office.

"Hello," she said, wearing a black dress. I wondered how she changed her clothes so quickly. I spun around and nearly kept spinning right back around to the wall. I caught myself and looked up into her eyes.

"Good afternoon," I said. Those eyes were like a baby dolls, blue and shining, with a catlike green tint. The rest of her form wasn't bad either, extending the metaphor down to a pinned on tail. "You've just come from a Halloween party," I deduced. She applauded. But she shook her head.

"It's March."

"No wonder it's so cold."

"Not as cold as my husband." I thought she meant in bed, at first. These sorts of dames usually do. But the way she licked her lips and looked up to the right made me know she meant he'd kicked the proverbial bucket. I guess the real one was taken up by someone else.

"He's been iced?"

"Well, that's how he keeps so cool," she said. I told her I'd take the job, for twenty large. She gave me a novelty Jackson. I told her I meant a cool million. She offered me a cooler stuffed with the green. "That's more like it," I said.

I got my coat, and walked into the local speakeasy to check out any leads. Everyone poured stuff out, since it came so easy there. But no one knew a thing. I knew I had to make some headway into

the matter, so I went the only place my gut led me. I went to Headway Ltd., where they make some headway and sell it to people like me who need the information. I bought a small pack and knew to check down by the old pier for an informant whose aliases were all the same: Old Nick, Old Nick the Sea captain, Sea captain Old Nick, and Nick Old the Captain Sea, amongst others.

Where am I in the dark again? Always with these people! Always in the dark, the green hedges growing round like some refrain to a terrible minstrel song. And me without my black face. All I'll say is there better cheese be for the end of all this again, I so hungry, and my family as well—at least, so much I can assume, or will assume, since I haven't seen my peoples since never. Time, then, I suppose, to journey inwards. What is that old rule? Always turn left? Right? Left? Right. Right, I'll go left. It just gets old, every time, getting to the end, grabbing that Brie, Camembert, and all the runny, hard, and juicy cheeses, only to open my eyes the next second to find someone whacked me once again with some billy club and dragged me back here to the start. If only the start, which is the same each time, meant that the maze stayed the same. But whoever's in charge of all that, like a vicious lobster boiling his cousins, wouldn't be so amused, I guess. Oh yes, this is the life, I guess, sweating bullets out, trying to get home. Why, another three or four times through, and not a chance out, I'll just go right through the hedges and start the next mondial revolution. The Maze-Burners. Yes. Well, there's still some hope yet, and I haven't a torch... no, not yet. I'll start singing my way through this maze. To the left! To the left! Always to the left. Why you'd think that I'm a Lib-Dem. But that's the rule.

And so, she whistled. "Why does he sing?"

"No no—"

"Why, does she sing?"

"He."

"It's so hard to tell, them so little, and clothed."

"I don't know, it's hard to tell, but in another two, I shall replace it with another. No use in starting any mondial actions, you know."

"Oh ho, your phrasing is so international."

"I'm only for raising flowers, myself."

*Once upon a time, I stopped on a dime
I started to look and brother came by
He sat down, looked my pockets around
Then he let out a lion of a mousy sigh
Once upon a time I dreamed of a stage
With hooks, and crooks, and dirty looks,
It was common, it was all the rage
And no one was level on their books*

*Oh, Take me back to those golden days
When a man was a man, a song would get a raise
And a good old girl with good old ways
Could lift her legs for some show time praise
Oh, Take me back to those golden hours
Where water skirted, squirted from flowers
And Mabel Normand led those pie showers
Take me back to the world that's ours*

*Bring back the lights of vaudeville
Routines, and scenes, and songs
Bring back the tinkling tin pan keys
The melodramas right and wrong!
Bring back the tumbling felons
On their run from the lam
Bring back the singers, the left winters
The grand dames and grand dam
Yes! Bring back the banjo pickers
The tinkling ragging keys*

*Bring back the nights, the spotlights,
The magic, return, oh please*

*But nowadays there's picture shows
Genre conflict, and everyone goes
And even on Broadway, in the front rows
They don't know the song from dance*

*So, bring back the lights of vaudeville
Routines, and scenes, and songs
Bring back the tinkling tin pan keys
The melodramas right or wrong!
Bring back the tumbling felons
On their run from the lam
Bring back the singers, the left winters
The grand dames and grand dam
Yes! Bring back the banjo pickers
The tinkling ragging keys
Bring back the nights, the spotlights,
The magic, return, oh please*

Old Nick just came back from a vaudeville revival, where they sang some new tune about reviving vaudeville. He thought it rather droll, but not so good as it could have been. They could have made the whole thing a revue with a plot, instead of all the self referential garbage and meta textual Ur-Themes, in his mind. He got back to his spot on the corner, and Dick Privitt, Private Dick, etc., was waiting for him.

"Where you been, Nick?"

"Around. How about you, Dick?"

"Call me Richard."

"Hey Richard, come here." No one came. The two men stood still for a moment, and then sized each other up, staring each other down.

"I got a case."

"Of what?"

"No, an investigation." The twirled round again, looking each other over, and seeing past the other too.

"Well, I saw something."

Why, I tell you, one run through that song, I'm always about to find my way out. But if this happens just two more times now, I tell you, I am going to go out and start something. You can't treat a man like this. Even if he is smaller, like me. Why, I'm only 7'18". A terribly small dwarf, you know. Those tall scary giants are around 3'smallest, and you can barely see them at biggest. Why, they just have all the legislation, because you pay attention to what's above. Damn government, always concerned with the heavens. Why, I'll show them, and this time no one will knock me out with—

"Why, that is ever so adorable. Did you pick the rat costume, out yourself?"

"Why, I'd never out myself. There's more money in staying straight."

"The roads?"

"Narrow, too. That's how I build them. Now, let us get front to the matter at foot."

"What's afoot?"

"No, that's a hand. Now, let's see that money. I'm pretty sure you've double crossed me."

"I haven't touched you. What's more, I only move behind people. Old show business habit, you know."

"There are nuns in show business?"

"Well..."

"How many?"

"None."

"Terrible."

"They can't all be non sequitur. Go on, ya bastard, take a look."
"I will."

"Go on!"

"I'm looking, I'm looking. Egad!"

"No, your name is E. Stole."

"I mean Egads! Surprise, shock, astonishment."

"Oh." She spit her cigarette to the floor. He stood up and walked back to the window. She sat down and looked in the bag. He turned, and went back to his seat. He sat on her. She squealed. He got up, and then she got up and crossed behind him to the window. He sat back down. He got up. His right leg thumped on the ground seven and a half times. He pulled another two cigarettes from his pocket. He lit them, and offered her one. She shook her head no, and took it. Then she sat back down, across from him, at the table.

I saw something all right, as I was coming down off a drunk last night. The woman came in through the window of the barge. Or was it out? Anyways, she went through the window one way or another with a body. Nearby, some elephant was icing a guy, really creaming the cake with blood. Well, it had to be the drunk anyways, so I didn't pay it no mind.

I saw her get off through the window. She exited through it as well. This was all down here by the pier, but my balance was off, so everything looked rather like a carnival. Could be the time of the year, you know, with the beads and all. There was this big tent nearby, and of course the local bar. Now that I think about it, it went down about this way and in this order. If I had to order it.

I got drunk, having scrounged up enough money for a good drunk and quite a bit of the old hooch and cooch. I even had some of the money left for the liquor! You might not think that's an important detail, but for me it's everything. Yes, I got a good drunk, and was wandering the streets. I think my haze mighta had something to do with Mr. Finn, Mr. Mickey as he's known, he slipped past and slipped

me, like he always does. He'd been drinking too, as he does, as we all does.

He goes outside, and I'm stumbling along in my haze, back towards my pier, to try to get more money for another beer. I looked up, my head titled back. The stars was clear. But in the distance, I hear this calloong, and so I looks. And that's where I seen it: this pink elephant steps out of tent, a big circus like tent, probably set up by the church for the festivities. This elephant, big pink head, floating around on some poor body, comes out, with a bunch of guys in sharp suits, and they just blast away at Mr. Mouse. Yes, sir, poor Mick went right down, like a kid paddy at a pederast parade.

That's when this girl all in red comes tearing out of the place, away from the elephant, her purse jingling with change. It hada be a lot, since that's all I heard, echo after echo of the jingle jangle thing, like a bad drummer thumping on a dwarf trunk. Well, it quiets down abit, and a coin rolls over to me. I figure, I can buy a bit to drink, so I go and grab another beer, and drink off the drunk.

Next thing I know, I'm at this vaudeville show, where they're singing this terrible tune, and there's not even a man on stage. No sir, only a brick wall, and the voice coming over it. Tired, and the song finished anyway, I came back here. To find Dick Privitt, Private Dick, and other things than an asshole too, waiting for me— that's you, Richard. I guess, being the super smart detective and all, you'll figure it all out now.

Buy me a drink?

"Go ahead," he said.

"Go ahead of what?"

"Go ahead, because if you go behind, you won't see what's coming."

"Oh, but you were about to say something just then."

"Was I?"

"You was."

"That doesn't sound right."

"Here, shift onto your left foot."

"Oh, that might be the problem. Let's see. Was I?"

"You were."

"I were, then, I see. Good, good. Anyways, what I've been trying to say—" Here he coughed, and cleared his throat at the same time, a strange strangled gazellelephant like sound that took two minutes, and then continued. "There's no money in there."

"Oh."

"Yes."

"I see."

"Uh huh."

"Well then."

"Yeah?"

"I wonder which bag my wife got?"

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I'd solved the case. Her husband had been Mr. Mickey all along. Just no one remembered, and no one cared. I kept the money, and we all went on with our lives, down in our little section of the city. Somewhere, far away, as I looked up at the stars, I could hear the punchline to some joke "...Bag my wife, God."

