

Elephant

by Jim Breslin

You notice the stench first, as soon as you enter your house. You hang up your hat in the vestibule when a pungent odor flits across your nostrils. You spin around to see your slim wife, smiling, in her pearls and a floral dress. This is not what you expected. She steps up on her toes, in her stilettos, and pecks you on the lips.

“Dinner will be ready in ten minutes,” she says.

She is lovely and content.

“Can I make you a drink?” She asks.

“A Manhattan,” you reply, back on your heels.

“As you wish, my love,” She leaves your side and heads into the kitchen.

You unfold the newspaper and review the headlines. Catch another whiff. You step into the living room and sit in the wing back chair that has just been reupholstered. The buzzing of flies catches your attention and you glance up.

A wrinkled muddied grey beast is chomping on hay. Massive floppy ears. Tusks of alabaster. Melancholy eyes staring at you. Through you. They never forget. The creature lowers it's head and munches away.

“What did you do today?” You call out.

Janice walks in from the kitchen with a tumbler. Hands it over carefully. Her face is dolled up. Don't spill it. She smiles. “Nothing dear, I had my hair done. Cleaned up the house a bit. Just give me a moment.”

The wild thing's trunk stretches out so close you feel it's moist, putrid breath on your neck. Like a blind parched snake, the trunk searches and slurps at the fresh drink in your hand. The trunk then curls within itself, spraying your whiskey into it's open mouth.

As a child, you rode one once at the circus. Somewhere, perhaps in the attic, there's a black and white picture of you, one hand behind the floppy ears, the other hand raised in a wave. Joyful

memory. But you've never had one visit before. This is different. Entirely different.

In the dining room, Janice sits across the table, separated by pure white linens. She delicately slices her pot roast. Stabs at the string beans. Chewing slowly, meticulously. In the present moment, she is there for you. Faithful.

Behind her, the arch opens into the living room. The grey beast basks in the streaming light from the picture window. The tail rocks like a metronome. You had no idea it would be so massive. Intrusive. This weight of indiscretion. You wonder how it beat you home. How it wedged through your front door.

The creature shifts his weight, slowly plods a tight circle, knocking a shaded lamp to the floor. The plates and the crystal water glasses shake. Your wedding picture rattles on the wall. Underneath, the floor joists must be sagging from the girth. You imagine standing in the basement, watching the wooden beams. Look carefully, and you can see they are splintering. A series of faint but brittle pops. A splintering. Something is about to give. You can see it in her eyes.

