

Once the Excrement Encounters the Oscillating Rotary Air Circulator

by strannikov

"Oh, get over it, you'll never find him!" Camella smirked from the quiet security of her beige Peugeot.

In the shade of a thick stand of pines halfway up the hill, she watched the small figures of the detectives poking around in the bed of African violets. Earlier that afternoon, these same geniuses had all missed the film canister, still safely gripped between her thighs. She still wanted to move it, the plastic cap had been pinching for hours already, but she did not dare retrieve it until after the detectives all left the yard for the day. The film canister—with Camembert's thumb in it—was positively gouging her thighs now. When would they give up for the day and leave?

Camella let her mind drift briefly to those happy days with Camembert, those splendorous days antedating the comparatively recent days when she finally achieved presence of mind to see him dead.

The conception of her beloved's death had arisen spontaneously and otherwise unprovoked the very day she'd noticed that the amount of dust settled into the lace curtains of the dining room had to weigh more than the curtains themselves. This observation led her instantly to surmise that Camembert had not sold nearly as many vacuum cleaners in the past month as he'd been bragging just days earlier. If he had sold so many, why couldn't he afford to bring a display model home to go over these nasty curtains? And: where was their new car, the one he'd been promising her for months?

"Ehh, leave your face on, my pretty, and don't you worry about money, I'm still saving," he assured her, patting her face in place. He offered her the use of a clean feather duster for the lace curtains.

And so, two days ago, she finally began in earnest the project she'd planned and put off back in late fall: the installation of a large bed of African violets to go into the shady spot next to the patio, under the lush and thriving crepe myrtle. "Will you—? Can you—?" Camella's voice trailed off as she waved a limp arm over the assembled confusion of trays of African violets and bags of potting soil and fertilizer.

"Will I help you set out your African violets, my precious?" Camembert responded, lowering his financial paper.

"If it suits," Camella had whispered with just the right note of huskiness.

Camembert wondered only briefly at her request, since he well knew his beloved's potting prowess. It was she, after all, who'd successfully potted his African elephant the previous May.

Potting an African elephant requires reserves of perspiration, a suitably large pot, and untold tons of potting soil, depending on the desired depth: but Camembert was heir to a large villa between Marseille and Toulon with hectares and hectares of good soil, plus he had his own backhoe to dig and move dirt as he chose, plus he had a pet African elephant he'd bought from a fleeing circus years back which he'd since trained to patrol the perimeter of his poorly fenced property. The whim and fancy of potting the elephant was another of those larks he would sometimes humor Camella with. Camella had contained her enthusiasm at the time, quite unlike her, he had somehow failed to notice.

The elephant was as docile as they come, but it had initially balked at stepping into the pot (a granite trough which had formerly served as sarcophagus for one of Camembert's many great-great uncles and a great aunt). Camella had had to pull and tug on the elephant's trunk as if she were summoning servants from the far end of a castle with a tinkling little bell pull. The elephant was not much put out with Camella's abuse but was not much amused, either.

Before anything untoward could occur, Camembert had commemorated the event by snapping candid shots of the dour elephant barely up to its ankles in dirt and the exhausted Camella, photography being yet another of his numerous hobbies.

Those events had innocently contributed to the idea blooming in Camella's mind, the idea which these months later was now being executed. Camella had Camembert sink the vacant sarcophagus along the edge of the patio so that she could fill it. This idea appealed vastly to Camembert, and with his backhoe, he dug a suitable trench for the sarcophagus before planting it in the void, taking care not to molest the roots of the lush and thriving crepe myrtle.

Camella then lined the granite interior with spadeful of loose soil and elephant ordure, both available in copious supply. "Don't you need more soil in there?" Camembert quizzed his precious a few hours later.

"I want a slightly sunken bed, haven't thought yet what to ring it with, we don't have much juniper," Camella beamed. "Be careful to place those trays far enough apart, they can't be too crowded or they won't fill in." As Camembert positioned and repositioned trays of African violets, Camella strolled over to crank the Victrola for "The Last Time I Saw Paris."

Soon enough, Camembert took to absentmindedly humming the tune along with the Victrola, unaware that behind him, Camella was guiding the elephant from around the corner towards the double-wide granite sarcophagus. Enamored of his beloved's project of planting this bed of African violets under the generous shade of the lush and thriving crepe myrtle, and happy to be of actual assistance, Camembert forgot that the very tune he was humming mindlessly was the same he had used years earlier to train the elephant to tread grapes in a trough adjacent to the estate's winepress.

"Are these far enou—AIYKKKKKKKKKKKKKKHHH!" Camembert managed to utter just as his spine cracked and severed in fourteen separate locations.

Camella cranked and recranked the Victrola for hours as the elephant dutifully trod in place. Afterwards, she hosed off the pachyderm's feet, hosed off the patio, recovered the thumb lying just next to one of the patio bricks, spent the evening filling the trough with dirt and reddish-orange clay before arranging the African violets satisfactorily, and by morning had a lush and thriving flower bed freshly watered beneath the contented shade of the positively maternal crepe myrtle, along with a working Victrola, a serviceable backhoe, one disposable thumb, and a complicit but taciturn elephant.

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