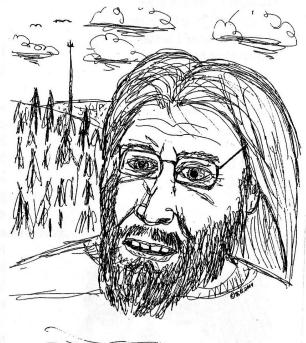
THE ELEPHANT GOD

It's Rosh Hashanah. My wife is at services And I'm wandering in Lakeside Park, Scared, empty, Craving more passion and purpose In my life. People are seated on the grass In the park amphitheater Awaiting the free Shakespeare play. A man, woman and teenage boy come in. The man closely resembles my friend Dan, Wiry, bearded, Even wears a floppy white hat. He shakes out a blanket Onto the ground, Then he and the boy Head toward the back, Where I'm standing. Suddenly the boy takes my hand, Startling me. He's gaunt, bent, His face deeply wrinkled, Like an old man's. I contemplate escape But his lack of self-consciousness Is disarming. His eyes explore mine With a quiet hunger, Triggering my own. I clasp his hand, Its cool softness Like a gentle animal. I navigate the blue expanse of his eyes For long seconds. Smiles tiptoe over our faces, Joy trickles through me. Then his father says In a feathery voice, "The man is just standing here. Let's go to the bathroom."

"What's your name?"



I ask the boy To hold him A moment longer But the words feel wrong, Blunt instruments For a delicate operation. Silent, He frowns. "His name is Ganesh. He doesn't like his name," The father says. The Elephant God, I think, Remover of obstacles-Though I can see why He doesn't like his name. Moments later I leave, Sauntering homeward, My eyes drinking in The boyish blaze of grass, The sky's smooth throat.

Ralph Dranow Oakland, CA



THE BRIDE WORE BLACK & A QUOTE FROM L. COHEN

If you looked up oxymoron in the OED, the example of new and bride would be the mutually exclusive qualities in conjunction, would apply to her. She may have been young once and new to someone but there was a lot of hard miles between then and her now, sitting at the bar, pounding double Captain's and Diet, flush with the kind of excitement that comes with dropping hits of high test speed and drinking heavy for hours to slow the rush down long enough to keep her rooted to one place long enough to make casual conversation, rapidly becoming risqué, with any and all men at the bar. From a discreet distance she probably looked as if she was this killer blonde in tight jeans and a plunging neckline pullover top, crazy bedroom eyes reliving all the encounters with all the ghosts of the past, four days into her latest binge, a marriage/place-to-stay by the night, ready to trip the light fantastic with whichever cowboy was the last man standing when the lights came up "and when she came back, she was nobody's wife."

Alan Catlin Schenectady, NY