

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
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