



by Louis Cox

An elephant statue sits on a fireplace mantle. Nearby on a marble table there is a black wooden ashtray with another elephant adorning it: the elephant is missing one of its tusks, leaving a singular white cigarette shaped tube protruding from its mouth. Donna is sitting on the bed, James stands by an open window smoking a joint, the elephant ashtray sits between them.

He takes a drag and exhales out the window.

"I don't know." He says, "I just don't know."

"What do you mean?" She asks.

"Nothing. I'm just tired." He says.

"Yeah. Me too. Come to bed."

"Just a second."

"I thought you were tired?"

"My muscles are sore. I need to stretch them."

"Suit yourself," she says. "Can I see that?"

James snaps out of it, walks across the room, and hands her the joint.

She takes a drag.

He takes a few steps back.

"So how was your day?" He asks.

"It was alright," she says. "This girl at work is pissing me off."

Now stretching his legs, James begins cracking various knuckles while Donna continues to puff the joint.

"Oh yeah? What'd she do?"

"She just won't stop complaining. Won't stop looking for problems. Half of them she creates herself too. Like today, ok, so we have this whiteboard in the break room. It's where we write down all our shifts. And she lost the marker we use to write our shifts down, right. And now she's running around..." Donna sat up to do her best impersonation, putting on a rather squeaky cartoon voice: "Where's the marker? Where's the Marker?"

He laughed.

“She sounds unhappy.” He said.

“Oh yeah. She’s like 38 years old and she works as a waitress.”

“I don’t want to end up like that.”

“Oh God, me neither.” She said, handing him the joint.

He took it from her and stopped pacing, taking a drag.

He paused for a moment. Took another drag, looked to the floor, and then to her.

“I don’t want to do this anymore,” he said.

“Do what? What do you mean?”

“Smoking.”

“Oh,” she said. “Well, if that’s what you want.”

She looked at the joint in his hand.

“No, not like that,” he said.

“I’m not forcing you,” she said.

“That’s not what I meant.” He said.

He takes a drag and hands it to her.

“I never said you were.”

She takes a drag and then hands it back, giving him a look.

“I didn’t mean it like that. Don’t get so serious all of a sudden.”

“Ok, whatever.”

“It’s just that, I can’t think straight y’know. Like there are good things to it too. Part of me feels like I’m too wound up and I need it to relax. Like if I don’t have it, I’ll end up murdering someone—“

She laughed.

So did he.

“Yeah, but then like on the other hand I can’t help but feel like if I could think clearly more, I would get more done.”

She looked to the floor and collected her words.

“Yeah... I know what you mean,” she said. “Yeah, sometimes I feel like we are smoking too much. I want to cut back too.”

“Look,” he spoke upbeat, “I’m not saying we have to stop completely. Like we don’t have to torture ourselves.”

She seemed relieved.

“Yeah. Just cut back.”

“Yeah. And I know you work long hours and you get off late and you just want to unwind. I would too. I totally get that.”

“Thank you for understanding.”

“Of course.”

The lighter flicks and snaps as she tries to relight the joint.

His teeth grit a little.

“Right. It’s just that... I don’t know.”