

A Short Story

THAT DARN NET

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One day a beautifully majestic elephant meandered smack-dab into the center of a far away village.

The villagers were amazed at its stature. It rose higher than any elephant they had ever seen. Its eyes revealed a huge heart. There it stood, nearly motionless, in the center of the far away village.

"Let's catch it," a young boy shouted. "A net! We need a net!"

This sent the villagers scurrying for the largest net in the forest. Yet, while the ropes, threads and fibers of the net were as threads to the magnificent beast, simply seeing the wide-eyed excitement of the villagers scurrying this way and that way, giggling for joy joy, dancing and hooting and hollering like children filled the elephant's heart with sheer delight. It, of course, knew their feeble attempts to capture him were in vain (for all he would have to do was to breathe and the net would snap like the tiniest vine), yet for all the joy it brought to it's being, it allowed itself to be taken.

"Why not?" it thought. "I rather enjoy the feeling of the net on my backside. Besides, these people are simply delightful."

And so the elephant rested, netted and content, for a very long time.

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Generations came and generations went.
Through it all, the elephant slept.

People from all over the known forest came to see the elephant, living, breathing, resting there in the town's square. As things evolved, new buildings rose, sky scrapers and cafes emerged, kiosks and parks, all were built around the snoring noises of the sleeping elephant.

Once day an architect showed up and presented an idea to the Village Council on Urban Development. His idea was to enclose the elephant in a huge glass dome.

"With portals so it could breathe, of course" he added, pointing here and there at the designs on the scroll rolled across the wooden table.

The idea sat right and all voted in favor of the dome.

Years later a young Tarzan-like dashing fellah appeared and make a presentation which swooped almost everyone off their feet.

"The net within the dome securing the sleeping elephant is worth millions," he rightly said.

He went on to say that by removing “a mere fraction” of the sacred threads holding the elephant, the town could be fiscally secure for generations to come. There was some push-back by the older tribesmen who at first thought the young entrepreneur would be removing the entire net. But after hearing it was only about a fiber here and a fiber there, their fears were relived.

Years later another elder from a nearby village showed up with the idea of a museum.

“The Museum of the Net!” His dark eyes sparkled to the idea. And it was so.

Generations came and went. One day a helicopter landed with an entourage of well dressed men. They appeared before the Village Counsel on Urban Development with an idea so grandiose that it made all the children leap for joy.

“A theme park!” They flipped open their phones with multiple blueprints showing maps, amusement rides, fountains, and thatched-hut kiosks all surrounding the net.

“We’ve designed the kiosks to look like they used to look, in the old days.”

“The Swinging Vine falls will be here.”

"The rope course will be here, just across from Vineland." Another excited salesman pointed to his screen. "You can see it here, just to the south of the vineyards."

The Chair of the VCUD leaned forward, slid her reading glasses off her head and squinted through the scratchy lens'.

"And this - this white dome," tapping a finger to the phone screen. "What is this?"

"That's the *NetScape Planetarium*."

All the while the elephant rested, content, happy to be smack-dad in the middle of all things important.

Every thousand years or so the elephant would take a deep breath and stretch. It was a dramatic event. Many tribesmen had written about such events. The libraries were filled with them. Yet, like a seismic event, no one really captured the intensity of the event unless they had lived to tell the story

This time, however, the elephant stretched to such an extent that the strain on the aged net sent its threads popping this way and that way, crashing through the glass dome, landing on rooftops and filling the paved streets with fibrous clutter some three feet thick. The ground rumbled furiously, sending people scampering across the city like ants across the forest floor. Yet, as things went, after the dust settled all would return to their shops and pleasant activities, all their museums and theme parks, all but forgetting about the living, breathing, giant being, silently resting in the center of all they knew.

One day a little boy appeared (who would later become known as a renowned scientist) who often snuck into the rebuilt glass house around the net. He'd spend hours and hours of free time sitting on the curb; staring, studying, jotting notes and sketching, fascinated with the sleeping giant. Sometimes, and when all the tourists had left and it was only him, he'd tip toe across the manicured greens, duck under the hedge of rose bushes, climb under the security fence and run his fingers through, over and across, the very fibers of that ancient net.

He grew up (as I mentioned earlier) and became a well-respected scientist. More than that, he developed research labs and acquired grants which lead to greater and greater technologies, allowing him and his colleagues to thoroughly examine the fibers of the net. They performed tests on the ropes, their density and organic makeup. It was rumored they were on the cusp of unveiling never-beforehand discovered mysteries of ancient net to the global research community.

In fact, in the flurry of fascination with the fibers – a flurry of fascination which was almost equal to, if not greater, than, that very first day when the

elephant meandered into the village, so many generations ago – in the that flurry of fascination, the resting elephant itself, it's life, it's being, and the beating heart behind it's peaceful eyes all but disappeared. In short, the life of the elephant became all but invisible, shadowed and tangled in the new-found discoveries of the net.

Fascination about the net filled the scientific journals of the day. It seemed each day a new angle emerged.

"Our research is conclusive and shows the molecular content of the net is *this* or *that*."

"Contrary to popular opinion new evidence has just been uncovered about the net."

"We had previously believed the net consisted of elements of *this* compound, or *that* compound. Yet our remarkable research labs have unveiled new facts regarding its origins, discoveries we could have *never* imagined!"

And so it went.

Through the eons of time, well beyond the days of flying cars and robot spouses (and other inventions, the which, if I were to list here, you'd hardly believe), beyond the days of shifting belief systems, forgotten family traditions, and slippery-

slopping theology, the elephant, resting smack-dab in the middle anything that mattered, simply disappeared.

That darn net.

Then came the day.

"I reckon it's time for me to stretch my legs, get some exercise, perhaps even find a roasted peanut stand," the elephant sighed. It stood to its feet, completely leveling the majority of the metropolis.

Reaching around its backside with its trunk it rubbed its rump pleasingly. As to be expected the net snapped off its body with a series of ear-splitting snap, crackles, and pops. Thread by thread, fiber by fiber, rope by rope, knot by knot; the net went a-whizzing through the sky into the far corners of the globe.

Scientists scrambled. They scurried back to the labs, befuddled. Everything previously known about the net had now been tossed out the window.

"This is going to change everything!" They cried.

Indeed the whole of civilization on which the findings of generations of research had been

reasonably explained, was now dangling by a thread.

Deep anguish filled the land; that day when the elephant sighed. Everything – from human hearts to assumed worldviews of how the world went, reality, and the ground of being of all anyone knew – all got scrambled and scrunched and turned inside out. That was a terrible day - that day when everyone realized the net - that very thing on which the very hat of their existence hung - turned out to be quite a *nothing* at all.

Out of the metropolis and through the burbs, the elephant moseyed along, its carefree trunk flipping this way and that way across the grounds, sniffing fragrant flowers here, sucking bugs there, seemingly without a care in the world.

"I absolutely *love* being an elephant!" It thought with a spring in its step and a twinkle in its eye. "Isn't life grand!"

One day (though I would be hard-pressed to say how many eons of time had passed by now) the elephant meandered deep into the thick of a tropical rain forest. Brilliant rays of sunlight beamed through the mist, shadowing bamboo towers and spreading a moist, gentle warmth onto his toes.

So peaceful, almost Edenic.

"This is as good a place as anywhere, I suppose, to take nap."

It yawned, dropped to its knees, and hit the ground with a thud, its ear flat against the moistened ground.

"How lovely. Absolutely nothing like it." It mumbled as it fell into elephant dreamland.

Deep within the shadowy stalks of the bamboo forest a clay-painted boys face appeared; wide-eyes, curious, marveling at the wrinkled mountain before him. Cautiously and ever so silently, he danced around the rooted forest floor and - slowly now - reached out and touched its backside with his boney, trembling fingers. A surge of bio-electricity snapped under his hand and rushed through his arm, into his chest, and captured his heart with the greatest feeling of love and peace he had ever known; his almond-eyes fearful, yet filled with wonder.

In an instant he was gone; running – no dancing – this way and that way through the sunbeams, darting like a gazelle across the mossy tundra until finally reaching the village. Thatch-roofed huts, dust, the smell of burning wood hanging in the air he ran into the center of the thatched-roof community.

With fists clenched at his side, his heart pounding with the rhythm of the ages, the boy lifted his face to the sky and announced the eternally evangelistic cry.

"A net! *We need a net!*"