

Do Elephants Believe in Heaven?

Come with me, dear,

They said to me with a subtle glint of magic in their eyes. Or maybe it was the weight of the humid stifling heat of a long day upon their eyelids. They held my hand gently by the wrist and navigated by the messages that the leaves brought them. The ground was permeated with roots that craved a love that only the sky would provide.

What are you trying to show me?

I asked a half-hour after they had led me off the beaten path. It was a place where an experienced wanderer could seem to be nearly omniscient. I would not doubt if they claimed that they had felt a flutter in the rhythm of a passerine's song a long way away. I wondered what they had found so interesting as to be incapable of communicating through words, but instead by their cryptic swirling motions of the hand, beckoning spirits with offers that I could not decipher.

There is beauty objective in these lands.

They were of few shy verses, and as dreamy as that might be (and it was oh so very often endearing), most of what they said was an incomprehensible mumble to the gods. Perhaps it was their mantra in a foreign world of words—a language that was too sharp and too fluid; verbose in a fashion that made the head spin and the heart fall to melancholy. To speak is not always a necessity, and some would rather go without. They communicated in the shape of their smile, the small movements of their brass brown eyes, and the spells they cast to tug at the strings of your soul. I felt that in their austere mind flowed the proper harmonies with which the land would resonate. It made them a terrible conversationalist.

A conversation goes both ways, my lovely raucous blackbird.

A thousand butterfly flutters away, I could see a clearing atop the small mountain and the light that streamed through at the edges of the canopy, as if impatient to show their radiance. I pointed to it, and they, an ever strong embodiment of stoicism, could only continue their solemn march forward, not any faster, but with an increased determination in their step that seemed to agree with my conclusion. We arrived shortly. We stood and gazed for so, so long.

It was a beautiful view, I'll give them that.

I felt as if I could sweep across the ten thousand treetops before me in an instant, a heron soaring past the landscape. The refreshing upwards draft threatened to make me lighter than air, that I may become one with the angels and the clouds. Verdant green rice paddies lined the sides of rolling hills that

seemed to swim towards the horizon. A serpentine river to the east crept along larghetto, like a lazy emerald dragon looking for a friend. The sounds of the land filtered through the wind and touched my soul.

Have anything else you've been holding out on me with?

A herd of elephants a valley away basked in the noon's foggy lustre. They plucked at the trees like a harpist playing for a slumbering child. They gave the land a respect and reverence that I could scarcely grant to myself. My guide tapped my shoulder, cautious as if it were a venomous creature, before pointing at the humble giants. Between the strongest and the eldest, the calves and their parents, the wise and foolish, lay a corpse at least a couple of weeks gone. Some stood around it, unmoving sentinels with eyes that spoke a close dialect to that of my companion's native gift.

There is so much more beyond the spoken and the heard.

The elephants looked as if they were mourning, if our human experiences could somehow be applied to these beings with minds of a far dissimilar paradigm. I wondered if they understood the weight of what happened, and then questioned if even I did. People seemed less prone to fully accept death than they were to try and find ways to cope with it. How would one even fully accept our concept of death? There is so much, even the inevitable, that we never do seem to put enough thought into. Who is to say that all the other creatures and critters had not solved this quandary long ago?

When we're gone, maybe we'll be together somewhere else.

They wrapped their hand around mine, with a meekness rivalled only by the drift of a feather in a blizzard. They turned to me, wordless as true purpose, and laughed. It was not malicious, it was fascination. A slow decrescendo left a bemused smile on them. Our hands danced naturally, purposefully, to their heart. It thrummed proud, playing a concerto accompanied by every flicker and crackle of their unending fire.

We'll never be gone, for we are in every moment, every action, every purpose, and drop of rain.

Does the rain fall everywhere that we'll be?

Do the clouds appear each time it rains?

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Who are we?

They pointed to the sky, I pointed to the land, they gestured to the leaves and I the roots that fed them. I stared sorrowfully at the elephants, and they stared sorrowfully at me. We didn't know what we were. There was not the passion to say what it was to live nor was there the logic to describe the facts of death. What was left was a deranged verismo that drove anyone to listen to become *just a bit* hysterical. Likely was it that all beings in all their myriad forms would come to the river and watch. To see great forests grow around music incarnate and to see it all swept away in one grand *Veloce! Fortissimo! Fortissimo!* And the crowd cheered forevermore.

So, do elephants believe in heaven?

Come to the concert with me, and you'll understand.

I believe in you.

Cadenza,

Cadenza,

Coda.