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# Symmetry

WV member Cassandra Atherton takes inspiration from Ernest Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants' in this tale of a love betrayed.

The elephant in the room is that I have an elephant obsession. The truth is, I like wrinkly skinned, mice-fearing mammals with prehensile trunks. I collect pachyderms with raised trunks. Never lowered trunks. Lowered trunks is what got me into trouble in the first place. The trunks have to be raised or else the good luck spills out. But beware humungous jumbos. They should be approached with caution. I like elephant babies. Calves. I like the way they hold onto their mother's tail. An elephantine chain. My favourite Disney film is 'Dumbo' and my favourite place in New York is Dumbo. And of course I like jumbo jets. You once told me I see elephants in everything. In clouds. In waves. In the tea leaves before you left me. But then you always said I had a memory like an elephant. My elephant man.

You had an obsession with symmetry. The kind of two's company, three's a crowd mentality. You didn't want a third wheel. Around my belly or in our tiny apartment. Three upsets the balance. Twice not thrice is nice. Vladimir Propp would argue with you on that point. The rule of three in writing is totally lost on you. But not on the 'Three Little Pigs', the 'Three Billygoats Gruff', 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' or even the Three Stooges. I try to imagine what your childhood was like. You liked things in twos. Two by two. Two squared. Two to the power of two. As a boy you would have asked to hear the tale of Noah's ark over and over. You pictured each animal trotting into the ark with its partner. No baby animals. No baby elephants in sight. Your favourite fruits would have been cherries and pears, for different reasons. You would have loved socks, mittens, chopsticks, salt and pepper, shampoo and conditioner. You only liked milk if it came with a cookie to go with it. I imagine you would never give anyone your kidney. How could you live with only one? My elephant memory remembers your words: 'It's perfectly simple,' you said. Does that explain my foetal attraction?

I jiggle the baby in my arms. It vomits on my shoulder. Another begins to cry and so I jiggle the vomiting baby into my right arm and take up the second, scooping it up with my left. White and wrinkly, only their heads are strong and round, save for the vulnerable fontanelle. When a third and fourth baby begin to cry, another nurse enters and tells me to put the babies back in their cribs. I ignore her and take them over to the window. There is nothing but flat, dry land. A few cars are coupled together in a lonely car park. The sun overhead is starching the colour out of the two shrubs near the hospital's north entrance. I turn my back to shield the babies from the glare. The baby vomit starts to sour.

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