

The Elephant on the Roof

by Joyce Agee, 2023

Longing can be a bad habit.

And longing for someone who doesn't return our feelings is like being a butterfly that seeks refuge in a net. It's not a good idea.

After we met, I soared and floated, lifting aloft by my longing for you. I took flight embraced by your warm, whispering words and the sweet honeysuckle scent of your body. A butterfly does have a heart and its blood flows freely. With you, I may have been safe from other predators, but you were new and dangerous territory.

You operated like a man riding an elephant and teetering on the edge of a tall building while holding a butterfly net. You took risks but you weren't afraid of heights and never lost your balance. Admittedly, sometimes you would fumble in a comic, endearing way but mainly, you spent your time applauding yourself and capturing hearts like someone collecting butterflies.

Capture was swift for me. The net knifed through the air and I was imprisoned. I fluttered and fought. I could see the sky beyond but I was still prevented from escaping the net. In truth, I was so enthralled by you that I didn't know I had the choice to leave.

It was only later that I discovered that I was one of many conquests preserved and displayed in your collection like framed portraits in a gallery. I am the wide-eyed pensive girl with brown shoulder length hair, wearing a coral colored headband, with her wings pinned to the wall.

Where there is longing, there is a story. And sometimes fate takes pity on us and our longings. My escape ultimately became a need for retribution when I gently pushed you over the side of the building while you were trying to trap more unsuspecting butterflies.

As you fell, I felt a twinge of regret that you didn't have wings.