

Not About The Knife
A Monologue by Mark Chrisler
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*(Man enters with a bag full of objects,
takes a seat at the table, center.
Throughout the story, he uses all the objects
as toys to illustrate the story)*

So the question was “who’d been slitting Elena’s tires?”

*(He removes an object meant to be him,
then one meant to be Elena and places them lying in “bed”)*

I’d been living with Elena--not really, I had a place I technically lived at with some guys, but functionally I lived with Elena and only said I was staying with the guys when I needed an excuse to sleep somewhere else, if you know what I mean.

So I was living with Elena--sleeping with Elena--but literally sleeping I mean, not figuratively sleeping with her, at least not very often, and thus why sometimes I’d say I’d sleep at home with the guys, even though home was, functionally speaking, there with her.

We were sleeping and somebody slit her tires. I didn’t say “we discovered someone had slit her tires in the morning” because that’s now how it happened. What happened is that I’d been talking in my sleep--sometimes I do that, but only rarely, when something awful is in my mind--and I don’t really talk in my sleep, because my eyes are open and I have this sense that there’s a me who’s in control and a me who’s in my head, and I’m the me in my head and the me who’s in control is out to say something terrible, something he’s not supposed to say, and I can’t stop him. So that’s the kind of thing I said that night which woke Elena and led us to discover that someone had slit her tires. Because we went out to the porch to smoke because we were awake, you see, and there wasn’t much else for the two of us to do together awake, and so we’re out here on the porch and her car’s over here and...

(replacing Man and Elena, and pulling out the car and the knife)

...I didn’t get to the puppet place so I just had to make do with stuff I had lying around, so don’t worry about why these objects, that’s not important--oops: the knife comes later.

So, she wasn’t too happy. Not about what I said--she didn’t remember what I said and neither did I, because I never do--but she wasn’t happy about the tire slitting, you see? But she didn’t really give it a lot of thought; chalked it up as a random thing that happened.

But my thought was, a tire slitting isn’t a random thing. It’s very personal, very vindictive. You don’t slit someone’s tires unless you’ve got a bone to pick with them. Or, I guess, if you’ve got a bone to pick with their car, but that doesn’t really make much sense, does it? And I wanted a sensible explanation, so I started an investigation, the question of

which was “who’s been slitting Elena’s tires?” I didn’t tell her about my investigation, though, because I didn’t want to upset her and trouble her with questions.

*(Here he sets up the bar, with the elephant man,
Eric and Natalia--symbolized by the knife)*

My first suspect was a skinhead named Eric who hung out a shitty old bar that had a beer sign instead of its name, so you just had to call it “That Michelob Place” and “That Michelob Place” only had three kinds of customers: skinheads, crazy Latvian girls with whom the skinheads were in love and a hopelessly drunken old man with elephantiasis of the nose.

Now, there are two kinds of skinheads: the shitty, violent racist ones and the good, non-violent, non-racist ones, and the way you tell the difference is by the width of their suspenders and height of their jean cuffs. I don’t remember which width or height means which, but Eric was the shitty kind. I confronted him about the tire-slitting and he seemed honestly clueless. After a while of feeling him out, I decided it wasn’t him, and went on to get shitfaced, chat up a crazy Latvian girl named Natalia and call Elena to say I was staying at home. This was my semi-regular routine. It was, as far as I was concerned, a coincidence after all.

(Going back to the bedroom/porch setting)

The second night Elena’s tires got slit, though, meant something was really up. I’d been asleep with my eyes open, trying not to say something awful--not knowing what--and then I said it, and I knew this time she’d heard. She said “What?” back to me and I mumbled another thing I couldn’t hear. And then we went out to smoke and there were her tires, slit again. So now I took it upon myself to figure out what was going on.

She told me what I’d said, that I’d been talking in my sleep, that I’d said “You have to pour water on the shoes.” And she’d said “What?” and I’d said “It’s a joke.”

That was not the terrible thing. The me in control was leading me on.

(and again to the bar)

Now I returned to the bar, to continue my investigation, because I wanted to be the hero--was sick of being the bad guy, but I still didn’t tell her, because I didn’t want her upset. There was the skinhead over here and the crazy drunk with elephantiasis of the nose there, and there was the crazy Latvian girl, Natalia, whom I went right over to grill. She laughed right in my face, because she was crazy, see, and although she denied up and down that she’d done it, I didn’t quite believe her. So as was often the case, I hung around there and got shitfaced with her before calling Elena to tell her I was staying at home tonight.

(And the bedroom/porch once more)

The third night her tires were slit was when it really added up. As usual, I’d been half-awake and half-sleeping and had failed to resist saying the terrible thing. And this time it must have been terrible--more terrible than the shoes joke--because I snapped to full waking from her anger as she ran out to smoke. I followed her, running to explain away what I’d said--which was difficult, not knowing what I’d said.

I did know the gist, though. That I'd looked her right in the eyes--though I'd been sleeping--and told her that her tires were getting slit because I was sleeping with a crazy Latvian girl, and either she was doing it or the skinhead who loved her was. So that's what I was ready to try to explain away.

But she stopped me with a finger to her mouth and pointed to her car, where in the shadows, we saw the culprit, mid-tire-slitting.

(Using the knife as the knife)

A dark, drunken, crazy shadow with a knife. We stood in stillness watching, unseen. And as the knife raised we saw the silhouette of the face behind it, big elephantiated nose and all.

*(when revealed, Man places
the elephant man object next to the car,
wielding the knife in the other hand)*

He mumbled with anger, because Elena's car was flatly in the way of his nightly stumble home. He had to step around it, go out of his path a good three feet, and that was enough to invoke his wrath. So what do you know about that? It was the car he'd had something against after all. And if he ever slit her tires again, I wasn't there to know about it. That place wasn't my home anymore.