

49 Miles
(excerpt: Mile 20)

by
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MILE 20 THE SAN FRANCISCO ZOO

"ELEPHANT SHIT KENO"

AN OLD MAN WEARING DIRTY OVERALLS AND CARRYING A SHOVEL WALKS INTO VIEW. HE STOPS AND SPEAKS TO THE AUDIENCE AS IF THEY WERE A SMALL CROWD IN FRONT OF THE ASIAN ELEPHANT EXHIBIT.

AN ELEPHANT KEEPER

St. Francis of Assisi. Now there was a nut for you. The only reason he was out there in the woods talkin' to the animals is because nobody else would listen to him. The church thought he was a heretic, you know? He'd spend all day preaching to the animals... "The church is corrupt, the state is corrupt" And now they named a city after him. And we've got a zoo. I'm not a big fan of irony, but ya gotta laugh. (BEAT) You know they say... If we were any good with people... We wouldn't be working with animals. Well, I never liked people too much myself. They talk so much and it don't mean nothin'. Animals though, even the ones that lived their whole lives in cages are, well... better company. It's not like they could survive in the wild anyway. They've been domesticated, most of them. They don't ask for too much... Just to be fed on time and cleaned up after. Lucky bastards. Now a lot of people look down on us, because we gotta clean up their crap. But it's not as bad as looks. Well, not the hoofstock anyway. Now you take giraffes, they eat acacia all day so when they drop a bunch of pellets, it smells like potpourri. It's the same with most of the herbivores. The Koalas, just munchin' on eucalyptus, they smell like cough drops. The carnivores... well if you've ever had cats you know what THAT smells like. But the closer you get to humans, like the chimps and gorilla's... Well, you just don't want to be down wind of that. But hey, it's not so bad. I mean look... elephant dung is just organic manure. Heck, nothin' wrong with that. It's what makes the roses grow. You know, elephant shit paid for my house. Yeah, we used to play "Elephant-shit-keno" In the old Asian elephant barn. Drew chalk marks on the concrete and placed bets... Tinkerbelle... was my girl... I always knew where she'd go... Never failed me. She loved peanuts... shells and all... I always put some out for her. That's not to say it ain't dangerous. More of us get killed in the line of duty than postal workers. (HE LAUGHS) I been an Elephant keeper here for over thirty years. I ain't brave or anythin' it's just somethin' you get used to. Like the mud and the cold and the fog. This new zoo? Yeah, I seen the plans, gift shops and new ways to separate the tourist from their cash. This "Zoological Society" cares more about that damned merry-go-round down there and what happens to them wooden animals than they do the real ones. Because they make 'em money. We should look after the Elephants first. Get 'em out of these old WPA prisons and let em' roam around a bit, we got the room. Then they say it's not cost effective! (HE LAUGHS) Listen to me now will ya... "The society is corrupt." Next thing you know I'll be out in the park preaching to the squirrels. Well look, I gotta go clean up tinkerbelle's night quarters. I tell ya, ever since she got TB and had to take her med's from the other end, she's been doin' double duty, if you know what I mean. (HE EXITS)