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Skin Deep

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Skin Deep

My name is Billy.

I am twenty-three years old and I work at the Columbus Zoo, or at least I used to.

It's not really hard work, not like the guys who have to feed the animals or the zoo doctors because I only have to pick up trash. Some days, if not everyone shows up to work, I get to use the stick with the nail in the end to jab the bits of paper that cover the ground. Sometimes I pretend that the pieces of hot dog wrappers with ketchup are bleeding from the hole I put in them, but only on days that I come to work blue. Most days I'm not blue and I just use the broom and the metal garbage collector to pick up the trash.

I don't make a lot of money at my job, but most of the time I don't need to pay for my lunch because not all of the people finish their food, so I keep it. We're not supposed to do that and Dave, my boss, tells me not to if he sees me so I always look around to see if Dave is watching before I pick something out of the trash. Once I found a can of Mountain Dew that was almost full, but when I drank from it, I found a bee that had found it first and I got stung on my lip. I don't drink pop from cans anymore, even if they are almost full, unless I'm the one who opens it, and even then I shake it to make any bees that are inside fly away.

Dave is pretty nice even though he yells at me sometimes and looks mean if I come up and pat him on the back and say "how's it going, Dave." Me and Dave are best friends, but since Dave lives too far away for me to ride my bike to see him and he said I wouldn't fit in his car because I'm too tall, I've never been to see where he lives. Dave brought some friends to see me, though, and we all went to a bar on High Street. Dave and his friends had me drink a lot of beer and I saw a girl who smiled at me and we danced but then I don't remember. Dave said we had fun so I guess we did. The next day I heard my mom crying, but my head hurt so I didn't smile and say "Good morning, Captain" like I usually did. Her favorite apron was soaking in the sink and I asked her why and she said that I got sick on it when she was putting me to bed the night before and she kept crying. When I asked Dave about it he laughed and said that he gets sick on people all the time so it was alright. I said that I didn't think so, but I thanked him for taking me out.

Later when I went to whiz I looked down and saw that I didn't have any hair in front like before. I saw that there were some black lines that I hadn't seen before and so I went over to look in the mirror. Somebody laughed when I turned around but I didn't see who because I was staring at myself in the mirror. Somehow where the hair used to be there was an elephant face drawn on me. There was little eyes and big ears, but the trunk had been there before. It was the best thing I had ever seen. My favorite animal in the whole zoo was Matilda the elephant because she was so pretty and big. Everyone knew it, and they would even ask me how she was because they knew I always went to see her, first thing everyday. This picture on me looked just like her, but it was more of a boy elephant I think. It was so nice that I whizzed in the sink so I could look at it some more. I decided that I liked it very much. When I went to show Dave he was on the phone and he seemed shy about it, but when he saw how much I liked it he told me that it was his idea and that it was a tattoo so it wouldn't wash off. I thanked him very much and left. On the way out, Dave told me not to show too many other people because they wouldn't understand like me and Dave.

The reason I don't work there anymore is because I tried to show Matilda the picture. The day that I tried to show her wasn't too busy and I'd picked up lots of trash so it was alright. To make sure she would see I stood up on the black railing in front of Matilda's House and pulled down my pants. While I was waiting for Matilda to come out a little boy came up beside me and pulled on my pants leg and asked me what I was doing. I turned around and showed him the picture and he said it was cool and that he wanted one, but then his mom came and saw me and she screamed. I think she was just blue because she couldn't have one too. She took the little boy away and the Zoo Police came and took me to see Jack Hanna. I had never seen Jack Hanna up close, and it made me scared because Jack Hanna was famous enough to be on David Letterman. I thought about it, though, and decided that maybe if Dave and the little boy thought my elephant face was cool then maybe Jack Hanna would too. I thought that maybe he would think it was so cool that he would take me to be on David Letterman too. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to find out, so before Jack Hanna could say anything I showed him my elephant. When I showed him his mouth sort of dropped open so I knew he liked it. All the other men in the room laughed and the Policeman took me out and sent me back to the employee building. When I got there he made me take off my name tag and my Zoo Hat. While I stood there, he peeled off my name from the name tag and gave it to me. I still have my name because I put it on my mirror at home and when I look into the mirror it says Billy Winston and I nod 'cause I know it's me.

When I got home and put my bike away, I saw Mrs. Carmichael from The Franklin County Retard Board in the kitchen with Mom. My dad had called it The Franklin County Retard Board and my Mom hated that, but my dad was gone so it didn't matter. One time my dad had given me a shirt that said "Instant Retard, Don't Need Water" that he had made special out of one of his own shirts, but he didn't tell Mom. I never wore the shirt because it smelled like "The juice of the Devil" that my Mom was always talking about, but I guess I lost it because I don't know where it is now. I'm glad my dad is gone, though, because I fit into all of his clothes. Mrs. Carmichael was getting up when I came in, and she patted my arm and looked up at me and said that she would do her best at finding another job. I told her I liked the zoo, so could it please be another zoo? She looked away and said something to Mom. Sometimes I go to the zoo still, but only on busy days so I can get in. I saw Dave once, but he left before I could say hi, so I don't think he likes me anymore. The animals still like me, though, so I say hi to them. Last week I went and Matilda wasn't there, even after I waited all day. I asked a boy who hadn't worked there when I did, and he said that she had been Put To Sleep because she was sick, so I picked some flowers and sat on the railing to wait. A few minutes later, the boy walked by and after he passed he yelled "THAT MEANS SHE'S DEAD YOU FUCKING RETARD," so I said thanks, but I'd wait anyway. I thought she'd want to see the picture.

Eric Whitney