

TINE VAN AERSCHOT

WE ARE
NOT
AFRAID
OF THE DARK

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DE NIEUWE
TONEELBIBLIOTHEEK

There is no story that can be told so beautiful and so sad as the story of death. It is the saddest most wonderful story in the world and when it is told right, it is the most humble, the most joyous, the most honest celebration of life.

But maybe for the story to be told right, it is possible that first death needs to be died right.

For it is certainly true that there is no story that can be told so horrible and so cold as the story of death. It is the coldest most awful story in the world and when it is told right, it is the most gruesome, the most terrifying, the most honest condemnation of life.

Experiment with drowned ant nr 1

by John Lubbock:

January 3 1876: I immersed an ant in water for half an hour; and when she was then to all appearances drowned, I put her on a strip of paper. The immersed ant lay there an hour before she recovered herself and during this time a marked ant passed by 18 times without taking any notice of her.

Once started, it is hard to stop wondering about the direction in which death creeps into the body. Does it start like frost, first taking the extremities and the limbs and slowly slowly surrounding the heart, squeezing the rhythm out of it? Or does it start from inside-out laming the mechanism bit by bit, part by part, section by section? Possibly it is pure brainpower. This surprising tool, this thing, we sometimes consider to be the equal of ourselves. This bodiless wonder we more often than not take for us, for me, for myself and I. Does the mighty brain decide?

Why would it matter? Does it matter if I stay connected? Does it matter when you have stopped speaking, when you have stopped looking towards the outside so that I can still reach you? Does it matter for me to know that if I stroke you in the

fold of your arms, that you recognise me? Does it
matter if those soft, tender spots know it is me?

Experiment with drowned ant nr VII

by John Lubbock:

January 3 1876: I immersed another ant in the water for an hour after which I placed her on the strip of paper as in the preceding case. She took three-quarters of an hour before she recovered: during this time two marked ants were passing to and fro; one of them went by eighteen times, and the other twenty times; and two other ants also went over the paper; but none of them took the slightest notice of their drowned friend.

He was someone's great-uncle, he was someone's uncle, he was someone's brother and he was someone's husband. He was on his way to the annual Second World War veteran's dinner. He was dressed in his best suit, his best coat, in his 'for funerals only' black shiny shoes, clean socks and underwear. He felt uncomfortable, but he looked his best. And just like that, he keeled over. He did not have the time to take his hands out of his pockets. He just keeled over, smacking face first on the pavement. Dead. His kind face, ruined. And he lay there, already dressed for his coffin, in death as in life, finding ways to cause as little trouble as possible.

She was his sister and she was someone's wife. They came running to her house. She was his sister and he dropped dead. All the adults went. She stayed at

home. With me. The baby. The youngest grandchild. We sat quiet. Waiting for something, not knowing what. And then she told me about the war. About running away from the bombs and about packing everything onto the cart. And she showed me her gun. Her totally rusted cast iron probably 'never fit to shoot a bullet' pistol. I could hardly breath. I was allowed to hold it. It was heavy and I was considered trustworthy. To me she could talk about the war. To me she could show her most secret possession. This treasure that had been buried in the garden for four years. I was holding the object that could have had her executed by the enemy.

Experiment with drowned ant nr XXI

by John Lubbock:

I immersed two ants for ten hours and then put them on the strip of paper. They began to recover in three quarters of an hour, but were not quite themselves till half an hour afterwards. The same marked ants passed respectively eighteen and twenty-six times without taking any notice. After this I left off watching

Okay, it is black, pitch black. There is no moon, there are no stars. You might have a flashlight, you might have a candle. The weather is behaving itself. It is not raining, there is a little bit of a breeze. Not much, but just enough for the leaves to make their presence known. You are on a small island, you are in a cabin. There is no electricity, no running water. It is about 3 in the morning, you are in your sleeping bag, cosy, content, the perfect temperature, heavenly sleepy, but there is one little thing. One little pressing matter that can not be ignored. Your bladder is full. Your bladder is getting fuller by the minute. You are hours away from the crack of dawn. And you will have to go and expose your crack to the elements. Crouch down, bare butt, millimetres away from God knows what. From anything hiding in the undergrowth. Something that is not going to

be happy if you relieve yourself on it. And what seemed very peaceful and quiet just a little while ago when you were having your 'second to last' nightcap, happily hanging limp in the hammock, now has turned against you. Crickets are screaming at you, whole families of creepy creatures are getting their armour ready, they are going to direct their weapons directly at your milky white soft perfectly round buttocks. Snakes, spiders, ants, bees and wasps are on the lookout for some human blood.

What makes it so brutal, so hard to deal with, is the fact that it is final. There is no way back. It is exactly the same, and at the same time, it is exactly the reverse of being born. Once you are, you are, and once you are no more, you are no more. There is no second time. You cannot have another go. There is no rehearsal possible, it is irreversible, and it hurts. It hurts a lot. I don't think the dying part is necessarily painful. But the staying behind part is. And however happy you are to have been part of the shared life. However proud you are to have been a friend or a brother or a niece or a son or a wife; however certain you are that you will stay connected for as long as you remain alive, a big chunk has been ripped out of you. I think this is when Adam should have lost his rib. This is when it hurts the most.

Ghost #1

Is this on? Is it on now? Can I start? Gosh, it is really nippy out isn't it.

Anyway, okay I am on, I'll start.

Rabbits okay, well, we were almost always breeding rabbits. Because after the war food was really scarce and the food stamps, the food stamps that the government gave you, they, it was not enough, it was not enough to feed a whole family so, the government really encouraged people to be self-sufficient, they really encouraged you to grow your own fruit and vegetables and to breed rabbits in order to eat them. Rabbits were cheap to feed because you could find the stuff they wanted to eat

anywhere. You know, by the side of the road or we used to go down to the railway tracks and get food for the rabbits there.

Anyway, we always started with two rabbits, because we could not afford four rabbits. So when you start with two rabbits it is called line breeding. It is not inbreeding. Inbreeding is illegal. You have to have permission from the Pope to do inbreeding. Only the royals get permission to do inbreeding. Because well, I suppose because the royals could not be breeding with commoners. And in the beginning, Adam and Eve had to start that way. So what Adam and Eve did was line breeding.

So when you start, what you have is the mum and the dad. And then they produce the first litter. And you have to wait a little while after that. It is a few

months before they get into heat. And then you have to get the daughter serviced by the father and the mother serviced by the son. You can only do this once and you have to stay with them when you put them together in the hutch. I mean, you have to watch over them carefully and when they are done, when the males have shot their load, than you have to separate them physically. You do not want the male breeders to run out of steam, you do not want them to run out of enthusiasm, you do not want them to run out of spunk. You have to keep them keen. And also it is not really proper to let them go at it the whole time especially not with sons and daughters.

So after that all you have to do is keep skipping over one generation and then you will be fine.

Ah, but you cannot let the litters get too big. If the litter gets too big, than the youngsters will just suck the doe dry. The doe is the name for the mother.

The father is called the buck. If you have too many youngsters, you will have to kill them. Sometimes you might have several litters at the same time and than you can choose. You can get rid of the scrawny ones and have the good ones from your best doe suckled by other does who of course are actually related. They are distant relations of the youngsters.

But this is how you get a really good pure breed.

And they are better than any other strain. They have more meat on them and they fatten up much faster.

Someone told me once that this has been tried with people somewhere. I do not remember where, I do not remember when but anyway, I think that is against God, regardless of anything.

The thing you really have to look out for is the snuffles. If snuffles gets amongst your lot, than you will lose them all. And than you will have to wait quite a few years before you can start up again.

Snuffles is like a head cold for rabbits. It starts with sneezes and runny noses, but than it eats the whole brain away and once that starts, you will have to get rid of all of them.

Is that it?

Sorry, is that enough?

About experiments with ants

by John Lubbock:

It was originally intended to do the experiments principally with bees, but soon it was found that ants were on the whole more suitable for its purpose. In the first place ants are much less excitable, they are less liable to accidents, and because of the absence of wings, they are more easy to keep under continuous observation.

March 6 1962: 'An exceptionally interesting case' was noted.

- The accident of five-year-old Roger Arnsten.
- It could be called 'Experiment with drowned boy nr 1'.
- He drowned in a stream of icy cold water.
- He stayed submerged for the estimated time of 22 minutes.
- He was half frozen when he was pulled out onto land.
- First aid external heart compression was started immediately.
- They believed he would not survive.
- He was rushed to the hospital.
- They continued the heart massage.

- They inserted needles directly into his heart.
 - They gave him shots of adrenaline.
 - They gave him a blood transfusion.
 - He was dead for about two and a half hours.
 - They believed he would not make it.
 - They kept on trying.
-
- At 8.14 his heartbeat resumed spontaneously.
 - His lips, hands and feet stayed blue.
 - They injected increasing dosages of chlorpromazine.
 - They could feel a pulse.
 - At 8.27 he took deep gasping breaths.
 - At 8.30 he peed blood.
 - At 9.30 he suffered a violent attack of lung oedema.
 - At 9.44 he discharged bloody foam through a plastic tube.

- They gave him ‘this and that’.
- They assisted his respiration.
- They controlled his severe convulsions by ‘that and the other’.
- They sucked the content, previously belonging to his stomach, out of his lungs.
- Between 10.15 pm and 7.30 am he suffered three additional attacks of lung oedema.
- In the next 24 hours, he stopped breathing 5 times.
- He had several attacks of severe convulsions.
- They kept on trying.
- They still believed he would not survive.

- On the fifth day his pupils started to react to light and dark
- On the tenth day he could obey simple orders.
- He could recognise his mother.
- He could answer ‘yes’ and ‘no.’

- On the eleventh day he became again unconscious.
- There followed a period in which he appeared brainless.
- He began to utter meaningless shrieks.
- He made uncoordinated movements with his arms and legs.
- When his mouth was touched it automatically opened to eat.

- In the sixth week after he drowned, his mental condition improved.
- He progressed every day.
- In the seventh week he began to speak.
- In the ninth week he regained his vision.
- In the tenth week he was discharged from the hospital.
- He was wobbly on his feet.
- He was clumsy with his fingers

– He was on his way to become by clinical standards,
a normal child.

Death by drowning in boy as in dog, might be
overturned when freezing occurs before drowning.

Ghost #2

A body cooled by liquid helium will keep for all intents and purposes, forever.

Fact: right now it is possible to preserve dead people, through freezing at very low temperatures, with essentially no deterioration.

Assumption: medical science will be able to repair almost any damage to the human body, including freezing damage, but also 'infirmities by old age' and all other causes of death.

The only thing left for us to arrange is the storing of our bodies in suitable freezers, until the time science will be able to rescue us.

Her name was Katie Margaret McGillis, she was the oldest of eight children in her family. There had been five others, besides those eight, but they all died. Her father was a fisherman, her mother was not very well. She has worked since she was twelve. She worked in the coalmines for ten-cents an hour, she worked in the lobster factory for ten hours a day. She got a job in the Mabou asylum 'you know' says Katie Margaret, 'You know where those people were kept, those people who were not well. The doctor would come in, maybe once or twice a month and just cheque a little bit, but there wasn't a thing like medicine, unless caster oil'. At 17, Katie Margaret McGillis had enough of it and she went to New York. She found a position with a nice doctor and his bad tempered wife and on one of her trips back home she met Angus

Rankin. They liked each other, but their jobs were more important. It took over thirteen years before Katie Margaret McGillis left New York and became Katie Margaret Rankin. And then one day this young boy she does not remember his name was helping on Papa Rankin's farm and she does not remember what she was doing, maybe frying something or baking something for lunch. And she looked down at the tractor and Holy Moses, she saw a leg that went up in the air. And my God she ran down to the tractor and she had no idea what was going to be ahead of her. And she tore off her apron, it was one of her big white aprons, not a little stinking tea apron at all, and she got a piece of rock or a stick and she twisted and twisted and she screamed and screamed until someone came. And she just took the apron off and put it around the leftover bit of leg. And she kept twisting the

rock or the stick into the apron to tie of the bleeding. And he was fainting off and on and she poured some water on the other end of the apron and wetted his lips and the boy says 'light me a cigarette Katherine' and she lit him a cigarette and she put it in his mouth. And they put him on the back of the truck and rushed him to the hospital and she held his head and the blood was coming out of the back of the truck.

Angus came home as soon as he heard and in the evening he buried that leg down there in the field.

It was more than twenty years later, and Angus was digging a well near Ketch harbour. This new house wanted a well. And Angus says, 'My wife is with me and we are going to have a bite of lunch' and the man came to see me and he grabbed me and he says 'Boy! You saved my life' and Katie Margaret says, 'I

don't know' and he says, 'do you remember how far I was gone' and Katie Margaret says, 'Oh is that you'. Anyway, he built three houses, and drove a taxi for fifteen years, he has got a family of eight and a lovely wife. And when he is laying down shingles, he throws off his leg and he runs up and down the roof faster than you and I, like a monkey.

Ghost #2

When your body is frozen, you will be referred to as 'suspended dead'

and in this way you can be thought of as dead, but not very dead, and in a not so far future you could be revived.

In many popular views, 'suspended death' is chiefly thought of as

'possibly useful for astronauts on long interstellar voyages'. The importance

of suspended death lies however not in travel to the stars for the few, but in

travel to the future for the many.

It is understood that our breasts mimic our behinds, just to insure that we are attractive to the male, from the front as well as from behind. And it is understood, that we, as a species have survived because of that. But today, this is not what procreation relies on. Male does not force himself upon female whenever he sees breast or bottom, or when he gets an urge or an itch or whenever a female is passing by. At least not as a rule. These days the selections are made by the females as well as the males. These days, procreation and the picking of partners relies largely on dentists, on the pharmaceutical and on the cosmetics industries and on Adobe Photoshop nine point zero two or higher. These days it also looks like procreation has moved out of the way and has landed much lower on the priority list. These days, it seems that eternal youth and immortality have become the frontrunners. And

it does not matter anymore if God or the Gods created man and woman. Or it does not matter anymore if the opposite is true, that Man and woman created the Gods. Heaven and paradise have not much value left. These days man and woman want eternal life here and now. In this world on this planet or at least on Mars when it gets too crowded here and only the elite can go. Or maybe Mars has to become a new colony, not unlike Australia was once elected to be, a far enough dump for human trash and misery. But those of us who have less extreme wishes and wants, those of us who do not want eternal life, we do still feel cheated if we ourselves or our friends and members of the family do not make it to the life expectancy age in our countries. We feel wronged and our sense of justice is shaken. And it is not fair. And it would be unbelievable if we all could count on reaching the

blessed age of around eighty. But it is also not fair that we are born here and they are born there, in Zambia and Lesotho and Afghanistan and Zimbabwe, where people are expected to die at the age of forty something. And how are we supposed to survive all of that?

Ghost #2

For the moment we must put our trust in the basic program. After you die a natural death, your body will be frozen until you can be cured.

For instance: the tired old man will close his eyes, centuries may have gone by before he is brought back to life, but for him, only a moment of sleep without dreams will have passed.

But maybe by then, science will have evolved so far that it can also rejuvenate the old man. Will he, with his new body of an Adonis, will he want to go back to his weary and faded wife?

When your bowel movement starts to be a topic of real importance to you, to your family and your close friends, you may consider yourself in serious trouble. In all normal circumstances bodily functions are supposed to pass unnoticed. You breathe, your heart beats, you pee, you menstruate, you fart and you get rid of your stool all on a more or less regular bases and all without being mentioned, except maybe when you need to be excused for the one or the other, or if you need to apologize for their undesired residue.

But when someone comes into your room and asks morning, midday and afternoon if you have farted yet or if you are ready to wave the victory flag of pooh, it is quiet plausible that you will be on your way out pretty soon.

This is what was said about him, Doctor, minister Wilfred T Grenfell. He was a brave young English gentleman. His whiskers were trimmed to perfection and his education was impeccable. In 1890-something, he was trying to satisfy his medical aspirations as well as his desire for adventure and his need to deliver his message of salvation and hope. He found all he was looking for in the human misery and hardship that were present in abundance on the barren coast of Labrador. When the Royal National Mission opened a post up there, he jumped at the chance. He was sturdy and hard working and he established four hospitals. He provided house visitations for the sick and the ailing by means of dogsled journeys during the long winters and on horseback in summer. He also taught wholesome

and righteous living wherever and whenever he could.

So this is what happened. It was during the holy week of 1908. Maybe it was Maundy Thursday or Good Friday or maybe it was that Saturday nobody remembers the holy name of, the one before Easter, we don't know. But Grenfell's strength and eagerness were tested to the limit. Word of a very urgent case came to him. The wound in the thigh of a young man he had operated on for an acute bone disease, had turned bad. The poisoned matter had accumulated and it was believed the leg would have to be removed. There was no time to be lost. He quickly packed the necessary instruments, fitted out the dogsled with his best dogs, and started out at once. His dogs formed a powerful team and could hardly be held back. But on the morning of the

second day, he faced a dilemma, travelling over the frozen sea or going around the bay. Going around following the shoreline would be several miles longer and precious time would be lost. But the wind had shifted and the condition of the ice was deteriorating fast. And of course, this story would not be told if he had made the right choice.

He went over the ice or what was left of it. He probably walked more on water than anything else. He got stuck in 'slush', a kind of snowy porridge. And in the end he and his dogs ultimately made it to a tiny little nothing of an ice pan. The sled was lost, most of his clothes were lost, but he had had the sense to hang on to his knife and the dogs were still wearing their reigns.

What he had to do to survive is hardly describable. It involved the killing of two of his dogs, sharing the meat with the other dogs, using their pelts as covers and bedding for the night, the black night. It involved slowly drifting out into the ocean, it involved half freezing and it involved using the reigns to tie the bones of the eight doglegs together into a flagpole. And with it, he kept on waving his only shirt about for hours, hoping that someone, anyone would be out there on the desolate coast who might spot him.

He was spotted and he was rescued by some very brave men, who risked their own lives to get him back on land. But the most remarkable thing, the most remarkable fact of this whole adventure, is not his miraculous rescue, or his fearlessness in the eye of almost certain death. It is the fact that under

these circumstances his mind kept thinking. Even when he was trapped in a surreal and very stupid life-threatening situation, even when he found himself unable to bridge the gap of less than a mile, between him and safety, because of the half frozen, half melted state of the water, his hungry mind kept on going. He knew that if the ice was just a little bit harder he could walk the distance. He also knew that without the ice, he and his dogs could have swam a shore. And he was certainly aware that any little boat, a canoe and a paddle would get him across this porridge. And fully conscious of the predicament he was in, he chose to spend his time thinking about a new medical procedure. He was thinking about an article he read about an intervention that was performed very recently by Doctor Harvey Cushing, in a New York hospital. The article described the operation in which the

doctor had removed two tumours from a man's brain without any anaesthetics. During the whole procedure, the patient, with the top of his skull removed, had kept up a vivid conversation with the operating doctor. The article did not mention what the conversation was about.

A few days after the rescue of Wilfred T. Grenfell, the young man with the infected leg, was brought into the hospital and after a simple course of treatment, the leg was saved.

Experiment with drowned ant nr LXVI

by John Lubbock:

Again, I immersed an ant for an hour, and put her on the strip of paper. The marked ant passed twice, after which she did not return. Soon after another ant passed by and went up the immersed ant and carried her off into the nest.

Basically, I know nothing about the differences between man and woman or between boy and girl, and basically I also know nothing about the similarities between male and female. This does by no means mean that I believe them to be the same. I only know a little bit about me and the incomprehensible differences and similarities between me and everybody else. And because of that little bit of knowledge about me, I am ready to assume that we, everybody, feels up to a certain point the need to be useful, that we, everybody, feels up to a certain point the need to lead a meaningful life. And I am also ready to assume, that we, everybody, wants to leave some kind of a trace behind. And we, everybody, know that leaving a trace, only really feels like leaving a trace, when it comes with an almost superhuman effort. And we,

and the rest, are at our happiest, at our proudest when we are overcoming our own barriers, our own limitations. Or maybe it is better to argue that we are at our happiest when we have reached the other side. When have overcome our barriers and limitations, when we have made it, whole and in one piece. When we sit ourselves down on a bit of a rock or a stump of a tree, when we are catching our breath, when we are having a drink of water and when we are wiping the sweat off our brow.

It is probably even better to argue that, what we are leaving behind is mainly a trace within ourselves.

A lot of the time, we only feel impotent, inept, and helpless in the situations we are in. But if we have been given the gift of being invited to one of the extremities of somebody's life. If we have the privilege to witness the birth of a tiny little shrimp of a human being, or if we have the privilege of

being a part of the ending of a normal, exceptional, person's existence, it does not matter if we feel incapable, impotent, inept and helpless. We are there, we are creating each other's traces, we are part of the whole and we are part of the most intense sharing of love and life and living.

Ghost #2

Questions about possible legal side effects.

Will you have the legal right to freeze a relative?

Will failure to freeze be considered murder or negligent homicide?

Will a frozen body have legal rights and obligations?

Can a frozen body vote?

Boekenlijst

Journey to the Polar Sea // Sir John Franklin

In the Land of White Death // Valerian Albanov

Frozen in Time // Owen Beattie and John Geiger

A Woman in the Polar Night // Christiane Ritter

Endurance // F.A. Worsley

The Storm // Daniel Defoe

A Common Pornography // Kevin Sampsell

The Arctic Whaling Journals of William Scoresby the

Younger // edited by Ian Jackson

As I Lay Dying // William Faulkner

The Colony of Unrequited Dreams // Wayne Johnston

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich // Aleksandr

Solzhenitsyn

The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of

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Zeepost // Roelof Van Gelder

The Heart of the Antarctic // Ernest Shackleton

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Scott

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The Last Gentleman Adventurer // Edward Beauclerk

Maurice

A Methodist Missionary in Labrador // Arminius Young

Cod – A Biography of the Fish that Chaged the World //

Mark Kurlansky

Adrift on an Ice-Pan // Sir Wilfred Thomason Grenfell

The prospect of immortality // Robert C. W. Ettinger

A drift on an ice-pan // Wilfred T. Grenfell

Ants, Bees, and Wasps // John Lubbock, Kegan Paul,
Trench and Co.

The care and management of rabbits // Chesla C.

Sherlock

Small Talk at Wreyland // Cecil Torr

Poultry // A.W. Richardson

The old farmers Almanac 1978 // Robert B. Thomas

Your flying car awaits // Paul Milo

This giddy Globe // Oliver Herford

Eskimo (Inuktitut) Dictionary // Arthur Thibert

Death on the ice // Cassie Brown

The face of the arctic // Richard Harrington

The travel Journals of Tappan Adney // edited by C. Ted
Behne

The long exile // Melanie McGrath

Excuse my Dust // Sarah Seager

This is what they say // François Mandeville

The evolution of useful things // Henry Petroski

we are not afraid of the dark werd voor het eerst opgevoerd in de Kaaitstudio's op 1 maart 2012 in Brussel

Inspiratie: Tracy McKellar Wright

Spel:

2012: Dianne Gaidry

2013: Valerie Buhagiar

Ghost #1: Claire Marshall

Ghost #2: Don McKellar

Regie: Tine van Aerschot

Tekstcorrectie: Oonagh Duckworth

De creatie van de theatervoorstelling *we are not afraid of the dark* is mogelijk gemaakt door steun van De Vlaamse Gemeenschap en De Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie

Tine Van Aerschot (Mechelen, 1961) werkt sinds 1987 in verschillende hoedanigheden (als dramaturg, vormgever, productieleiding, schrijver) met diverse gezelschappen en artiesten (waaronder Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods, Dennis O'Conner, Sarah Chase, Simon Aughtarlony). Vanaf 2002 begint ze haar eigen werk te ontwikkelen. Een reeks e-mails, onder de titel *The whereabouts of Trevor Wells*, is een voorzichtige voorloper van de huidige blog-cultuur. In 2006 volgt de eerste voorstelling. *I have no thoughts and this is one of them* schetst een wereldbeeld opgebouwd met enkel ontkennende zinnen. *Triple Trooper Trevor Trumpet girl*, een mislukt dagboek vol vragen en bedenkingen over alles en niets, gaat in première in 2008. In 2012 maakt Tine *we are not afraid of the dark*, een stuk over overleven en daarom ook over sterven. Haar nieuwe project *Between This*

and That onderzoekt de veranderende betekenissen van woorden en begrippen door vertalingen, her-talingen en verplaatsingen in de tijd. *A Partial Exposure of A Half Decent Elephant* is een eerste resultaat van dit onderzoek.

Toneelwerk

A Partial Exposure of A Half Decent Elephant – 2013

we are not afraid of the dark – 2012

Triple Trooper Trevor Trumpet girl – 2008

I have no thoughts and this is one of them – 2006