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I Saw Seven Shooting Stars
Ethan McAtee

We sit on a log next to our smoldering fire with a baby elephant between us, and we gaze at the stars. We can barely make out any constellations within the sea of glittering lights.

A shooting star streaks across the sky, and you laugh with wonder. It's the first you've ever seen, you tell me. The elephant's trunk wraps around my hand and pulls it toward yours. I wrench it away and point out another shooting star.

The Milky Way is a cloudy road across the heavens, and I follow it with my eyes until I meet the gaze of the elephant. Its trunk points at my pocket, within which is the letter you wrote me that I read over and over until I had its sweet words memorized. I scour the sky for anything to distract myself—there! Two more shooting stars!

I mumble something about how it's one of those famous meteor showers you always see a million articles about on Facebook, and you laugh and say how lucky we are to get to see it together in a place so full of stars.

The elephant nudges my shoulder and nods its head in your direction and I'm tempted to say something cheesy about how I think *you're* a star, but instead I stay silent and watch a fifth brilliant stream of light zip across the horizon. We can't stay here forever. We both have our actual lives to get back to—yours across an ocean and mine in a landlocked state full of corn.

At this point, the elephant has crawled into my lap. Its trunk encircles my head and it turns to face you. As our eyes meet, a summer's worth of unspoken words shoot out of the elephant's trunk and hang in the air between us. I try to gather them, deciding it will be easier to write them down instead of saying them out loud.

You point out yet another shooting star as I finish the note and take a deep breath.

The elephant nuzzles my chin happily as I turn to hand you the note. But as soon as our eyes meet, I lose my resolve. I can't do it.

Instead, I feed the note to the elephant. It writhes in agony. Its pained trumpeting gets weaker and weaker, its motions slower and slower, until it stops.

We sit on a log next to a pit of cooling ashes, a dead elephant between us. A seventh shooting star flits through the sky, existing for briefer than the blink of an eye.