

THE RWENZORI IN AFRICA

By Emily Roper

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SETTING

The common area of an old folks' home.

CHARACTERS

HAROLD- An old man that is always asleep, husband of Eleanor

ELEANOR- A talkative old woman, wife of Harold

CAROL- An old woman with poor hearing, all of her movements and speech are incredibly slow

NANCY- A nurse at an old folks' home, has been there for quite a while and knows the other characters' habits

AT RISE: two chairs and a wheelchair centerstage, slightly turned in on their line with the wheelchair. Both chairs are ornate or comfy. A small table with a broom propped against it is in front and to the side of the chair on the end. HAROLD is asleep in the wheelchair. ELEANOR is reading a book in the chair next to HAROLD. CAROL is in the remaining chair. There is a low table with a simple puzzle in front of CAROL's chair. She is hunched over it, slowly working.

HAROLD

(HAROLD starts yelling and jerking around in his sleep. During the following, ELEANOR slowly rises, walks over to him, and slaps him once with the book, putting him back to a semi-silent sleep.)

Batten down the hatches! Steal the skiffs! The seas they are a' churning! Stay on board! Don't let ye' mates fall over! And get out of the blasted crow's nest, One-Eye! I'm gonna-

ELEANOR

(ELEANOR slowly makes her way back to her seat, mumbling.)

Why'd I ever let him get that stupid boat? Always had a thing for the sea, he did. Wanted to be a captain. Never has some nice, pleasant sea dreams with the sun shining and a clear sky.

(she sits, brightens)

Ohh! Have I ever told you about the time he took us to the island in the lake? He was so happy. Brought a picnic blanket and everything, very sweet if you ask me. We found a pretty little clearing in the middle and everything was laid out just fine. It was so perfect. 'Cept for those bum-biting ants. Soon as they'd come out, we high-tailed our way out of there, but, when we reached the shore, we found he'd let the fricked tether hang free and that boat had-

HAROLD

(HAROLD starts yelling and jerking around in his sleep. During the following, ELEANOR slowly rises, walks over to him, and slaps him once with the book, putting him back to a semi-silent sleep)

Cap the tank. Cap the tank. Turn it until it clicks. Don't disturb aunt Ella when you get back in. There are some crackers behind my seat if you're hungry.

(Pause)

No.

(Pause)

These are the good sounds. All of that new music's cow pies Just li-

ELEANOR

(ELEANOR Slowly makes her way back to her chair and sits in silence. Fidgets, glancing around the room. Her gaze settles on CAROL's wrist.)

Nice bracelet. I like the design. Where did you get it?

CAROL

(CAROL slowly sits up and stares at ELEANOR for a while, as if taking in what she said.)

I don't remember.

(She settles back down to her puzzle)

ELEANOR

Oh. I wish I had one like that. It actually reminds me of a gaudy one my cousin wore to her father's wake. The food they had was just terrible; I would've thought they'd fed us Uncle Earl if he hadn't been staring at me from a few feet away. Never liked that man. Had a bit too much of a temper on him. When we went to the mountains twenty years prior, he complained the whole time. Didn't like the supper I cooked. I'd made my special chili too. Said it was too bland. Poured half the bottle of Tabasco in before he labeled it tolerable. I never cooked for him again. Aunt Mary made all his meals. She always said that he-

HAROLD

(HAROLD mumbles and fidgets in his sleep. Meanwhile ELEANOR gets up to hit him.)

Darned rodents in the attic. I told you that they'd find the pie. You can't store a pie in the attic. You just can't. Squirrels always find any food up there. Then they take their little fangs and-

ELEANOR

(ELEANOR hits HAROLD with the book.)

HAROLD

(changes his mumbles)

Ellie! Ellie, get out of the river! The current's too rough! You'll be pulled under, Ellie! I- I don't want to lose you, Ellie. I can't lose you too. I won't be able to take it. I'll-

(ELEANOR hits HAROLD with the book.)

(changes his mumbles)

Fine. I'll feed the dogs. It'll be fine. You don't have to worry. You'll only be away for a few days. I can take care of the plants too. I have plenty to eat. Don't worry. We'll make it. Don't-

(ELEANOR hits HAROLD with the book. HAROLD (settles back into his quieter state. ELEANOR makes her way to the back of her chair and, with much effort, moves it within hitting distance of HAROLD. She walks around to the front of the chair and sits.)

CAROL

(CAROL stares up at ELEANOR for a long time before speaking)

When's the next meal?

ELEANOR

I don't know.

(turns to scream offstage)

Nancy, when's the next meal?

HAROLD

(mumbles in his sleep)

Gorilla.

NANCY

(NANCY enters, folding a blanket)

Dinner is at five.

CAROL

(nods, thinks, stares at ELEANOR)

What's for dinner?

ELEANOR

(screams toward NANCY)

Nancy, what's for dinner?

HAROLD

(mumbles in his sleep)

Half past ten.

NANCY

Broccoli casserole.

(NANCY places folded blanket on small table and walks with the broom to sweep behind HAROLD)

CAROL

(nods, thinks, stares at ELEANOR)

Good.

(CAROL continues working on her puzzle)

HAROLD

(sadly, mumbles in his sleep)

I want a sandwich.

ELEANOR

(to HAROLD)

We're having casserole.

(to CAROL)

Has anyone ever given you a casserole? We moved into a new neighborhood once and the family down the way brought a squash and sharp cheddar casserole. Said the squash was from their garden, but I wouldn't think anything could grow in that dump behind their house. That thing was so bad that, when I found out they were sick, I graciously brought a special batch of my peanut butter ice cream and broccoli candies. It was only fair-

HAROLD

(mumbles in his sleep)

Just another minute. I'm almost ready. Don't worry about the-

(NANCY pulls out a small towel and begins wiping drool from HAROLD's face)

ELEANOR

(ELEANOR slaps HAROLD with the book and he quiets.)

Harold never was too good at just sitting down; he was quite the workaholic. He's catching up on all his sleep now. Once, when he was working on the roof, his whole leg fell through to the kitchen where I was working. He screamed and screamed and cried like a-

HAROLD

(HAROLD, still asleep, hits ELEANOR; NANCY jumps back, puts away the towel and resumes sweeping)

Kick it out.

ELEANOR

(ELEANOR is taken aback. Quiets. Glances around before staring at CAROL)

How's the puzzle?

CAROL

(CAROL slowly looks up and stares at ELEANOR before responding)

Good.

ELEANOR

What is it of?

CAROL

(stares at ELEANOR)

Mountains.

(CAROL looks back down to continue working.)

ELEANOR

We went to the mountains for the summer thirty-eight years ago. Harold went climbing, but I refused to go along. Said he saw a lot of waterfalls, and he brought back all sorts of leaves and flowers for me to press in a book for my collection. He's so sweet.

HAROLD

(sings in his sleep, slightly dancing to "Lovefool")

Love me, love me, say that you love me, fool me, fool me, go on and-

(ELEANOR hits HAROLD with the book, shutting him up. Continues glancing around the room.)

CAROL

(stares up at ELEANOR for a long time before speaking)

When's dinner?

ELEANOR

I don't know.

(turns to scream towards NANCY)

Nancy, when's dinner?

HAROLD

(mumbles in his sleep)

Midmorning.

NANCY

(sweeps near CAROL)

It will be served at five.

CAROL

(nods, thinks, stares at ELEANOR)

What are we eating?

ELEANOR

(turns to scream offstage)

Nancy, what are we eating?

HAROLD

(mumbles in his sleep)

Noodles.

NANCY

(NANCY replaces broom and wraps blanket around CAROL. NANCY Sweeps behind ELEANOR)

Broccoli casserole.

CAROL

(nods, thinks, stares at ELEANOR)

Good.

(CAROL continues working on her puzzle)

HAROLD

(mumbling in his sleep)

Old creatures sometimes go to sleep, but it's not like normal sleep. They dream about paradise and everything is perfect. And they don't have to worry about any of the problems here anymore because they get to stay there forever. That's what death is.

(ELEANOR reaches out and holds HAROLD's hand. He sleeps peacefully. CAROL slowly pushes blanket off of herself and onto one of NANCY's sweeping piles on the floor. NANCY picks up, shakes out, and folds blanket, setting it back on the table)

HAROLD

(mumbling in his sleep)

Please,

(HAROLD squeezes ELEANOR's hand.)

please don't go. I love you.

ELEANOR

(ELEANOR leans closer to HAROLD and whispers)

Shh. They're sleeping. Be quiet.

HAROLD

(mumbling in his sleep)

Quiet. Yes. They're finally sleeping.

(CAROL finishes the puzzle and stares at it for a while. ELEANOR slowly releases HAROLD's hand. NANCY walks over to the puzzle, takes it apart, puts the pieces in the box and shakes it before handing the box to CAROL; resumes sweeping. CAROL opens the box and starts the puzzle again)

HAROLD

(softly singing in his sleep "Remember Me")

Remember me when the candlelight's are gleaming. Remember me at the close of a long long day. It would be so sweet when all alone I'm dreaming-

(ELEANOR rests her hand on HAROLD's, quieting him. HAROLD mumbles in his sleep)

Say, what do you think about buying a boat? It might be fun. We could go to that island in the lake.

(ELEANOR smiles)

I've always wanted to captain a ship. It might be fun. We could go out on the rough seas and hang on to the boat for our lives and-

ELEANOR

(ELEANOR hits HAROLD with the book and removes her hand. Stares at the puzzle)

What mountains?

CAROL

(slowly looks up at ELEANOR)

The Rwenzori.

ELEANOR

What?

CAROL

The Rwenzori in Africa.

(NANCY finishes sweeping, replaces broom, and pulls the blanket off the table; it unfolds; she exits the side she entered, folding the blanket once again)

HAROLD

(mumbling in his sleep)

Toto. By Toto.

ELEANOR

Toto was in Kansas and OZ, not Africa. We once went to Kansas to see his folks. Never was a huge fan of my in-laws, but they had this little shed in the country. Remember driving out to it and thinking a tornado might suddenly appeared on the horizon and carry me away. Such a dusty place. Really did look monochromatic. Reminded me of-

HAROLD

(mumbling in his sleep)

Under the influence? Me, officer? Why would I-

ELEANOR

(ELEANOR hits HAROLD with the book)

HAROLD

(mumbling in his sleep)

Very perceptive, sir. I happen to have some vodka in the back if you want a sip. We could share, and you wouldn't have to tell your buddies about this little mix up. That sound-

(ELEANOR hits HAROLD again with the book.)

(mumbling in his sleep)

We have to go! No, we don't have time to get the couch; the water is rising. Elle, please, let's go. I'll drive. We need to-

(ELEANOR hits HAROLD again with the book.)

(mumbling in his sleep)

Xylophone!

(ELEANOR sighs and looks around the room.)

(mumbling in his sleep)

Yoga? You want me to do yoga with you? No, I will not join your stupid-

(ELEANOR hits HAROLD again with the book.)

(mumbling in his sleep)

Zebra.

(ELEANOR continues glancing around the room.)

HAROLD

(singing in his sleep)

And I-ei will always love you-

ELEANOR

(ELEANOR slaps HAROLD. Stares at the puzzle. Moves her chair closer to CAROL, back to its original placement.)

They're really coming along.

(ELEANOR sits alone. Glancing about the room she starts reading again)

HAROLD

(HAROLD starts yelling and jerking around in his sleep. During the following, ELEANOR slowly rises and walks over to him.)

Batten down the hatches! Steal the skiffs! The seas they are a' churning! Stay on board! Don't let ye' mates fall over! And get out of the blasted crow's nest, One-Eye! I'm gonna-

(ELEANOR hits HAROLD with the book.)

END OF PLAY