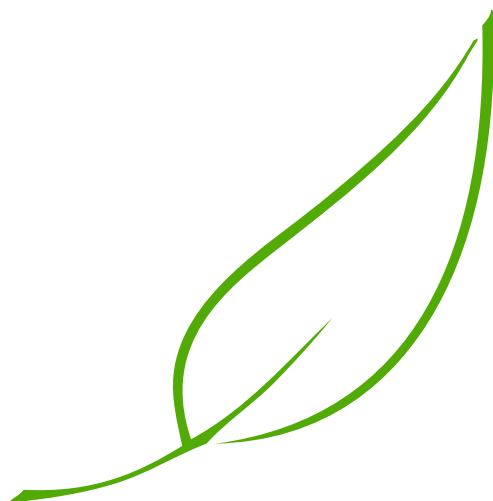


ON THE BRINK

by Robert L. Crowe



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(Alberta, or Albert, is a talker- Donna, or Don, is a sophisticated snob.)

ALBERTA: *(singing some tune)* It's a lovely day today, and whatever you got to do, it's a lovely day to ... *(there is a commotion outside and we hear ...)*

DONNA: I resent this type of treatment! Hey, no need to push. I'm going in! I'm going in!

ALBERTA: Whoops, so much for the single supplement. Looks like I'm getting a roommate.

DONNA: *(brushing self off)* Everybody's so crass these days. There's no one left but me who has any manners. *(sees Alberta)* What are you staring at?

ALBERTA: Hey! Hakuna Matata, baby. I'm starin' at nothin'. Just ... nothin'!

DONNA: Are you calling me a nothing? I seldom resort to violence but I might be able to stir *your* face.

ALBERTA: Whoa! Go over and stick your head in the water trough. Cool down a little.

We're going to be in here together for a long time. They only feed us twice a day and you already burned up a day's ration. If you're not careful you won't even last as long as my last roommate.

DONNA: Is that how you refer to someone locked in this ... this prison? A *roommate*?

(*there is no answer. Alberta hums and piddles about her business. Finally, Donna calms down and says ...*) OK. What happened to your last roommate?

ALBERTA: (*that's close enough to an apology and resumes her chatter.*) It was an aardvark. Had an anxiety attack! That aardvark got so angry about everyone else's business, it finally did her in. She would watch the other cages, listen to *everybody's* conversation and make it a part of her emotional day. She had a lot of problems of her own but, nope, she wouldn't mind her own bees-wax. One day I took an afternoon nap and when I woke up there she was ... all four feet in the air ... stiff as a rhinoceros tooth. It's easy to see why they're an endangered species.

DONNA: Oh. Sorry. (*becoming more friendly*) Look, I know it's not your fault I'm here. It's just that I've never been locked in a cage before and I don't like it one bit. When they captured me they told me it was for my own protection but I don't really believe that ... not for a minute I don't.

ALBERTA: At the risk of tripping your switch again I'd like to point out that that none of us asked to be in these cages. We weren't born in here, ya know. At one time we All walked around ... or crawled around, in some cases ... free as a bird ... or a snake.

DONNA: Or an aardvark.

ALBERTA: Exactly. Now look the world around you. No one is free. All of us in a cage of some type.

DONNA: (*looking out between bars*) What I want to know is how they picked the roommates.

ALBERTA: Thanks.

DONNA: Oh, I wasn't referring to you ... honest. This is all strange to me. I've always had a room of my own. I've never had a roommate and I was just wondering how they decided.

ALBERTA: Not much scientific research goes into it. They try to avoid putting natural enemies together. That's about it.

DONNA: What about dining? I mean ... do I have to eat what you do? Do they feed all of us the same thing?

ALBERTA: Naw, there's some variety. It's not like picking out something you like in the wild but you don't have to go hunting for it, either. Pretty soon you get used to it.

DONNA: (pauses) Do me a favor.

ALBERTA: What.

DONNA: Save me some time. Tell me about yourself so I don't have to spend hours of cross examination.

ALBERTA: Well, I'm a little slow getting started but after my pump is primed I make up for it. A lot of the others jokingly say it was my conversation that really killed the aardvark. But, anyway, I have a delightful sense of humor ... that the aardvark *didn't* appreciate. Try these for instance ... What do you get when you cross an aardvark with a heater? An antheater! Get it? An antheater! Well, the aardvark didn't think that was funny ... and that was one of my better ones. I got a million of 'em.

DONNA: I think I get the picture.

ALBERTA: It got so that the only one who'd laugh at my jokes was the hyena next door ... and that's no compliment. That aardvark had no sense of what's funny. So. Tell me about yourself

DONNA: Where shall I start ... I often give the impression of superiority and I can't help it. Generally, I am superior. I don't talk much. Naturally curious. Like to run ... doesn't look like that's going to come in handy here. You know, I don't want this to sound snobby but ... look at those other cages. Those are really strange looking animals. What kind of zoo is this? Where are all the elephants ... and hippopotamuses?

ALBERTA: Ohh ... hear about the hippo that told his wife she looked like an elephant ... and she never forgot it? Ha, ha! (*waits for laugh ... nothing*) Hmmmmmm. Oh! Oh! You know what the mother buffalo said when her kid left for school? Bison. Ha! That's a good one!



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