

Her Cloudy Sphalerite Brown Eyes

"The ark was his refuge for her, an escape from this world, a heist of her treasures to take with them to paradise."



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It was locust season, and she could tell from the deep rumble slowly approaching the riverbank. The vine bush on the bank stood tall, its branches forming a network of smooth vines with heart-shaped leaves. The locusts came fast, their jaws sharp as axes, tearing the vine down like a chainsaw ripping through a helpless tree. She watched, aghast, as flowers rained to the ground and the bush quickly decimated. Yet, one branch survived. Amidst the colourful fall of petals, a lone red flower remained, protected by a cage of vine stems. Its sweet nectar dripped from the beaten-up flower. She screamed, running toward it, petals flying away in a sudden breeze. Her vision blurred as raindrops gently hit her cheeks like a lullaby. The sounds of the raindrops grew louder, with its rhythmic little taps gradually pulling her from the dream. She slowly reached for the red flower within her fingers' reach. Then, a voice broke through the dream's edges.

'Love... Omugo, you need to be careful when you sleep,' a voice slowly emerged. She looked around for its source.

'I'm sure you wouldn't waste a second picking me up once I fall,' she whispered, yawning.

'I wasn't gone long,' Eru said, turning on the living room lights. Omugo sat by the riverside window, wrapped in her hand-knitted blanket, slightly damp from the rain through the open window.

'Jeeze, you didn't notice the rain?' He removed her blanket and made her more comfortable in her favourite chair.

'I was sleeping. How would I notice?' Omugo whispered. Her eyes echoed the cloudy sunset outside. 'It's duller than usual,' Eru thought, watching her cringe from the cool breeze.

'I'll get you another blanket, love. How are you?' he asked.

'As good as one can be,' she said, turning toward the wind. It touched her relentlessly, making her aware of every inch of her body, like the anticipation of eating a hot meal. It was uncomfortable, but she needed it to feel whole.

Eru shut the window and brought her another blanket. 'What happened? You look angry.'

'Nothing, it was just sudden,' she groaned. 'You always have too much force in everything you do.'

Eru sat in the chair beside her. He took her hands, placed them on his face, and watched her concentrate, tracing his features. 'Why are you stressed?' she asked.

'I had to fetch Billy the goat from the river again,' he stammered, moving away from her touch. 'I need to prepare for rain.' His hurried steps echoed as he shut the door behind him.

'It's impossible to hide anything from her,' Eru thought, walking through the forest. Barks, quacks, and bellows grew louder as he approached the ark, a towering, nearly completed structure. The ark was his refuge for her, an escape from this world, a heist of her treasures to take with them to paradise.

Animals scurried as he opened the door, locking them in their stalls, ensuring they had food.

‘Get in, Wonky. Come on,’ Eru said, slowly approaching the donkey, its eyes watching him like a playful dog's. ‘Please, Wonky, I'm not in the mood today.’ He sighed and flailed his arms, making himself prominent. The donkey ran into the stall, and Eru locked it behind him. ‘You'll have acres of land to run in soon,’ he promised.

‘I'm back, love. Sorry, I had to go back to the farm.’

‘Can you take me to the bedroom? I'm tired,’ Omugo mumbled in the dimly lit room. She stared out the window, longing for the musky, fishy smell of the river. Instead, the smell of manure and sweat filled the air.

‘Of course, my love,’ Eru said, swallowing the words he wanted to say. He helped her up, carefully navigating the messy floor toward the bedroom. Light from the wide window beamed onto the bed. Their worn-out Bible sat between the pillows, open to Genesis. The pages were barely holding on, like plastic strings on a fish. Omugo groaned as Eru helped her under the covers.

He sat beside her, grabbing the Bible. ‘Genesis 6:11: The population of the Earth was corrupt, absolutely spiritually and morally putrid.’ He smiled quietly, glancing at her as she cringed. ‘In God's sight, and the land was filled with violence—’

‘Eru... not tonight, please,’ she whispered, staring at the ceiling. ‘Pick another passage.’

‘This is the only passage we need.’

‘It smells of cow dung and manure. What about one that talks about storks swimming in the river or beavers fighting over a rock?’

‘What do you know about that? You don't even go outside,’ Eru whispered.

'And whose fault is that? Days and days of being cooped up in this aging house. I can't see anything, but I can tell you where everything is.'

'It's too dangerous,' Eru said, playing with the wrinkles on the sheets. 'You know, I had a dream,' Omugo said, sitting up. 'We were in the meadow, the one where we used to play when we were younger, looking for those red flowers. We'd sniff the sweet nectar, fight the bees for it. But it was different this time...' Her voice trembled. 'There was a locust horde that destroyed the bushes. All but one of the flowers was gone, and the last one had almost no nectar.'

Eru took her hand. 'I really don't want to lose that taste,' she whispered.

'I understand, love. I'm sure it's still there now.'

'Wait here. I'll get the donkey,' Eru said, helping Omugo onto the patio seat. She sat with a subtle smile, listening to the fluty whistle of the wind and the chorus of birds. 'Alright, let's go,' Eru said, helping her onto the donkey.

They walked along the riverside, the plip, plip of waterdrops hitting the river. Omugo smiled with her eyes closed, her grey Afro fluttering in the wind. Eru, however, kept looking over his shoulder like an overly cautious deer.

'We should speed up. It's going to rain,' Eru whispered, glancing at her peaceful face.

'Yeah, yeah,' she sighed. 'What do you see, love?'

'I see the riverside, littered with plastic bottles and bags. Decapitated trees scattered on the ground, and smoke fumes intruding on the skyline,' Eru said.

'What about fish? Do you see them?'

He looked at the rushing river. 'I don't know.'

'Let's go check!' she said, trying to get off the donkey. Eru frantically helped her down, guiding her to the riverbank. She smiled widely as he placed her hand in the water.

'Wow, I haven't felt that in so long.'

Eru smiled. 'I had a dream too.'

'What was it about?'

'We were much younger, searching for those red flowers. You should have seen your eyes, glistening like a brown gem. We didn't find the flowers, but we saw osprey chicks in the trees!'

'How? In February?'

'Exactly! We followed the mother osprey to the river and saw other birds—storks, cuckoos—all on a boat, singing a beautiful chorus, waiting for us to board.'

'Did we get on the boat?' she whispered, leaning on him.

'No, but we will,' he said, smiling lightly. Holding a dark, smooth pebble, Omugo lifted her hand from the river. 'Have this, love.'

'Thank you,' Eru whispered, placing it in his pocket. The smoke fumes grew more prominent as they continued down the trail.

'We should see the bush soon—' Eru stopped as they approached the meadow. Sand covered the ground, and the smell of smoke was thick. Tree stumps lined the bank, and clumps of sand formed a barrier.

'What's happening?' Omugo asked. Eru's face went pale.

'It's just rough terrain.'

The donkey began to get restless as he resisted moving to the sandy bank of the river. 'Move, move,' Eru struggled, pulling the donkey backwards towards its back.

'Maybe we should walk—

'No, w-we'll figure it out,' Eru barked

'O-ok'

Eru pushed the donkey from its back, forcing it to move inwards.

'There it is,' Eru whispered. The bushes were gone, with blocks of concrete all around the bank. There was a construction zone behind the concrete wall, with a deafening hiss of metal being sawed off, creating glistening, blinding sparks of fire. The windy climate made the sparks of flame move spontaneously and randomly, with sparks flying as far towards the river close to Omugo. But there was one lone red-flower bush, right in front of the concrete blocks, barely hanging on with malnutrition, dull in colour, limp like a sad toddler, wrinkled like a wise elder.

'Let's go, love.' He helped Omugo off the donkey, holding her hand and the rope attached to it. She resisted getting down, whispering, 'No, no.'

'Love don't worry, I'm here with you this time'

She reluctantly climbed off the donkey as he carefully led her to the bush; he struggled to contain the donkey's restlessness with his other hand. 'Quick,' he said. 'I can't contain it for much longer,' Eru said, leading her to the plant with her hands searching for flowers.

Ok, I just want to grab it—

There was a gust of fire sparks flying towards Omugo. Seeing it, Eru immediately took Omugo's hand, pulling it as she tried to grab the flower. With his other arm, he tried to control the donkey as it tried to frantically escape the banks.

'Calm down,' He cried. But the donkey was too strong for him, leading it to take Eru along down the riverside. Leaving Omugo falling down the river, with the pair separated, under the grumbling of the cloudy sky

Pelting like rock pebbles on concrete, rainfall poured down. It tore tree leaves and made dents into pot-holes.

'Wonky, Wonky,' Eru cried, with the rainfall drowning out his voice. Walking through the heavy rain, he saw the land along the river crumble, entering the body of water. With the sea level increasing, almost reaching him up the bank. Looking up at the cloudy sky, he saw a colony of seagulls, storks and songbirds heading towards the river, all in its loud orchestra of squawks.

'It's time to get on the boat,' He whispered. A subtle, loud wail echoed along the riverside, bringing Eru's frantic run to it.

He saw the donkey struggling to get up the riverside, with his back hoofs touching the intruding water. 'Wonky,' Eru cried, helping the donkey off the riverside.

'Eru, Eru, where are you?! ' a voice cried, bringing both Eru and Wonky running to it. He saw Omugo also struggling to avoid the riverside, with her hugging a nearby tree. 'Eru, is that you? Please help me,' she cried.

He held her hand, pulling her up the bank. 'We have to go, love; it's time.'

Omugo struggled to get to the banks with Eru's hard, frantic hold on her. 'Calm down Eru, I can barely walk.'

'My love, our boat awaits us, we must not waste time.'

Not even giving a chance for a smile, Omugo whispered, 'Can we please go home?'

'Oh, we *are* going home.'

'What do you mean?' She asked, still being manhandled by him.

'Our boat away from the violent, desecrated, and corrupt land'

'Take us home'

'No love—

'Let go of me!' She cried, forcefully removing his hand from her

'I can't see anything!' She cried. 'All I can taste is this bitter, overwhelming rainwater.' She spat out onto the wet, soggy ground. 'I can't even smell anything cause my nose is filled with mucus.' She sat down, head below her thighs, looking towards the ground, feeling the relentless rain hit on her neck. 'I'm blind love. I'm truly blind now.'

She looked up, her sight black as her view of the world, unable to hear Eru's footsteps away from her.

He walked with Wonky, looking for the red flower, hoping it still stood from this plentiful rainfall. The relentless resistance of the donkey brought him to a stop, and he desperately held the rope, making sure it didn't leave. Surveying the area, he caught a glimpse of the red flower plant falling down the riverside, heading towards the body of water. He looked back towards the ark, with the flight of birds still squawking at the structure.

Lightly smiling, he let go of the donkey and ran along the riverside towards the acres of field. Eru ran up the riverside, grabbing the plant. 'We found the flower this time, love, ' he whispered. The red petals were gone, with just the carpels left. He reached into the roots and grabbed the seeds, leaving the rest behind as he ran back to Omugo.

'Omugo... my love,' Eru whispered, walking back to her as she silently watched the rainfall, still sitting on the wet ground.

'You know that I always hated the rain,' Eru said, sitting beside her. 'I really did, cause it always brought out worms, snails and all those little creatures hiding in the ground.'

He looked at Omugo, still watching the river. 'But you always did, with you constantly holding up the worms, chasing me with it everywhere, even in the house.' He chuckled.

'Ever since that day Omugo, that accident replays in my head over and over again, with each glance I look at you. I can't forget how those evil blue-collared devils blinded my love. Looking at you, I constantly tell myself "It can't get worse than this" which brings me to read that verse again. I just wanted to create a promised land for you, with everything you loved: the worms, birds, and even this beaver in the river. Maybe we could have found a paradise for you.'

'How did they get out?' He whispered. He realized these were the beavers he captured to put in the ark. But he was more surprised by how much they were having fun in this circumstance, with their tails fluttering despite the beating raindrops on them and the light, playful sounds they were making, fighting for a pebble.

Eru reached into his pockets, throwing the pebble to the beaver, allowing them to play with their respective pebble.

Omugo chuckled, hearing Eru. 'Shouldn't have placed them in a wooden cubicle, now all the animals would escape.'

'They're definitely gone now,' Eru whispered.

'Then let's get them back together.' Omugo said. 'Maybe not an ark, but a farm will do.'

'Maybe a meadow too,' Eru said, placing the red flower carpel on her hand and watching her cloudy, sphalerite brown eyes water with tears as the now soothing raindrops fall on her, with a sense of déjà vu.