

ROLLING ALONG WITH MOTHER

I was sorry I had pointed out the horses as soon as she said "Where?"

By the time I could answer, the pasture was a quarter mile behind us and she was saying, "I didn't get to see them. Bob speeded up the car and I missed them."

And Bob said, "I did not speed up. Why do you always say that?"

Then she said, "Well, you do seem to go faster every time Rose and I want to look at something."

So I had to say, "No, Mother, I really don't think he does that," in order to keep the tightening muscle in my husband's jaw from becoming an audible attrition of molars.

Presently she said, "I do love horses. Do you still have my painting of the white stallion?"

With the window down I don't always hear her in the rear seat where I have to sit because she has trouble with motion sickness unless she rides up front. If I don't respond, Bob cranks his head around with a frown and says, "Rose, your

mother's talking to you." This time, though, I needed the time while the question was repeated to get my answer together.

"No, Mother. Don't you remember how a friend of mine became so fond of it I broke down and let her have it when she moved? She's the one who found the cat you gave us after it ran away. She went to so much trouble to return it I had to do something as nice for her. I told you about it, remember?"

"Now I do. But when you get to be my age you don't always remember. And of course, nobody remembers me. It's the price you pay for getting old. Nobody remembers you." Her voice trailed off. We were at a stop light and she suddenly said, "I had a hat like that once. Did you see it? That old woman had a hat like my lavender one. They speeded up so much you probably couldn't see it. Everybody always speeds up when you want to look at something."

I was glad she was diverted from the "nobody remembers" bit. I had given myself a stern briefing before we left. I would stay calm, keep Bob calm and make sure she had a pleasant Sunday outing.

We passed a white haired man napping in a deck chair in a small yard. She sighed so I could hear her in the back seat. "Poor old soul." She shook her head. "All alone."

"Maybe he's just resting until his family picks him up for dinner and a drive in the country," I said cheerily.

"What?" After I repeated it, she said, "It's not the same as old friends. I miss my old friends. It's awful to be uprooted from those you've known so long."

"Mother, you stopped speaking to most of your neighbors long before you decided to come to Chicago."

"Well, I still don't see why my only daughter and son-in-law have to live in such a cold dreary place. There must be plenty of nice businesses in Florida where Bob could work."

"You've forgotten we did live there briefly. I was allergic to 27 plants in the neighborhood, Rose was one big sunburn blister, no-see-ums came through the screens to eat us and our shoes molded each time we took them off. Not to mention it was too hot for us," Bob added with finality.

"Speaking of heat, I'm going to have to turn on the air conditioning for awhile. Don't you have a jacket? Rose, did you bring her jacket?"

"What?"

"Roll up the window. I'm turning on the air."

"Oh. Put your jacket on, Mother. It's fallen down between the seat and the door."

"It's chinking a draft," she said. "Hand me that sack

back there, I'll have to--"

"Is your door closed?" Bob reached across her. "I don't feel any draft."

"The sack has peaches in it, Mother."

"Just put them on the seat. I have to stop up this windy place."

"There are 10 pounds of over-ripe peaches in this bag. I can't put 'em on the seat. Some of 'em are starting to ooze." Too late I saw the bag was already wet and my contact encouraged soft fruit to sneak out the bottom. "Oh no! They're yukking up the upholstery."

"Well, I told Bob to get plastic covers. Once you sit down on this stuff it grabs you like flypaper. No wonder you're always too hot."

I was aware of Bob's throbbing redness as he swiveled to look. "You mean peach sticky is getting on my car?" He came to a sudden stop.

In a moment the offending bag was lying in a patch of weeds on the shoulder of the road. I heard him rattling things in the trunk. "There's nothing to wipe it up with but your white slacks," he said loudly.

"Oh! That startled me," Mother said as he slammed the trunk.

The washable slacks I kept there for bicycle riding were

thrust at me menacingly.

"When you're through, let me have them to chink this draft." She was looking over her shoulder then she spied her peaches on the roadside. "Oh! Oh, haven't you got anything I can put them in?"

"Forget it," Bob said. "The sack came completely apart and they're already drawing flies and gnats. Why did you buy rotten ones?"

"Why, they're just perfect! I can't stand those hard mealy things you usually have here. These looked like Georgia peaches. Maybe I can put some in my jacket."

"No way," he said as our tires squealed away from the scene. "I just hope some cop doesn't pull me over for littering."

"They should have had plastic sacks at the fruit stand. I could use one to plug up this air leak. Back home we always had those nice pink plastic bags. As a matter of fact, you ought to get plastic seat covers, Bob."

His voice reminded me of an electronic man from another planet. "Rose's car has plastic seats and you said they were stiff, cold and they smelled funny. That's why we're in my car."

The glow on his neck was radiant. I held my wadded slacks in one hand and tried unsuccessfully to stifle an

overwhelming, snorting, up-from-the-toes spate of laughter with the other. I almost didn't hear her say, "Get in the left lane, Bob. That looks like a peach stand up ahead."

ROLLING ALONG WITH MOTHER

Glenna Holloway

I was sorry I had pointed out the horses as soon as she said "Where?" By the time I had told her, their pasture was behind us half a mile and she was saying "I didn't get to see them. Don speeded up the car and I missed them. Were they pretty?"

And Don said, "I did not speed up. Why do you always say that?"

Then she said, "Well, it does seem that you go faster every time Joan and I want to look at something."

So I had to say, "No, Mother, I really don't think he does that," in order to keep the tightening muscle in my husband's jaw from becoming an audible attrition of molars.

Presently she said, "I do love horses. Do you remember the picture I painted of the two white stallions?"

With the window down I don't always hear her in the rear seat where I have to ride because she has a little trouble with motion sickness unless she sits up front. (If I don't respond, my husband cranks his head around with a frown: "Joan, your mother's talking to you!") As it was all being repeated I had time to get my usual story together before she said, "Do you still have that painting?"

"No, Mother. Remember how a friend of mine became very

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fond of it, and when we moved I broke down and gave it to her? She's the one who found the cat you gave us after it ran away. It was so sweet of her to go to so much trouble to bring it back, I wanted her to have something really nice. I told you about it."

"Of course I remember. But when you get to be my age it's hard to remember some things. And of course, nobody remembers me. It's the price you pay for getting old and useless. Nobody remembers you." Her voice trailed off. We were at a stop light and she suddenly observed, "I had a hat like that once. Did you see it? That old woman going past was wearing a hat like my lavender one. They speeded up so much you probably couldn't see it. Everybody always goes faster when you want to look at something."

I was glad she'd diverted herself from the "nobody remembers" bit. I had given myself a stern briefing before we left. I was going to keep myself calm, keep Don calm, and make sure she had a pleasant outing on this Sunday afternoon.

We passed a white-haired man in a deck chair in his yard. He appeared to be napping in the sun. "Nobody remembers you when you get old and useless. They just desert you." She sighed so I could hear it in the back seat. "Poor old soul." She shook her head.

"Maybe he was just resting until his family picks him up for dinner and a drive in the country," I said cheerily.

"What?" After I repeated it, she said, "It's not the same as old friends. I miss all my old friends. It's awful to be uprooted from those you've known so long."

"Mother, there wasn't anyone left you could stand. You stopped speaking to most of your neighbors years ago and wanted to move long before you decided to come up here."

"I just don't see why my only daughter and son-in-law have to live in such a cold rainy place. There must be plenty of nice businesses in Florida where Don could work."

"We aren't suited for Florida. You know we lived there once. I was allergic to 32 plants in the vicinity, Joan was one big sunburn blister, our shoes molded the moment we took them off, no-see-ums came through the screens and fed on us, we both got jellyfish infections at the beach, the humidity bothered us and we missed the seasons," Don added with finality. "Speaking of heat, I'm going to have to turn on the air conditioning for a few minutes. Don't you have a jacket? Joan, did you bring her jacket?"

"What?"

"Roll up your window. I'm turning on the air."

"Oh. Put your jacket on, Mother. It's down between the seat and the door."

"Well, it's chinking up a draft. Hand me that sack back there, I'll have to—"

"Is your door closed?" Don reached across her. "I don't feel any draft."

"The sack has peaches in it, Mother."

"Just lay them on the seat. I have to stop up this windy place."

"There are ten pounds of over-ripe peaches in this bag. I can't put 'em on the seat, some of 'em are oozing." Too late I saw the bag was already wet and my contact with it encouraged soft fruit to roll out the bottom. "Oh no! They're yucking all over the upholstery."

"Well, I told Don to get plastic covers. You can't even move

on this stuff. Once you sit down it grabs you like flypaper. No wonder you're always hot."

I was aware of Don's throbbing redness as he swiveled to look. "You mean some sticky mess is getting on my car?!" He came to a stop. In a moment the offending bag was lying on its side in a patch of weeds cracking the concrete by the road. I heard him rattling things in the trunk. "There's nothing to wipe it up with but your old white slacks," he announced.

"Oh! That startled me," Mother said when the trunk lid slammed. The slacks were thrust at me menacingly.

"When you get through, let me have them to chink this draft." She was looking over her shoulder, then she spied her peaches in the gutter. "Oh! Haven't you got anything to put them in?"

"Forget it," Don growled. "The sack came completely apart and they're already drawing flies and gnats. Why'd you hafta buy rotten ones?"

"Why, they're just perfect. I can't stand those hard mealy things you get shipped way up here for the stores. These looked like Florida peaches. Maybe I can put some in my jacket."

"No way," he said as our tires squealed away from the curb. "I just hope some cop doesn't pull me over for littering!"

"They should have had nice plastic sacks at that fruit stand. I could use one to plug up this air leak. Back home we always had those nice pink plastic bags. As a matter of fact, you ought to get plastic seat covers, Don."

His voice was sort of like those electronic men from other planets. "Joan's car has plastic seats and you said they were stiff, cold and they smelled funny. That's why we're in my car. And now mine will always smell like rotten peaches."

The glow on Don's neck was radiant. I held my wadded, red-olent slacks in one hand and tried unsuccessfully to stifle an overwhelming, snorting, up-from-the-toes spate of laughter with the other. I almost didn't hear her say, "Get in the left lane, Don. That looks like a peach stand up ahead."

Glenna Holloway
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Naperville, IL 60565

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1,000 wds.

Michigan Rolling along

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