

The Call of Africa

by Harry McNabb

Choose your own adventure story:

1. Stay in bed
2. Get up and smoke a cigarette
3. Walk to the nearby convenience store for an energy drink

Andrew hopped out of bed and went outside with a cigarette crushed between his ring and index fingers. He opened the door, and what a sight he saw!

There were toucans and monkeys and a lush blanket of elephant ears and tall trees. This was not Andrew's home. Somehow, in the middle of the night, Andrew had been transported to a tropical African forest. What a gyp.

The forest was calling Andrew, but he thought it would be better if he just went back to option 1, stay in bed.

His bed was comfortable and normal and not of Africa. This bed was of the United States of America and therefore one of the best beds in the world.

He laid his head back onto the pillow of his American bed and attempted to dream. His dream was full of giant demon faces chewing up screaming human beings. It was like an interactive Bosch painting made by the creators of *Saw*. It was a shitty dream, but it was better than being in the middle of the African jungle.

As if by magic, Andrew woke up to find that he was no longer in Africa but in Denton, Texas.

"Inception," he thought. "It must have been a dream."

Now it was time to really get started on the day. He decided to take option 3 and go to the corner store for an energy drink. He pulled on clothes and stuck his bare feet in a pair of old running shoes and headed out into the windy winter sunshine.

Andrew's fat body klumped its way down the street. Walking was very tiring for Andrew. He needed one of those Rascal scooters that old people have.

"I am fat," thought Andrew, "but at least I'm not in the middle of the African jungle."

A street artist was spray-painting a wall. It said, "Option 4." Andrew was intrigued.

"Hey man, so what is option 4?"

"Call a close friend," he said.

"Huh," said Andrew. "I might do that."

Andrew decided to go to option 4 instead. He might as well call a friend. He opened his phone. Who to call? There were so many names, and he wasn't comfortable with most of his contacts. Finally, he found someone he was comfortable with. His dearest mommy.

"Dearest mommy! How are you?"

"Busy, Andrew, what do you want?"

"Oh nothing, just wanted to see how you were emotionally?"

"I'm doing fine emotionally. I've been building canoes a lot—in fact, so much that my emotions don't really exist for me. It's just canoe, canoe, canoe."

"Aw, Mom, you never get a break."

"I don't have a break, because I don't want breaks. I just want to carve out canoes, sand, polish them, and sell them."

"Oh well, I'm glad you're having fun."

"Listen, Andrew, I've gotta go. I've got this canoe I'm working on."

"Ok," said Andrew, "enjoy doing your canoes. By the way, you know we have family therapy tomorrow at 11 a.m."

"I remember; I'll be there."

Andrew wished his mom cared more about him than canoes. She was one of those people who got obsessed easily. In the 90s it was swimming. In the early 2000s it was motorcycles. In the late 2000s it was chess. And now it was canoes.

Andrew walked back to his apartment feeling glum.

Choose your own adventure:

1. Go back to bed
2. Clean
3. Watch TV

Andrew decided to clean. That would at least be productive and make him feel better in some small way. He cleaned by listening to a 90s techno artist called Juno Reactor. He found a few lighters underneath the couch cushions and a nice wineglass he had lost ages ago. Cleaning was drudgery, but it was better than being in Africa.

His night was filled with dreams of demons eating the faces off of crying humans. He woke up crying. Why couldn't he just sleep like normal people. His sleep life was truly the cats pajamas in reverse.

The next day, his mother picked him up in the car, irritated that she had to do something that didn't involve canoes. Luckily the therapist was right up the road.

"He can't just do his own thing," said Andrew's mom to the therapist. "I'm trying to make beautiful canoes, and he's just lying in bed smoking pot and wondering why his life—"

"Mom! I don't do drugs—I'm just depressed. Why would you even say that?"

Choose your own adventure story:

1. Really lay into mom
2. Ask the therapist to allay the situation
3. Tell the therapist you went to Africa for five minutes

"This morning I went to Africa for five minutes," said Andrew.

"What," said his mother. "Are you schizophrenic or something?"

"Mom, schizophrenia doesn't work that way."

“If I might interrupt,” said the therapist. “I think your showing up in Africa is a symptom of a disease that scientists are just beginning to understand.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean it’s global displacement disorder. Your body doesn’t move, but your . . . have you heard of astral projection?”

“Yeah, but I thought it was just something pretentious people did to show everyone how enlightened they are.”

“Well, we’ve found that some people have the power to do it and not always intentionally.”

“Well, this is great,” said Andrew’s mother, rummaging in her purse for lip balm. “My son has this weird astral projection thing, but what I’m really concerned about is him giving me space. It’s not normal for a twenty-four-year-old man to call his mother every day. I’ve got a big contract for seven canoes, and I can’t be trying to raise a grown adult. He eats in my house, he sleeps in my house, he’s got it covered. I wish he’d stop coming over to ask me what I’m doing when I’m in the zone.”

“I think I can help you,” said the therapist. He pulled out a piece of paper from his notebook and brandished it in front of Andrew and his mother. “This is called a cognitive behavioral therapy worksheet.”

Choose your own adventure story:

1. Punch doctor in the face
2. Punch doctor in the face
3. Leave

“I’m out,” said Andrew. He walked out of the office and plonked down in the waiting room. He picked up a *People* magazine and studied the photographs. One photograph depicted Selena Gomez. She was so hot. Even though she was in her mid-twenties, she could definitely pass for eighteen.

He read the magazine until his mother came out, livid and holding a fistful of cognitive behavioral worksheets.

“These are for you,” she said abruptly, dumping the crumpled papers on his lap. “Doctor Wheeler said you should do one of these every time

you feel the need to interrupt me while I'm working. He also said that he thinks you're regressing."

"I would agree with that," said Andrew. "I'll totally do these worksheets, and you won't hear from me again."

Andrew got home and went to bed. He couldn't sleep, but the covers were warm like the hug of a giant fat girl.

Why did he even get up.

Andrew slept for twelve hours, and when he woke up, he was in Africa again.

"Not again," he said, putting his face in his hands.

Africa was stupid and dangerous. What was he gonna do?

Choose your own adventure:

1. Go back to bed
2. Clean more
3. Explore Africa

Andrew went back to bed and slept for an hour. Then he cleaned his room. Then he went outside. The toucans and monkeys screeched with wild abandon. It was time to explore. It couldn't make things any worse, could it?