

LIONS, RACISM AND A DREAM.



I find myself climbing over a tall barbed wire fence. The fence was well-manned, an indication that it was one of those which enclose White-owned farms here in South Africa. After struggling to over that high fence, I finally landed on the other side. Indeed it was a White-owned farm because in addition to a neatly kept high fence, the thick, dense bush and tall grass also indicated that it was a privately-owned farm. Such privately-owned large farms are not the same as the communally Black-owned pieces of land which are overcrowded, eroded, deforested with little animals, grass and trees which are all depleted by people who live on cramped space together with their livestock and pets.

Actually, I don't know what brought me where I was. And I even don't know what prompted me to cross that high fence into that seemingly White-owned farm with thick and dense bush with such tall grass. I then moved deeper and deeper into the farm. I was not aware if the farm was for livestock breeding or a wildlife camp. I also did not know if there were dangerous animals roaming in that farm, but I kept on

penetrating deeper into the bush. With no paths, I had to negotiate my way by sometimes crawling under drooping branches of thorny trees.

After negotiating my penetration into the dense bush for almost an hour, I finally came to a less dense place with fewer trees and shorter grass. That was where I then saw a huge, grey old building which appeared abandoned. The building appeared empty and isolated right in the middle of the bush. I don't know what told me to enter the old grey building, but I just went through one of the wide entrances with neither door nor frames. After entering into that wide entrance, I entered into a section of the grey old building with very tall walls with roof. On the sides of the tall walls there were wooden rungs built like a ladder going high up the tall walls. I started climbing those steps going up the high wall. At the end of those steps – high up there – there was a vantage point from where I could see most parts of that farm from the top. Still clinging on the rungs and leaning against the high wall, I began to look at all sides of that heavily overgrown and densely bushed farm.

Just a few metres from where the old grey building was standing, from the top vantage point where I was perched, I saw a lion chasing after its soft target. This soft prey was a donkey. The lion did not struggle too much to get its weak prey. At once the lion grabbed that meek donkey by the neck and rolled it on the ground. Again, a few metres away, another lion emerged chasing yet another donkey. That second lion grabbed the donkey with its paws and the donkey fell to the ground. The lion released its prey for a while, but pounced on it once again as it tried to escape. The two lions which were a few metres apart, began to feast on their soft targets separately.

I was still perched on the highest rungs on the sides of the walls of that old grey building and now I was very scared. What really scared me was the sight of those prowling lions. I started to realise that that densely bushed farm was a wildlife farm which was infested with dangerous beasts such as those lions. I began to imagine how I went through such a densely bushed forest with such dangerous animals without being attacked! The thought that I had just walked through that dangerous forest, made my knees weak, and I nearly fell from the rungs I was clinging on top of that old grey house.

After being overwhelmed and terrified by the danger which was surrounding me in the form of lions, I began to slowly climb down the steps. I was still scared. I was also still trying to think about the two dramatic scenes I have just witnessed – of the lions and their donkey preys. I was thinking about how soft, weak targets donkeys made their way into that dangerous jungle in which only the strong survived. I also imagined myself to have been a soft, weak target who ventured into that jungle, and I wondered how I was going to survive. About the donkeys, I only thought that they were just thrown into the lions' farm as a form of feeding the kings of the jungle. I just thought that was how the lions were routinely fed.

I was still slowly and thoughtfully descending the wooden steps when somewhere halfway I saw a White young man through one of the window-like hole on that grey, old building. Through that window-like opening with no glass panes, I could only see that young White man from the head down to the chest. I did not know whether to be

happy, to be sad or to be scared. Because I was still very scared of the lions I had just seen from the top vantage, I just felt happy and scared at the same time. I was happy because here was a human being like myself, even if he was White, at least I will be saved from the lions which I was so afraid of. However, I was also scared of that human being – that White young White man – because obviously he was going to take me to task about how I got into his farm, if that was his farm or his parents'. I find myself between the rock and a hard place – between the vicious lion and a potentially harsh, racist wrath of the White man.

When I first set my eyes on the young White man through that window-like opening, he was still talking on something like a cellular phone or a walkman phone. I was still on the middle steps and I decided to take the initiative. I put up a brave face and waved my left hand to him while my right hand was clinging on the wall as I was descending. He looked at me but he continued to talk on his earpiece gadget. His face was neutral as it did not show if he was surprised, angry or happy to suddenly see something like me descending from the top of that old grey structure in the middle of the lion-infested jungle.

Eventually, I touched on the last lower rung and then I was on the ground. I was determined to move straight to the White young man before he could come to me. I did not want to look like guilty although I knew that I was going to have a tough task of explaining how I came into there. But at least, with a human being in sight, the lion scare was no longer there, at least for now. Suddenly, when I was approaching to where that young White man was standing, there was a group of his mates, including

about two Black young men. I was approaching with my head up, putting up a brave face, at the same time reading any signal from those White and Black young men. From how I read the situation, I saw the White young men very relaxed, looking very prepared to listen to my story. On the contrary, I saw the Black gentlemen ready to deal with me the harsh way. At least that was what I felt inside me as I approached them.

When I greeted the group, the White guys politely greeted me in return, and before I could utter any word after greetings, one Black guy – Black like me – grabbed me by the collar and dragged me a few yards from the rest of the group. As he was pulling me, he was swearing, and telling me that I should tell the truth as to how I got into that farm. At once he gave me a hot clap on my cheek and I almost became dizzy as I saw the stars. The other guys were just looking. As I tried to recover from my dizziness, I was almost surrounded by a group of all Black young men and boys, some of them were very small. The White young men I had seen earlier were now far outnumbered and overwhelmed by the score of Black boys who had almost surrounded me.

All those who had surrounded me were hurling insults at me and I did not know to which one I had to listen. I was trying very hard to explain, and in fact there was very little I could explain because in fact, I did not have a story which they would believe. But I still tried to explain. One of the Black guys told everybody to shut up so that I could be given chance to explain myself. I knew, I had no story, but I tried to explain. That Black guy then asked me something like, “Through which reception area did you

get here, was it Makombi?" Thinking that was going to help me out, I just said, "Yes!" Now, that guy whom I thought was going to ease my predicament with lead questions, asked, "In which year was that?" Then, instead of being helped out with lead questions, the latter question really got me completely lost. I then scratched my head, thinking, "in which year?"

The mob of Black boys became impatient with me as I was struggling to explain myself. They immediately pounced on me, grabbed me and lifted me high on their arms. Some of them grabbed my legs and arms and I was so frightened that they were going to pull to the opposite directions and tear me apart. At that time my sight was blocked, I don't know with what. I also did not know where the White guys I saw earlier disappeared to. But when I thought to myself, I suspected that all those Black boys who were now carrying me on their arms, running and chanting, were only the farm labourers who were eager to please their White masters by torturing their fellow Black who was found illegally inside that wildlife or lion breeding farm.

The mob was still running with me on their arms. I could hear their chants and their heavy stamping on the ground that they were running. But I could not tell where they were going because my sight was still blocked. What I knew was that they knew where they were going and it was not for the first time that they were going there. And that what they were going to do there was not for the first time they were doing. That thought gave me a terrible scare because I suddenly thought of the lions. I thought about those lions which were fed with soft, weak preys – the donkeys. I suddenly thought that that mob was going to feed those lions with yet another soft, weak prey

– this time, me. I was shit scared. But there was nothing I could do because I was in the tight hands of the mob and my view was also blocked.

At the end I felt the mob slowing down their steps. They then lifted me higher and higher. With my ribs I could feel that they were putting me across a fence or something like that. Then, at once, I was released from the mob's hands as I was thrown down from a very high position. With my sight still blocked, I hit the ground with my back. My hips were hurt. At once, I heard the roar of two lions next to my ears and I also felt the softness of the paws of the lions against my face. Now I knew that I have been thrown to the lions as their food. I knew that that was my end. I struggled to open my eyes. At last, I opened my eyes, and I only realised that I was dreaming. I realised that I was at my house, on my bed. I switched on my headboard lamp and I looked at my round, white wall watch with a brown wooden frame, and the time was something past five a.m.

I then began to think so deeply about that terrible dream. I thought very hard, replaying it once again in my mind. Along the way, I was asking myself all sorts of questions. The most important question I asked myself when analysing that dream was that, “why do I dream about fear of lions two days in a row”. In fact, the night before that one I dreamt of myself, my younger brother and my aunt's son, being scared by a lion. That dream was not as clear as the latter one, but I saw the lion which woke up and scared the three of us. Now, again was that dream of me jumping into a lion infested jungle, ending up being thrown into the lion's den by a mob of Black farm workers trying to impress the young White guys who were probably the

children of their White bosses. Whatever the interpretation of that dream, it was just lions, racism and a dream. A dream after all is just a dream, isn't it?