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Opening extract from

The Lion Who Stole My Arm

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One day, lion… he told it. *One day soon I will come and get you.*

He was desperate to get back to the village, afraid his father might hunt the lion without him. But his arm healed fast and in a few days he was home. Pedru wanted to pick up his spear and bedroll and set off at once to hunt his lion. But that wasn't how it turned out.

Everybody made a big fuss of him, sure. His mother, Adalia, hugged him so tightly that he thought his other arm might break. His two little sisters, Zibi and Aji, climbed all over him asking questions until Issa told them to stop. The whole village came by to take a look at him, prodded and poked him like a goat roasting on the fire, and then talked and talked about lions, over his head. Mr Inroga's cousin had been killed by one, just a couple of rainy seasons ago.

"He went out to chase bush pigs from his crops," Mr Inroga said, shaking his head, "and he never came back."

Mamma Ramina had been cycling home one day and a lioness and her cub had chased her down the road.

"She was so close!" Mamma Ramina said, fanning her face at the memory of her escape, "but I pedalled too quick for her!"

Most horrible of all was Mamma Lago's story. When she was little, a lion had burst through the straw roof of her parents' hut and taken her brother. It was a long time ago now and still Mamma Lago shed tears whenever she spoke about it.

Everyone agreed that lions were very, very bad. Leopards and hyenas would take your goats or chickens; crocodiles would take your leg, but somehow that was just a part of the way things were, like the rains and the sun. Lions were different. Lions made people afraid and angry. And now there was Pedru's lion that might come back and take a person for its dinner. The whole village buzzed with worry.

Pedru sat still, listening, wanting all the talk to stop. He wanted some action instead, and hoped

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that he would get it when old Mr Massingue, the village head man, came along. His voice was like dry leaves rustling in a wind, so quiet that people had to lean in close to hear him.

"Issa Bubacali is our finest hunter," Mr Massingue announced quietly. "If this lion must be killed to keep our village safe, he will be the man for the task."

Everyone nodded gravely at Pedru's father. They all knew it was a great and dangerous duty to hunt a lion.

"What is your opinion, Issa Bubacali?" Mr Massingue went on. "Must this lion be hunted and killed?"

Pedru's heart leapt. His father would hunt the lion and Pedru would go with him!

But Issa shook his head. "I followed the creature's tracks," he said. "They lead far away from the village. They did not come back. I searched for two whole days and found no sign."

There were exclamations of relief all round, but Mr Massingue held up his hand. "We must remain vigilant," he said. "Not even a skilled tracker such as Issa Bubacali can predict what a lion may do. But I think, for now, there is nothing to be gained from a lion hunt."

And that was that. There would be no lion hunt. Everyone knew the rains were coming and soon there would be lots of work to do in the fields. There just wasn't time to hunt a lion that had stolen the arm of an unimportant little boy.

Pedru tried to swallow his disappointment, but it stuck fast in his throat like a big lump of gristle. He went to bed without speaking to anyone. When he lay down to sleep, he pursued the lion through his dreams.

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