

**THE
LION WHO STOLE MY
ARM**

For Colleen Begg

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Chapter One

Pedru had been fishing with his best friends, Samuel and Samuel's big brother Enzi. They'd chosen a spot where the river rushed over rocks and was clear enough to see fish underwater and shallow enough to keep them safe from crocodiles. They'd ridden the currents between the boulders

and chased fish into nets stretched between their hands, sometimes holding fish in their mouths because two hands were not enough to hold onto their nets and their catch.

"If I had a mouth as big as yours," Pedru teased Enzi, "I'd have twice as many fish."

Enzi grinned, showing just how wide his mouth could stretch. "I think I could swallow a crocodile!" he laughed.

"My mouth is small," said Samuel, "and I still caught more fish than you, Pedru!"

By the time the boys had tied their fish onto sticks to carry home, the sun was already dipping behind the trees.

"We're going to have to hurry," Pedru said. The others nodded. They knew it was a long way back and it could be dark before they reached the village. Of course, they were brave boys and not afraid of the dangers of night-time in the bush: the hippos grazing on the bank who will bite you in two if you disturb their supper; the leopards and lions

stalking you, quieter than breath; the hyenas that will crack your bones; the crocodiles that will drag you under the water. No, what worried the boys much more was how angry their mothers would be if they were late back. So they hurried along the path and didn't speak until they saw the tops of the village huts over the tall grass.

"We're late," said Samuel. "I can smell the cooking fires already."



“Don’t worry,” Enzi replied, putting his hand on his brother’s shoulder. “We’ve caught so many fish that Mamma will be too busy cooking to be angry.”

Enzi was right. He and Samuel had caught more than thirty fish between them. Pedru looked at the fish on his stick: ten. Ten small fishes were not going to keep him out of trouble for being late home, but ten fish and a fat guineafowl might.

Pedru stopped walking. “You go,” he told his friends. “I’m going to see if my snares have caught anything.”

Before the brothers had time to remind their friend that dusk is not a good time to be creeping about in the long bush on your own, Pedru was gone.

Something had got to the snares before him. Freshly scattered guineafowl feathers dotted the clearing; whatever had eaten the birds could still be close by. Pedru scanned the ground for tracks. There, framed by the criss-cross of bird feet was a single print: four oval toes arranged like petals around a central pad, no claw marks. Cat, big cat.

Leopard, he told himself. *A leopard would take the birds from the snares and slip away. Not a lion. Not a lion that might be waiting here for a bigger meal.* The hair on Pedru’s neck stood on end and his heart pounded. Run! Run! He must run away right now! He streaked through the grass and bushes, ignoring the thorns that tore at his skin. Sweating and panting, he reached the path with the sound of voices up ahead and the smell of fires. He leant on his knees to get his breath, laughing a little at himself for being so scared, relieved at being safe again.

Thwack! Pedru’s legs were punched from under him. His body hit the ground and the air was knocked out of his lungs. For a moment, he didn’t hear or see anything. When his eyes and ears worked again, he found he was being dragged along on his back, by his outstretched right arm. He twisted round to see what could be holding him, and looked straight into the face of a lion.

He went numb. Time slowed down. Sounds

drained from the world, leaving a bowl of silence, with Pedru and the lion at the bottom of it.

Pedru stared at the lion. It was so close that even in the fading light he could see the spotted lines on its snout where its whiskers sprouted, the deep notch on its left ear and the scraggy tufts of mane sprouting on its neck. He could smell its breath, hot and meaty, and feel where its teeth had pierced his arm and crushed the bone, although he was too afraid to feel any pain.

The lion was bumping his body back along the path, dragging him into the long grass. *As soon as it feels safe, hidden in the bush*, Pedru said to himself, *it will eat me*. Suddenly, he stopped feeling numb and began to be very angry. This lion was not going to put an end to him!

The stick with the fish still tied to it was gripped in his left hand. He swung it with all his strength and hit the lion hard on the head. He felt the blow strike and when he looked at the lion, it had a cut between its ears. Pedru hit it again, and for a moment it

looked right at him, its golden eyes hot like the sun. Then it snarled and ran away, and Pedru saw that it had taken his arm.