

CHAPTER 7

THE LIONESSES

- THE GENEROUS ONE

2 Corinthians 9:7 – Each one should give – not with regret or out of a sense of duty; for God loves the one who gives gladly. (Good News Bible)

In the distance they could see a small rocky outcrop. Next to it was an umbrella tree growing in the sandy soil. The correct name for this tree is the Umbrella Thorn Acacia, which is a very common tree in the African grasslands. It spreads at the top like an umbrella, and provides good shade for animals.

No one noticed any signs of life, apart from the tree, but Dad had an idea that this would be just the right place for lions. He slowed down and told everyone to take a careful look, just in case.

It seemed as if there was nothing to be seen, until something moved. Now they could focus their eyes more clearly. The rocks were surrounded by some lionesses and their cubs, sleeping in the sun. Their yellow sandy coats blended perfectly with the landscape. It wasn't until one of them got up and stretched that they could see the whole family. As well as the lionesses and cubs there were two adult males, with large shaggy manes.

"Why are there only two male lions?" asked Samson.

"Each of these lions will have their own group of females," explained Dad. "Any more and the pride numbers would become too big. There is great competition between the males to be leaders. When a lion gets old, a younger stronger lion will come along and challenge him for his group of females. If the older lion loses the fight, he goes off to join a group of male lions who have also lost their place in the pride. They spend the rest of their lives roaming around together. It's a hard life for them because it's the females who are the best hunters. Without females to catch food for them they often go hungry."

“It’s a hard life for the females too,” Dad continued. “As well as rearing the cubs, they have to hunt to get food for the male lion and the cubs. After a kill they may be hungry, but they don’t eat straight away. The adult males always eat first. The lionesses are hard workers and give their time and energy for the survival of the pride. We could say that the lionesses are the givers. They give what they have to others. God wants His people to be givers too. The Bible says that God loves a cheerful giver. People sometimes say, ‘I’ve worked hard for what I’ve got, so I’m keeping it all to myself.’ But God wants us to be generous. We can help so many people that way. We can give money to those in need, and that’s important, but God wants us to give more than just money. He wants us to give our love, our time and our effort. Everyone can work for God, even children.”

They left the lion pride behind, and Samson wondered whether they would see any other big cats. Dad told them about the other cats that lived in the game reserve.

“Other cats do live here,” he said, “although it’s unlikely that we will see them. There are not many leopards and cheetahs left now. Unfortunately they were hunted for their skins years ago. The cheetah is the world’s fastest mammal, capable of sprinting at speeds as high as 100 km hour, although the average speed is more like 45 km per hour. The cheetah is different from the leopard in that it doesn’t attack humans, even when cornered. A leopard however, can be very dangerous.”

In the distance they could see the gates of the camping area. As they reached the gates the tyres rumbled over the metal grid. The gates opened and they drove through and traveled along the road to a little group of round African huts. The caretaker pointed out their hut for the night and at last the Land Rover came to a stop. A chance to stretch their legs at last!

The little hut was quite comfortable. It had walls made of baked mud and a grass roof. There was a grass mat on the floor, four beds, two small open windows without glass and a wooden door. The children laid out their sleeping bags, drank some water and played outside for a while before the evening meal. They took turns with the skipping rope that Serena had brought along. Then they played with Samson’s ball.

Outside the hut Mum prepared some corn meal on a little gas stove. She opened some tins of salted meat and then unwrapped some sticks of dried meat. These meat sticks, which everyone chewed on like toffee, were a special treat. To finish the meal there were some bananas.

It was now six o'clock and as they sat outside the hut eating their meal they could see the huge sun sinking rapidly in the west. The colours of orange and crimson soon faded and darkness started to fall quickly, as it does in these parts of Africa. The family quickly cleaned up the dinner things and went into their hut.

“Off to bed now you two,” said Mum. “We have a very big day tomorrow and will have to get up very early.

The air was cool now that the sun had gone down. The children lay in bed listening to the sounds of the African night. They heard birds calling to each other, probably warning each other that it was time for the hunt to begin. The children remembered that lions do most of their hunting at night. They could hear the grunting and growling sounds of lions outside the camp. But they were not afraid because Dad had assured them that the electric fence surrounding the camp kept them safe. In a few moments they were asleep and knew nothing more until the sound of Mum's voice at 5.30 the next morning.

“Quickly Samson and Serena. Come and get your porridge. We have to leave soon. Dad's got to get to the northern gate this morning to do his work”

They dressed quickly and rolled up their sleeping bags. After a quick bowl of mealie porridge they were in the Land Rover and all set for another day's adventure.

LION FACTS

- The lion is the biggest cat in the world.
- Only two other types of big cats live in Africa: the leopard and the cheetah.
- A male lion is about 1.2 metres high, from the ground to the top of its shoulder.
- A male lion can weigh between 150 and 250 kg. A lioness can weigh between 120 and 182 kg.
- A group of lions, lionesses and cubs living together is called a pride. A pride can consist of two to four adult male lions, up to 10 females, their cubs and some young lions that are not yet full grown.
- Members of a pride recognize each other by their smells.
- Lions fight with each other to be the leader of a pride. The lion's mane protects him during fights.
- Each pride has its own territory that may be 50 square kilometers.
- Lions mark their territory by their scent.
- Lionesses do the hunting. It is difficult and dangerous. They may be kicked by the hooves of animals. They might catch an animal only once in every five times they hunt.
- Male lions that no longer live with the pride group together and try to catch their own food. They are not as good at hunting as the lionesses. They often feed on dead animals or steal food.
- Lions need between 5 and 10 kg. of meat every day.
- When lionesses are stalking their prey they need to walk quietly. The pads on the soles of their feet soften the sounds of their footsteps.
- Lions have four claws on their back feet which are pulled in when they are not being used. Lions use their claws to grip their prey or as a weapon for fighting. They also use them as a comb for grooming.
- A lion's jaws are short. This gives the lion a powerful bite.
- Lions have large teeth. Their long canine teeth hold and kill prey.
- The lion's tongue is rough so it can scrape meat off bones.
- Lions see more clearly at night. They can see for a longer distance than humans can.
- Lions sleep for up to 19 hours a day. They are active at night.

- Lions roar to find out where other lions are, and to announce to other lions that this is their territory.
- A lioness gives birth to 2 to 4 cubs. She gives birth in a hidden spot.
- Newborn cubs are in danger of being taken by hyenas or leopards when their mother goes hunting. Usually only half the cubs in a litter live to become adults.

