



Africa - The Lion Mountains

Takouhi Minassian

Magic

Ordered in a row, like soldiers lined up, the trees were waiting for the command of the 'General,' their powerful and invincible 'General' – The Weather. The day was as long as it was supposed to be the night. Equinox on the Island. 'Ocean Wind' was the command of the 'General.' Leaves in beautiful colours were flying, but the tree-soldiers stood on guard and did not move. The streets were covered with leaves – yellow, orange, like old gold, semi-brown...

The noise of the cars, the trampling of the trains, the ringing of the church-bells – all of them were racing. Heavy torrential rain made people run, jump over puddles, people were wandering in a hurry to find a roof, under which to hide.

But no, the 'General' issued its fierce command. The sky roared and a bunch of light rays scattered in the air. It was September 22; the airport was crowded, a lot of flights delayed due to a strong wind.

Lora had held her mother's hand firmly and carried her rucksack on her back.

– Mom, will we be able to take off? Everyone's waiting for us in Africa, my dad, and my friends.

– Yes, Lora, do not get away from me. Let's have a hot chocolate drink while we are waiting for our flight.

Monotonous, almost no sound, the big Boeing was flying, and Lora listened to her favourite songs with earphones when screening on the plane was showing National Geographic programme. It was her beloved Sir David Attenborough. His voice, soft and fascinating, narrated about the mammoths and chimpanzees in Africa.

Lora absorbed the information with such excitement, her eyes jumped from the screen over her mother's face,

on the faces of the passengers and again on the screen. The 'General' called, the plane swung, tilted to one side, lowered, and then elevated upright and began to rise. 'General' – this is how little Lora called the Weather.

Watching the natural wildlife documentary of David Attenborough, Lora completely lost track of time, when the plane landed at Freetown Airport. The passengers enthusiastically applauded for the soft landing, thanks to the Pilot-Captain.

Lora jumped, grabbed her little rucksack and walked down the aisle and reached the ladder of the plane and felt the warm air.

– Haha – Lora smiled -here the 'General' loves us. It is warm, bright, and the sky is so blue.

Her mother smiled, grabbed her hand, and they both hurried to the exit. Outside there was a car waiting to take them to the village, where they were expected.

Mosquitoes buzzed, Lora slept in her bed, surrounded by tulle-netting curtains. She felt something warm at her feet and light sneezing. She opened her eyes and saw her little friend, Buno, who was happily playing. Lora jumped and hugged the white poodle.

After breakfast, she grabbed Buno and ran to the school in the village where the children greeted her with pathos. The streets were dusty, the air heavy, but the sky was blue.

– Lora, Lora, welcome – the slender Cassandra shouted and jumped up and down, and hugged her.

The two girls laughed, surrounded by several friends, classmates. The school year had already begun.

– Lora, will you study with us? Please re-enter our class – Sam asked.

Cassandra asked the little group to follow her:

– Do you want to go to the end of the village where there is one huge swamp, and behind it, there are beautiful trees and palm trees where chimpanzees live?

Lora asked her friend with astonishment:

– But how can chimpanzees live so close to the habitable area, aren't they dangerous species, and very mischievous?

– Let's go – Cassandra shouted.

– Ok, let's go guys -Lora encouraged the rest.

The curly haired little boy Fino and his mischievous friend Sam followed the girls. The group reached the swamp, and many mosquitoes ran around them. The children were trained and started to apply gel against

mosquitoes and spray with an insect spray until they were completely rid of the small 'earwig.'

Lora felt a pat on her head and jumped, looked aside and saw a monkey standing on its legs, standing as a man.

Buno ran with barking. Sweat started on Lora's forehead, and she asked with a stammer:

– What is this monkey? – It walks like a human on his back legs; I am frightened..

Cassandra approached the monkey and handed him a walnut.

The monkey deftly broke the walnut with teeth and chewed with pleasure.

– This is Bonobo – this monkey has come from Congo, he is very close to mankind, and it is not like those little chimps – Cassandra pointed to a tree where a few monkeys had settled.

Lora looked at the tree and saw one chimpanzee licked, crunched the leaves. She turned to Bonobo and met his black eyes, and gently pushed his shoulder. The monkey felt this as a tease and responded the same way.

– Bo-no-bo, Bo-no-bo – Lora said slowly, looking the monkey in the eyes.

Cassandra took the turn:

– Bo-no-bo, Bo-no-bo...

All the children called at once the name 'Bonobo.' The monkey's eyes moved from Lora to Cassandra, then they moved to Sam and reached the little curly haired Fino.

Fino was startled when Bonobo jumped up and approached him. The monkey caught the hand of the frightened little boy as a human would do. Everyone was amazed.

While the big monkey held Fino's hand, a flock of mosquitoes attacked them. Bonobo waved his paws to drive them away.

The sun shone somewhat unnaturally, darkened the air and it turned it in orange colour. It looked like everyone was looking through an orange curtain. The 'General' had intervened, was Lora's thought.

– Look at Bonobo; his coat shines in orange – excitedly pointed Cassandra.

Bonobo shifted, passed by all the children, gently slapped each of them on their shoulders, as if warning them for something.

– Bonobo invites us to follow him – Lora got Bonobo's message.

They walked the dusty road, and the pebbles along the way were with an orange tinge. The children were barely catching up the big monkey when Fino stopped breathless:

– Where are we going? – Fino already tired asked his friends.

– Go ahead – Lora said- The ‘General’ has dropped us this orange curtain so we could see everything in a beautiful and warm orange colour.

– Who is the ‘General’? – Cassandra asked.

– The ‘General’ is the ‘Weather’ who gives orders – Lora answered.

– Ha, ha – all laughed – Lora, this is a fantasy – Sam said, and threw a pebble towards Bonobo.

The monkey made a loud sound and chased Sam, grabbed him with its both paws (hands) and lifted him up very high. Silent moment as all children held their breath. Lora approached Bonobo and stared into his black eyes, and she got mixed feelings. Bonobo felt pain and anger at the same time.

Lora stroked Bonobo’s shoulder:

– Bonobo, do not mind, Sam is only playing with you, it’s a boy’s game.

Bonobo stared at Lora’s beautiful face, and he stretched his chin, opened his mouth wide, yawning and let go of Sam, who flew to the ground. The big monkey opened wide its long arms and began to hit (tap) happily on his chest first with the left, then with the right hand. Lora opened her hand’s too and imitated Bonobo, began to tap herself, everyone followed her. Bonobo looked at them all, gently tapped Lora’s head and then invited them all to follow him.

The air grew thicker and more orange.

– Wait, wait – Cassandra called her friends – I know why the air is dense and orange. In our geography lesson, the teacher explained to us that the Sahara and The Atlantic Ocean are to “unite.” The wind will spread grit (sands) of Sahara in the air, and the ocean will help this process.

– Yes, that’s right – Sam confirmed – but what will the animals do in the woods, in the deserts, in the ocean?

Lora listened to the conversation when they were startled by Bonobo’s next yawn, and all of them continued to follow the big monkey-guide. Their guide sometimes jumped over piles of stones or oaks, but the kids couldn’t do that.

They moved slowly. Suddenly the view in front of them has changed.

– Look at the river, oh-oh-oh-oh – Lora exclaimed.

– This is the river Seva – there are small crocodiles in it – continued Sam.

They approached the river. The orange sun contributed to the mysterious blue-orange hue of the river surface.

They continued to walk along the river, looking timidly for crocodiles. They saw fish swimming coloured in orange by the sun. Lora stopped and sighed dreamily:

– It looks exactly like in the tale of the ‘Golden fish,’ and according to this tale we make a wish, and the golden fish will make it happen.

– Ha, ha, ha- all of them laughed together, and Bonobo with one jump joined Lora.

There was a chirping of birds flying in different directions.

– Look, look, this is a green pigeon – Cassandra shouted.

– And here on this tree, look, a grey parrot – Sam pointed upward.

– Look – Fino’s squeaky voice – a bird in a metallic green cloak.

There was an incredible song from different birds in bright colours, with beautiful wings.

Bonobo jumped, and was on the tree, trying to catch the grey parrot.

– Bonobo, get off, do not chase the parrot – Lora called.

“Bonobo, do not chase the parrot,” said the parrot with a thin voice

...”Bonobo, do not chase the parrot,” the shrieking voice continued...

They all laughed, and Bonobo jumped from branch to branch, while the parrot flew away and got lost in the woods.

– Hu-hu-hue-hue – a bird croaked.

– See how silent it is – Lora said – look all, right on the branch over Bonobo’s head.

– It’s a screech-owl – Lora continued – wise and mysterious.

– She is beautiful – said Fino, spinning around the tree – she has a string of feathers on her head, dark chocolate feathers with white stripes on the wings.

The screech-owl lowered to avoid Bonobo.

– Her beak is yellow – Cassandra said – it’s a beautiful bird, but I know from my grandma that the screech-owl is a precursor of evil fate.

The predatory bird began to fly silently around Bonobo, who stopped to chase her any further and was standing up again on his back legs amongst his friends.

To the great surprise to all, the bird was circling Bonobo and touched him with her wings. Bonobo was

spinning and watching the sight of the winged beauty. The screech-owl landed on the shoulder of the big monkey and sang:

– Hu-hu-hu-hy...

They all surrounded their friend and stared at the sharp nails, big beak, and brown eyes of the bird.

Bonobo jumped with the bird on his shoulder, and the company followed.

They walked, passed mahogany trees, swamps until they finally got tired. They sat around an oak, on the leaves fallen from the trees when they heard something cut the air. Several arrows jammed around them. The children jumped, and they saw that they were surrounded by people with leather skirts and arrows in their hands.

– This is the native tribe – Cassandra started moving forward towards the tribe man, and Bonobo jumped in front of her with his full stature. But Cassandra pushed her head through Bonobo's arm and continued saying strange words.

One of the hunters answered.

Bonobo stepped forward, but Cassandra jumped to the shooter and strangely greeted him.

Everyone followed her gestures, and Cassandra explained:

– This is one of the few remaining tribes. They continue to live untouched by modern life. This is the Susu tribe. I know about them from my grandmother who lived near these places, here, to the river Seva. The only thing, which I could say in their tribal language is 'Peace.'

A boy came up with a bow in his hand and began collecting the arrows around the kids. The boy from the tribe was following with eyes the screech-owl that passed silently. Lora was staring speechlessly at the boy. Fino approached Bonobo. The screech-owl was circling but flew and lost in the vast forest. A woman from the tribe approached the group and said something in their language. She turned to Cassandra and leaned forward and touched the ground at her feet and, with a gesture, that this is their land, the land of the tribe.

Then Lora approached the woman and lifted her arms up to go to the sky, opened her hands and turned, pointing to Sam, Fino, Bonobo, Cassandra, then the boy from the tribe, and the rest.

– The sky is for all – Lora's said with a gentle, soft voice.

Bonobo was moving; mimicking Lora with his long arms raised to the sky and then went around and pointed each one with his hands...

At this very moment a man from the tribe with a small beard, and a colourful necklace on his neck said something in his language and gestured to the kids to follow him. He was the tribe leader.

Bonobo and his friends followed him, walking between trees near the river, slippery stones, and they came to the straw houses of the Susu tribe. Children, women, old men were walking around in different colours leather skirts alike. Then the tribal leader turned to his people; he said something in Susu-tongue and everyone present raised their hands to greet the strange group of kids.

Then tribe-leader took them to an incredibly beautiful place, the river running on one side, and horses on the other side, strange like leopard-cats in grey and black, running monkeys... and in the distance, a group of lions roared and chased each other.

The children were looking, and they wanted to get closer to the animals, but the tribe-man stood before them and stopped them.

Then he approached Lora, who was following with eyes the leopard-cat in grey-black spots which was little and was playing, running between the other animals.

– This is Leopard Genetta – somebody said in broken English.

Lora jumped and saw the tribe- leader talking to her:

– Leopard Genetta, how beautiful she is, and you speak English? – asked Lora and her grey eyes got even brighter.

The man smiled and continued:

– I speak Krio and broken English. But here all of us speak the language of nature – and he pointed the animals, the sky, the earth and he brought his bow to his chest.

The children surrounded them and listened to the words of the man of the tribe.

There was a loud yawn; Bonobo reminded of himself again. When Sam turned to him, saw Bonobo run away, moving away from them.

– Bonobo has found his family – Sam shouted incredulously, pointing to a group of monkeys that Bonobo approached. And they like him stand on their hind legs and tap themselves happily in the chest.

The tribal man urged the company to follow him. They reached the river.

– Look at how clean the river is, can we get in? – Continued Fino, took off his sandals and hurled into the water

– Oh, it's cold...

Sam, Lora, and Cassandra broke into the cold water, and the tribal man looked at them. A young boy approached the tribe -leader along with the little Leopard Genetta.

– Look, look, the bed of the river is shining, what are these pebbles – Fino said, leaning forward and pulling out a glittering pebble.

The pebble reflected the orange sun.

– Fino, it's a diamond – there are diamonds in this river – said Sam.

Sam, Cassandra, and Lora approached Fino to touch the diamond and with the touch of the diamond the whole river illuminated in incredible light. With the color of old gold and silver, the river was covered with a glitter of the diamond and the intense orange rays of the sun.

The screech-owl reappeared. Her dark chocolate wings wandered on the surface of the river; her eyes turned in diamonds.

Not only the children looked astonished, but the tribal man whistled, and all the inhabitants of Susu gathered together.

Surrounded by brilliance, Lora, Sam, Cassandra and Fino of one side of the river Seva, the Susu tribe on the shore.

The screech-owl rounded overall and sang:

– Ulu, u, u...

The Leopard Genetta run, waded into the river when the screech-owl forced her out (caw) with her strong diamond eyes and huge outstretched wings.

Suddenly the orange air cleared, the sky again was blue. The bottom of the river was visible with shining diamonds.

The screech-owl flew toward Fino, grabbed the diamond with her big yellow beak from the little boy's hand, and all heard "plock" – the stone fell into the river and sank to the remaining pebbles.

The children stepped carefully on Seva's uneven bed and coming out of the river were greeted with the song and the dance of the Susu tribe.

Sam began to swing into the tact of the song followed from the wet to knees Lora, Cassandra, and Fino. Then the boy from the tribe they met earlier in the forest said:

– I'm Tama, and I speak English.

Sam approached and greeted him:

– I'm Sam, that's little Fino, and those are Lora and Cassandra.

Tama smiled at them, staring at Lora's gray-blue eyes for a moment and then said:

– Sam, you're brave, take that bow and arrows as a gift. Only use them if necessary.

– Lora – Tama turned towards her – I trust you, the Leopard's Genetta has the same color eyes like yours. She'll keep you on the road -Tama smiled.

The children said goodbye to the tribe and took their way. The big cat was graceful, and Lora was trying to share the same steps. Cassandra and the rest were behind them. All stopped by a beautiful tree when suddenly they felt crisp, fresh air.

– Look at the mountains – Fino said.

Sam stood beside him, Lora and Cassandra joined. The Leopard's Genetta began to sniff. It was dark.

– These mountains look like two huge lions. Look at the heads and the hairs around them – Lora said slowly.

– Yes, look at the open mouth of the lion, on the left and the teeth formed from oak trees – Sam said.

– These mountains are Lions Mountains – nature has sculpted them from rocks, oaks, trees, earth... – Lora continued.

Sam first attempted to shoot with the bow and sent one arrow right in the head of the Lion-Mountain.

Leopard's Genetta growled and fled. The mountains were shaking... Children all huddled at the tree, scared by the noise.

– Do not use the arrow if you do not need it – the voice of Tama from the Susu tribe, echoed, and spread his message loud.

– Sam, what did you do? – asked Cassandra.

– But how can Tama's voice come from the mountain, where did I hit the arrow? And we left Tama back near the river, and the animals – Sam said stammering. His words were almost incomprehensible.

Then the screech-owl with the glowing diamond eyes appeared and circled with her beautiful chocolate color wings.

She flew past Lora, then around Cassandra and touched every one of them...

– Follow the screech-owl – Tama's voice continued – she will show you the way – the voice was heard again

from the mountain as if the Mountain Lion speaks with Tama's voice.

– Our country is called Sierra Leone, the 'Lions' mountains' – Tama continued. – 'Lions' Mountains', 'Lions' mountains – echoed around.

The beautiful screech-owl flew forward, and her diamond eyes illuminated the road. The children followed her, following the voice of nature, surrounded by the Lions' Mountains.

The mosquito buzzed, landed on Lora's nose, and finally woke her up. Bono jumped into her lap and began to bark, glad that Lora is back in her bed.

– Mum – said Lora – have so much to tell you, about the forest with the mahogany trees, about the beautiful birds and the screech-owl with diamond eyes, about our friend Bonobo, and the Susu tribe and Tama – the Guardian of the Lion Mountains.

– Yes, we waited for you to wake up, a little wanderer. Better write everything you see to read it to your classmates. You start school today in the class of your friends.

Lora jumped joyfully, opened her notebook and wrote:

"We live in a wonderful Planet. Her secrets are kept by the trees, the animals, the tribes that are close to nature. We only need to love our Planet loudly and to keep her true inhabitants born to her... Lora continued and ended with "Happy End," repeated the lion's mountains and the air echoed with Tama's voice.

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