

Excerpt from the original edition-1 of "Africa's Snow-White, Summer Love - Jealous Winter"
(reproduced for Low-Carb Friends with permission from the author, Jonathan Eloff, Dec 4th, 2011)

It was getting late in the day, and people were arriving at the clubhouse by the dozen. Every Saturday during the summer at around five o'clock the whole town would turn out for a huge *braaivleis*¹ with each family bringing some food and drinks to contribute.

Once most everyone had arrived, they would light the bonfire and stand around drinking and chatting for the best part of an hour while the fire died down to coals—if there was a flame, the meat would end up blackened and tasting like charcoal—at which point a massive metal grill was placed over the fire pit and the meat was placed on top of grill to cook. This would take at least another thirty minutes, but by wood fire standards, half an hour was actually quite fast. A small wood fire could take well over an hour to cook anything, yet since these fires were so big, by the time they died down to coals there was still enough residual heat to cook the meat quickly.

Nicholas and Denise were inside the clubhouse, sitting together by the window and watching for their parents to arrive. Denise's family had left more than an hour ago to get changed out of their tennis clothes and to bring their own contributions for the *braaivleis*, but Denise had opted to stay at the clubhouse with Nicholas and wait for them to return.

"You know," Denise began, "I've often wondered, why is it that everyone seems to think we'll end up together?"

"What you mean?" Nicholas said.

"Well, it's just that our parents, our friends—everyone really, kind of takes it for granted that we're together and that we always will be. It's almost like we're destined to be together and everyone knows it."

Nicholas wasn't really sure what she was getting at, but she was right. Everyone did seem to take it for granted that he and Denise would end up together. Yet, somehow she felt more like a friend than a girlfriend. She was the girl next door, except that *next door* meant a half an hour's drive away. People got used to a different perception of distance in rural Africa.

"It does seem a little that way doesn't it?"

"It wasn't like that when you were dating my sister Cathy," she observed.

He turned to look at her. "Well, she is a little older than me. I guess we just found that we were better as friends . . . but then I found you," he said, taking her hand in his, and flashing her a brilliant smile. She batted her eyelashes at him and returned the smile.

"Hey look, there's my mom," Nicholas said, pointing through the window at the white pickup truck pulling into the parking lot. "Let's go see if she needs any help unloading the food."

When they reached the truck, Kathleen was busily helping Emily retrieve the food from the back of the truck. Emily had been riding in the back with the food to make sure that it didn't slide all over.

"Can we help?" Denise asked Nicholas's mom, pointing to some of the food that Emily had piled on the tailgate.

Kathleen turned to see them standing there. "Oh, hello there—that's nice of you to offer Denise. Here, take this," she said, handing Denise a large bowl of salad. Nicholas held out his hands to take something as well. "No, Nicholas I want you to go fetch your father from the hotel. Run up there and tell him that we're going to light the fire shortly, and that he must hurry down so that he can help with the meat."

"All right, I'll be back soon," Nicholas said and then ran off in that direction.

A short while later, Nicholas was walking through the front entrance of the Hilltop Hotel, and approaching the table where his dad was sitting with the mayor, magistrate, and chief of police. Jan had his back turned to Nicholas, but Sergeant Wepner saw Nicholas coming.

"Hello Nicholas," the sergeant greeted. "You look warm," he said, noticing the beads of sweat on Nicholas's forehead.

"I am warm. I just ran up from the clubhouse," Nicholas replied.

Jan turned around in his seat to look Nicholas up and down. "Hello son, why the hurry?"

"Mom wants you to come down to the clubhouse now. They're going to light the fire soon and you'll be needed to help with the meat."

¹ *Braaivleis*: Afrikaans meaning *barbecue* often a social event; pronounced *bry-flace*

"Ah," Jan replied knowingly, "Well, just let me finish my drink and we'll head on down there, then. Here," he said, gesturing towards an empty chair behind Nicholas, and then at an open spot next to him, "sit down with us while you wait."

Nicholas pulled up the chair next to his dad, and sat down to wait. Jan picked up his drink and placed it on his lap. Nicholas followed the motion with his eyes, noticing with some dismay that his father's mug was almost full. He hoped that his dad would hurry up and finish the drink so that they could go—and so that he could get back to Denise—but Jan just left it there on his lap, as though he had no intention of drinking it.



"Have I ever told any of you the story of Herbrant and the lion?" Jan asked of those seated—Nicholas excluded, as he had heard the story many times.

"Ja,² I've heard it," Sergeant Wepner said, chuckling with the memory, "but I don't know about Dallas and Jimmy." They shook their heads.

Jan grinned. "Well you see, one day, Herbrant, a late relative of mine, was out in the *veldt*³ hunting *springbok*⁴ when he happened upon a female lion hiding in a thicket and doing much the same thing. The instant she noticed him, she turned on him, and—" Jan paused to take a sip of his drink.

"There was nothing Herbrant could do. It was either him or the lion, and he had only seconds to make his decision. So he did the only reasonable thing that he could, he raised his rifle, took careful aim, and shot." Jan said, mimicking the necessary movements.

"The bullet sailed through the air, for a miracle, hitting the lion squarely in the chest and causing her to trip over her own lifeless legs and tumble to the ground.

"The trouble was that once Herbrant walked up to the dead lion, he noticed something small rustling about in the thicket. Upon closer examination, he saw that it was a lion cub, barely the size of a small dog. Evidently, the lioness had been teaching her cub how to hunt and when Herbrant had happened along, she feared that he was after her cub, and she attacked.

"Now Herbrant felt really bad. To kill a fully grown lion was one thing—it was self-defense—but in doing so he had doomed the lion's cub to die along with her. So, forgetting all about the springbok, he

² *Ja*: meaning *yes*, pronounced *ya*

³ *Veldt* or *Veld*: Afrikaans referring to the wide, open, grassy plains in the rural spaces of South Africa

⁴ *Springbok*: Afrikaans, *spring* meaning *jump*, *bok* meaning *antelope*, *deer*, or *goat*—the *Springbok* is a small brown and white gazelle

gingerly picked up the lion cub, being careful to mind its claws and teeth, and headed back for his truck." Johann paused again to tend to his drink.

"And?" Dallas Muir prompted.

"Well, the poor *dom*⁵ felt a certain responsibility to the animal so he raised it on his farm as a pet. Naturally, the lion cub eventually grew larger, and since the cub was a male, he developed a rather impressive mane of hair. All would've been well except that the larger the lion grew, the fewer people came to visit Herbrant on his farm, until eventually no amount of coercion could persuade any would-be visitors."

"One can hardly blame them," Jim Michener commented with a grin and a shake of his head. "Imagine a five hundred pound lion bounding out to greet you! I doubt if it's an experience anyone would like to repeat."

"Hah! You're not kidding," Wepner agreed.

Jan sipped his beer again. Nicholas watched, impatient for the story and drink to be finished. He imagined Denise all alone down by the clubhouse, waiting patiently for him to return. He'd far rather be spending his time with her, after all this was the first and last day they would have together for the next three weeks—he would have to say hello and goodbye all in the span of a few short hours—and he wanted to make the best of that time.

Jan set his mug down, and resumed his story. "The lion was perfectly tame though. Evidently had been a poor student and hadn't learned anything at all about hunting from his mother. He was just a big *hond*,⁶ but the fact remained that Herbrant was a bachelor in the prime of life, living on a farm that was fast becoming a hermitage.

"After much deliberation, he realized that it wouldn't do for him to be driven into isolation by a lion, even one he had developed a strong liking for. He had to get rid of the poor beast, so he called the nearest zoo to ask if they would take the lion off his hands. The zoo agreed to take the lion, provided that they didn't have to come fetch him. So then, Herbrant and his friend Anton lured the lion onto the back of his pickup truck, closed the tailgate, and set out for the zoo which happened to be several hours away by car."

"Let me guess, the lion escaped," Dallas said.

"Sort of," Johann chuckled. "After they had been driving for a couple hours they happened upon a small mining town, and having worked up quite a thirst, they decided to stop for a quick drink in the local bar.

"Before long, they got into a fight with the miners—big, burly men with nothing better to do than pick on *besoekers*.⁷ Outnumbered as they were, Herbrant and his friend were badly beaten and subsequently *thrown* out of the bar.

They picked themselves up, dusted themselves off, looked at one another, and Anton said: *Herbrant, are you thinking what I'm thinking?* Herbrant replied with a righteous nod, and they walked over to his truck and lowered the tailgate." Jan paused, grinning as he noticed the suitably shocked expressions on the mayor and magistrate's faces. Apparently they realized where the story was going.

"Then they led the lion to the door of the bar, opened it, and let him in."

"*Naught ekse!*"⁸ The mayor exclaimed with delight, giving voice to the magistrate's expression.

Jan took a moment to sip his drink again, and then with a relishing grin and a lively voice he resumed his story. "The miners took one look at the lion, and in a mad rush, they dropped their drinks, knocked over tables, and all but trampled each other as they crashed through the windows to escape." Johann made vigorous gestures with his hands and supplied appropriate sound effects to convey the chaos of the scene.

Johann's description of the scene was followed by a raucous round of laughter as everyone appreciated Herbrant's revenge.

"So, what happened next?" Dallas Muir asked, leaning forward eagerly.

"Well, one of the miners—or more likely the owner of the bar—alerted the police and a short while later a couple of police cars arrived and a few policemen climbed out of their cars. They crept slowly forwards, all but moving backwards towards the entrance of the bar. Cautiously, with their shotguns at the ready, they pushed forward the lowest ranking officer among them to open the door. The door creaked slowly open, only to reveal a sight such as you'd never imagine." Johann paused dramatically

⁵ *Dom*: Afrikaans word meaning *idiot* but considered a more polite form

⁶ *Hond*: Afrikaans meaning *dog*

⁷ *Besoekers*: Afrikaans meaning *visitors*

⁸ *Naught ekse*: Afrikaans meaning *no way*

as he took a small swallow of his drink. Nicholas stared pensively at the mug; *still half full, so much for 'I'll be back shortly,'* he thought.

Johann continued. "There on top of the bar counter was the lion, swishing his tail back and forth peacefully, surveying the chaotic mess he had created, and behind the counter, Herbrant was serving drinks to his friend, Anton."

There was a fresh round of laughter. As it died down Dallas said, "No, I don't believe it, it's too fantastic to be true."

"It's true, and what's more, whenever Herbrant went to visit the zoo thereafter, he would always say that he could recognize his lion immediately, because at the top of the lions' pen there was a long, flat rock, and there would always be a male lion lying on top of it, swishing his tail back and forth peacefully, surveying the scene before him with a faraway look in his eyes."

The mayor was grinning wildly. "That's absolutely spectacular Jan! What a tale. A shame that he had to give up the lion, though, it seems to me a beast like that might have come in handy a time or two."

To this Sergeant Wepner replied, "Sure would. Just imagine the police dog that lion might've made!" He shook his head with wonder at the thought.

Now that the story was at an end, Nicholas sensed he had an opportunity to remind his dad why he was there. "Well, we'd better get going," he said, looking at his watch, "they've probably lit the fire by now, and they'll need your help to cook all that meat."

Jan looked over at his son apologetically. "My drink is still half full," he replied, "we'll go as soon as I finish it. The fire takes a while to die down to coals anyway, so we still have time before they start cooking the meat."

Nicholas frowned and glared at his dad's abominable drink. This wouldn't do. At the rate his father was drinking Nicholas figured that he could be there long enough to hear yet another well remembered anecdote from start and finish. *Still half full,* he thought, *roughly half a pint. Should be possible—definitely worth it.*

In one sudden, fluid motion Nicholas stood up, grabbed his father's mug from the table, and gulped with all the ferocity of a prisoner caught trying to escape his cell.

A second later, Nicholas slammed the empty mug down on the table in front of his father, and wiping his mouth on his sleeve, he looked down at his warden triumphantly, and said, "There, your drink is finished. Now we can go."

There was a short moment of stupefied silence, as everyone at the table replayed the scene in their minds.

For his part, Johann was looking up at his son with an expression of sheer disbelief. He turned his head to look at the empty glass standing defiantly in front of him, then back again to look up at his son, and suddenly his expression cracked into a crooked grin, and laughter thundered out uncontrollably—a sound which spread quickly around the table, reverberating from one person to the next.

Once he had mostly reigned in his laughter, Johann placed a hand on his son's shoulder, and getting up from the table, he spoke through a chuckle: "All right son, lets go," he said, and then gave in to the hilarity again.

www.Snow-White.ca and www.JonathanEloff.com

www.AmongFriends.us and www.Low-Carb.us