Mlinzi wa Asili

My name is Mlinzi wa Asili. It means “protector of nature” in Swahili. I have a special power that was given to me at birth, a power that sets me apart from the rest of the village. This power is the ability to communicate with animals, both our villager’s livestock and the wild animals that live in the Savannah. I have never known how I got my powers. So tonight, I decided to go to our tribe shaman, Busara, whose name means “Wise.”

When Busara welcomed me into his hut, I sat down and said to him, “You and I, along with my mother, know I have the ability to communicate with animals. But I must ask where have my powers come from?”

Busara ground up some of his magical powder, threw it into the fire, and as the images of my origins were shown in the smoke, said to me, “Mlinzi, long before you were born, your mother, though young, was found to be barren. But one day, I saw her free a gazelle from a poacher’s trap and mend its wounds with part of her skirt. I was so moved by her act of kindness that I summoned her to my hut, anointed her with the juice of the ritualistic Tsamma melon, and said to her, ‘Because of your kindness towards the animal you saved today, our ancestors have decided that you will have a child. You will name him Mlinzi wa Asili, for he will be given the ability to speak with all the creatures of our land, from the
cattle and goats of our village, to the creatures of the Savannah. The only limitation to this blessing is that you must vow to teach your son to use his powers for good, and never for evil.’ She agreed to this, and when the time came, you were born, as I had promised.”

When he finished, I said to him, “Asante Sana, Busara. You are truly the wisest man in the Mnyama tribe.”

Busara replied, “You are welcome, my young friend. You are dismissed. I bid you good evening.” I then left for my hut, said good night to my mother, and slept.

The next morning I woke up to a ruckus. The ground was shaking, and I heard the sounds of people screaming and elephants trumpeting. I exited my hut, and I found an entire herd of elephants stampeding through the village; many people were injured, and there were damaged huts and trampled crops everywhere. Many in my village stared at me with anger in their eyes.

They were shouting many things at me, such as “Traitor!” and “You have disobeyed Busara, by conspiring with the elephants to attack us!”

I said to them “Please, believe me! I have not broken my vow. I was asleep all night and had no idea that this would happen.”

Still, the people did not believe me, yelling, “Silence, insolent liar!”

Busara came out to the middle, called for silence, and said to me, “Mlinzi, what is going on?”
I replied, “A herd of elephants has stampeded through the village, and everyone thinks I am responsible for it, by conspiring with the elephants.”

Muviro my cousin said, “We must go after these elephants and kill them!”

Busara berated him. “No! Muviro, you know very well that according to the laws of the Mnyama tribe, we must only kill animals for food and clothing, and not for vengeance or pleasure.” He turned to me, “Mlinzi, you must follow the herd and ask them what is going on.”

I followed the trail that the herd had left and found them at the Maji River. I approached the leader of the herd, Mama Tembo.

“Mama Tembo,” I said, “why have you and your herd stampeded through my village today?”

“We are looking for my son, Nguvu,” she said. “One day, I allowed him to go exploring the plains, and he never returned. I fear that he has been captured by a poacher. However, we are not the only ones whose children have gone missing.”

As I travelled further into the Savannah, I found Malaika, the lioness and I greeted her. “Jambo, Malaika. Where are your son and husband?”

“My son, Mkuu was captured by a poacher. The exact same poacher killed my husband, Simba Mfalme,” she said, “We let Mkuu go out to practice his hunting skills and when he never returned, Simba Mfalme went looking for him and saw him in a cage in the back of the poacher’s truck. He told me to return to the pride while he rescued Mkuu. The
last thing I saw before I returned to the pride was Simba Mfalme trying to rescue him and being shot by the poacher in the process.”

I said, “I understand your grief, Malaika. I am looking for a young elephant who was also captured by the poacher. If I find him, it is more than likely that I will find Mkuu as well.”

“Asante Sana, my friend,” Malaika said. “However, I cannot come with you because I must go hunting. I wish you luck.” Later, I found Duma, the cheetah. I greeted her saying “Jambo, Duma. Where are your two sons, Chui and Haraka?”

Duma said to me “I have not found my sons, who were lost when the poacher abducted them.”

“Do you know for sure if it was the poacher?” I asked.

“No,” she said “I returned from an unsuccessful hunt one day and found my cubs gone. I called for them, but they never returned. I at first thought they were killed by hyenas, but then I saw tire tracks. I then assumed that the were taken.”

“Coincidentally,” I said, “I am looking for an elephant calf and a lion cub who were captured by the poacher. Once I find them, I will find Chui and Hakara and return them to you.”

“Asante Sana,” she purred.

I later found a herd of zebras, and one of the mares, named Kasi, approached me.
She said, “My daughter, Pundamilia, was captured by the poacher. Do you know where he took her?”

“No,” I said, “I don’t. But I will find her, along with all the other baby animals that have been captured by the poacher.”

As I followed a trail of tire tracks, I was approached by Upendo, the black rhinoceros. She said, “I am looking for my son, Pembe. Did you see where the poacher has taken him?”

“I suppose that these tire tracks lead to where he is. I promise you that your son will be rescued.”

“Asante Sana, my friend,” Upendo said.

Later on, a herd of buffalo approached me. One of the cows, Wakunga, approached me, “We are looking for one of our calves, Ujasiri. Do you know where he is?”

“Well,” I said, “coincidentally, I am looking for the calf as well. I am following these tire tracks to that house on the top of that hill.” After talking with the buffalo, I followed the tire tracks all the way up the hill and entered the house. It was empty, and when I went into a room that was next to the kitchen, I looked in and saw a lion skin hanging on the wall. I also saw piles of rhino horns and elephant tusks and traps that were waiting to be laid out in the savannah.

Just then, I heard a voice. “Who’s there?”
I looked to my left, and I saw a cage with Mkuu the lion cub in it. Next to his cage were five other cages, containing Nguvu the elephant calf, Chui and Haraka the cheetah cubs, Pandamilia the zebra filly, Pembe the rhino calf, and Ujasiri the buffalo calf. The animals were all frightened, but I comforted them, “Do not be afraid, little ones. My name is Mlinzi wa Asili, and I am here to help you. I will return you to your parents.”

“Thank you, Mlinzi. And please hurry,” Chui mewed. “When we arrived at this evil place, the poacher said that once we’re old enough, he’ll use us for canned hunting.”

“Forgive me, but what is ‘canned hunting’?” I asked.

“He will put all of us in a fenced area in his backyard and kill us.” Ujasiri lowed.

Suddenly, I felt a hand grab my arm, and I heard a bellowing voice say to me, “Didn’t your mother ever tell you that it isn’t nice to go through other people’s things?”

I turned and saw that it was the poacher. To my surprise, it was an Englishman named George Blackheart. “But, Mr. Blackheart, I thought that you loved animals and that you respected the traditions and beliefs of my people!”

“You are right, boy. I did when I was young. But, when I was your age, my father and mother were killed by a rhinoceros. Then, I grew to hate animals and thought that killing them might be an easier way to earn a living.” “And once I have finished those babies off,” he continued, “their families will follow the same fates as their children.”

“But, Mr. Blackheart, you must move on with your life and forgive the rhinoceroses that killed your parents. My shaman, Busara, always tells us that vengeance never heals the
wound. It only makes the wound worse. So, please, let these baby animals go and give up your ways of poaching.”

At first Blackheart looked as if he was listening to me, as if he was thinking to reform his life. But then he glared at me, got out his rifle, and pointed it at me. “Well, boy, I am not a Mnyama, like you. I am English. We go by our own traditions. Say Kwaheeri. And once I am through with you, your whole tribe will go with you.”

Just as Blackheart was about to pull the trigger, I heard the Mnyama war chant. I turned and saw that Busara had brought the warriors of our village to my aid. The captain threw his spear at Blackheart, but he missed, and Blackheart dropped his rifle. He tried to flee, but five of the warriors cut off his escape. When he turned for his rifle, he saw that it was broken into pieces.

Busara said to me, “Fear not, Mlinzi. We have come to help you.” He then turned to three of the warriors and said, “Seize him.” The three warriors charged towards Blackheart, seized him, bound him, and took him towards Busara. Busara turned to Blackheart and said “Kwa Kuwa alikaidi mila ya Mnyama, utakuwa milele kulaaniwa. Bila kujali ni wapi kwenda, utaona wanyama pori kushamulia watu karibu, na wewe tu kuona hili.” This is the curse of Mnyama, a curse given only to those who have killed animals for vengeance or pleasure. The curse results in having hallucinations of the people around you being attacked by wild animals.

After Blackheart received the curse, he gave me the keys to the cages, and I freed the baby animals. I then escorted each back to the Savannah.
We first found Upendo. And I said to Pembe, “Go. Return to your mother.”

Pembe ran towards Upendo. When Upendo saw her son running towards her, she was overcome with joy. She ran towards Pembe, and once they were reunited, she nuzzled him with the love that only a mother could give. Tears welled up in her eyes and she said, “Oh, my beloved Pembe, I thought I would never see you again.”

Pembe said to her, “Mother, we have been reunited thanks to Mlinzi wa Asili. He saved me and all of the other baby animals who were held captive with me.”

As we continued down the path, a herd of zebras crossed our path. I knew that this was Pundamilia’s family. I turned to the young zebra and said to her, “Pundamilia, here is your family. You may return to them.”

Pundamilia ran towards her herd, braying with happiness all the way. Many in the herd recognized her brays and stamped their hooves with joy. Kasi ran towards her daughter and nuzzled her, with her heart filled with joy only a mother could feel when she finds her lost child. Soon the whole herd rejoiced with the return of the missing filly. The stallion of the herd, Kwato then approached me.

He said to me, “Asante Sana, Mlinzi wa Asili. You truly are a hero to all creatures, great and small.”

After Pundamilia returned to her herd, we came upon a valley with scattered groves of acacia trees. We saw a pride of lions with Malaika lying in front of the others. She was still mourning the loss of her mate and her son. Her sister, Lesedi, tried to comfort her, but there
was little she could do. She then caught a familiar scent in the air and looked to her left to see Mkuu running towards her. She felt joy in her heart like she had never felt before. When Mkuu was close to her, she nuzzled and licked him saying, “Oh, Mkuu, my son, I thought I lost you forever. It fills my heart with joy to see you alive and well.”

Later, we found Duma feeding on a gazelle that she had recently killed. Chui and Hakara raced towards their mother as if they were hunting down their own food. Hearing them calling her, Duma raced towards her two sons. She licked and nuzzled them, showing the love and joy she felt when she saw them. “Mother, Chui and I have missed you so,” Hakara said. “We would never have seen you again had it not been for Mlinzi wa Asili.”

After Duma and her sons were reunited, Ujasiri, Nguvu, and I continued down the path in search of their herds. I looked down and saw buffalo tracks. I knew instantly that we were well on the trail of Ujasiri’s herd. We followed the tracks until we came upon a small waterhole with a few groves of acacia and kigelia trees near by. Drinking at the waterhole was Ujasiri’s herd.

“Mother! I have found you!” Ujasiri cried.

Wakunga bolted out of the herd and ran through the water towards her son. When she reached him, she nuzzled him as though he was recently born. Suddenly, the bulls of the herd saw me and charged. They thought that I was the one who kidnapped their lost calf.

Ujasiri bellowed “No! Please do not attack this human. His name is Mlinzi wa Asili. He rescued me and restored me to you.”
The bulls immediately stopped in their tracks and returned to the herd. Wakunga and Ujasiri also returned to the herd, happy to be reunited at long last. The herd then left the waterhole, continuing their journeys through the plains. Nguvu and I then moved on, in search of Mama Tembo and the other elephants. We came upon the Maji river and saw the herd drinking and bathing.

“Jambo, Mother! I have returned!” Nguvu trumpeted.

Mama Tembo saw Nguvu and let out a trumpet of happiness. She caressed Nguvu with her trunk, with tears in her eyes. The rest of the herd trumpeted with the joy found upon seeing the return of the missing calf. Nguvu’s younger cousins also ran towards him and caressed him with their trunks.

Mama Tembo said to me, “Asante Sana, Mlinzi Wa Asili. How can we ever repay you?”

I said, “Well, you and your herd can repair the damages done to my village the other day, when you stampeded through it.”

That afternoon the villagers and the elephants worked together to repair the damages caused by the stampede. Mama Tembo and her sisters helped rebuild the huts, bringing timber from the groves of Kigelia trees. Nguvu and the other young elephants of the herd helped repair the pens for our goats, sheep, and cattle, and brought them back to the village. Nguvu’s aunts helped the farmers replant and water the crops, which were trampled during the stampede. After four hours, the village was as good as new. The elephants then
wandered off into the savannah.

    My mother approached me and hugged me. She said to me, “Oh, my son, I am so proud of you. You have saved the lives of all of the animals and the lives of our villagers.”

    The rest of the village surrounded me and cheered, “Asante Sana, our hero!”

    Busara then approached me and said to me “For your efforts to save the animals and our people, I appoint you as the official guardian of the Savannah. You will serve as a guide to those who visit this land. You will protect the beasts of the Savannah from poachers. Do you accept?”

    “I accept. I will fulfill my obligations to both the village and the Savannah,” I said.

    The next day, Englishmen arrived at the village, prepared to take Blackheart to a prison in England. Busara agreed and Blackheart was handed over to them. He was then placed in a prison in London. That was when the curse on him began to take effect. He began having hallucinations of the officers and other prisoners being attacked by animals. The guards believed that he had lost his mind and transferred him to a nearby insane asylum.

Mwisho (“The End”)

Dedicated to the suffering children in Africa.