

Eliasse

by Coenraad Brand

Eliasse gets seated slowly, using his arms to suspend his body on the armrests of the torn and flimsy old fold up chair under the tree. He usually sits here, the others scarcely coming out this way, rather enjoying the company of each other inside the badly neglected old building. As he lowers his skinny, grossly underdeveloped body into the seat he takes extra care not to put too much pressure on his stomach, so that he does not have to call the nurses again to clean up the mess.

Finally he gets comfortable. He scans over the hill he faces, sitting here under the cool shade of the big tree. He listens to the bird calls, watches their flight intensely. Today is the big day. He spent all this time waiting. Months it has been now. Today his limbs are filled with vigor; unlike it has been for weeks. Every once in a while he accurately calculates the time accurately from the position of the sun as it climbs ever so slowly, heating up the plane and the buildings behind him.

This particular morning he got up earlier than usual, having rested more than an hour less than usual. At first he found it difficult to fall asleep but eventually managed to. He dreamed in expectation, he dreamed expectation. He had his breakfast like all the rest in the usual manner. He watched them. Their hands moving slowly, the garglers he calls them. They all did, till the nurses put a stop to it. Many of those who called them garglers became garglers their selves, sitting, eating with as little motion possible. Not willing to chew. Not willing to swallow, with their faces a hollow of hunger. Nurses were around them forcibly feeding them if they don't.

They lost their faith. They were void of hope. They wanted no more. They tell him it is not so, and falls into complaints one after another. Then they sleep, gargling it all away all of their day in utter hopelessness and coughing. How he questioned them, it.

They were there before, in their complete naked essences. Shameless. They had sex, filled with the vigor life it self possesses. The nurses had forcibly separated the sexes from one another, avoiding the much dreaded from happening. Now they gargle all day. The sun comes and goes. Night comes and goes, then the full moon. Then somewhere, somehow, in the solitary sleep they silently take their leave, not being able to breathe their exhausted breaths under their decayed bodies any more.

For so many months Eliasse had been averting them, the stench inside the whitewashed building, seating himself here under the big tree after having breakfast. One of the nurses would bring him lunch here in the afternoons. He would sit here on most days until the sun sets. He knows the birds. He knows their doings. Why they do what they do. He watches them intently. He dreams of the life beyond this hill, of the deity beyond the hill. But then again, at other times, he would curse this wondrous deity beyond the hill, from here where he sat stuck behind the hill.

The nurses go on and on about his health, about how he goes on and on living. How he never ceases to find reason. What reason they don't know, or perhaps cannot understand. He knows, and he knows they know, he does know they would know exactly, when, and if, they ever have to know. He teaches them so.

This morning he carried his fragile limbs limply out to the tree. He took with him the retarded helper to carry a crate for his coming guest to be seated on. The man, middle aged, had a stubborn temperament and weren't ever of any good use to anyone. He helps the nurses on their duties and in return they give him food. Where he disappears to in the evening and appears from on the clock at seven thirty in the morning each and every morning, Eliasse doesn't know. He never questioned. Some evenings, when there were any, he would take some of the leftovers with him. He was as clumsy as could be.

The helper presently dragged the crate through the area of bushes that used to be open gravel surrounding most of the building, instead of following him down the cemented floodwater gutter that Eliasse was dragging his weak body limply through. He would simply not listen to any advice. He could not conceive of his self as able to do something right. Never. He was eternally wrong. The nurses cared for him, and their scorn only could, after his careful consideration thereof, bring him to a stop once he gets started. They weren't here now. He can only be guided carefully in more or less the right direction by means of the interest he has in the company he presently enjoyed, this ill secluded fellow who always averted him. This company Eliasse presently provided him with was too weak to talk loudly to him, the helper would therefore not leave earshot distance from him, therefore Eliasse kept on walking. Being too occupied breaking through the marshland to realize this, with the crate almost broken by now, the helper reluctantly followed. Nails stuck out on all sides and planks were breaking free. Eliasse doesn't mind that too much yet and walks on, taking care of his fragile limbs as he picks up a round rock the size of his fist. He carries it in front of him using both hands, like a weighty bucket of water almost, caressing it tenderly with his fingers as he does so. Ever since they left the building, his eyes had been constantly scanning for the birds he knows so well. He watches their doings and the predictions he had of their doings, not neglecting the usual care of his step. He was right about all the ones he saw, and wondered eagerly about the rest of the birds he knows so well. It did not take much to get rid of the nuisance who broke the crate as badly as he did once he got seated. A quick, straight confrontation into his wrongdoing; followed by silence as he watches the birds. Eliasse did not even realize him leaving, or heard his murmuring as he left. He takes the rock and places it next to the broken crate.

Eliasse is a young man of merely seventeen. He lived the past seven years of his youth in this Aids clinic. His father left the family to fight, and hopefully attain a senior position in the Communist Revolutionary Army after having infected both him and his mother with the disease. His father, like so many with him, unfortunately died in his first battle. His father was always intrigued with war. His mother, then still young and naïve, backed him. His mother took the best care she could of her son when his father died at his age of only four and a half years. He went to school for a while, as a special child, since his health was exceptionally good. This normality of life he enjoyed thoroughly. His mother

became gradually weaker and succumbed when he was ten, taking all the care she could of him. But this was without her considering the years to follow when he went into puberty. She did not think he would make it so far. To him this was probably the most traumatic experience in his life. Sexuality, the killer which did so much harm, was now his entirely. He fell ill. He was almost dead when he recovered slowly after three months. He was bedridden for close to a year. When he recovered from his infections he was limp, and his sexuality never developed to its full potential. He was, for the most part, an eunuch. This was though, more a mental feat on his part, rather than a natural disability he suffered. This would account for his absence towards the sensually pleasurable, and the passionate status quo 'power play' of the others in the clinic.

They always had gangs among them, especially when the clinic was still almost fully occupied, sometimes with costly consequences, since the clinic could never be fully cleansed of weapons like knives and drugs. Eliasse would, in such instances avail his self to help the nurses. Here he would service the bedridden and the nonconformists or obstinate even, deriving from them in vivid acuteness, plenty of hope and faith in living from them. These individual experiences, after all the time that had passed since, would still bring in his present secluded state great thoughts to his mind. He was always trying to avoid all the Tuberculosis infected patients, and therefore spent his time sitting alone outside. At certain hours of the day he would cease to find any entertainment in bird watching, and would close his eyes in meditation, finding thus a finely balanced oscillation between watching them and remembering these good experiences.

This particular day however, Eliasse cannot really focus on anything at all. Every now and again he finds his self watching the little gravel road going up the hill. By now he knows all the trees and bushes in the distance where the road passes over the hill. He would know instantly if someone appears on that road. He hears the retarded man, who reluctantly helped him earlier on, catch a fit inside the building behind him, and then being scorned by a nurse, with heavy noises in between, and something falling.

A little while later the guest appears. Walking alone, he has a steady and wide stride. A stride Eliasse knows well. He watches him from where his head first appeared over the hill to where he left the road to turn this way. He watches every motion of his healthy, well developed body. He had to suppress his envy when he lifted his self from the seat to greet his good friend.

'Good day my friend, it is such a pleasure to see you today as you cannot imagine, I am sure.'

'Good day Eliasse. I am sure I can try. You should not have stood up to greet me. Please, let me help you get seated again.' He gently helps his friend get seated again.

'You will have to use that stone to hammer the nails back into your chair I am afraid, it has been terrorized by the man who really did not want you to have any seat at all.'

'I see.' Ndugu knows about the retarded man, and guessed as much. He took the giant stone and hammered the nails back in, tipping the crate over on all of its sides to do so.

'How has life been treating you this side of your hill?' Eliasse asks him, having been told numerous times about the hill separating Eliasse from the outside world, the world of the many new wonders.

‘Badly, you will not believe. A giant wave of Tuberculosis struck the clinic two and a half months ago. Here everybody dies, almost all of them. But me, I’m okay, for the time being. I am sure you can tell.’

‘Oh yes, you look so fine. There is nothing wrong with a man able to stand up to greet his guests.’ On previous occasions Eliasse asked to remain seated.

‘You look so good; your muscles are still growing.’ Eliasse tells his newly arrived friend whom he has so longed to see. He has so many questions which needs answering.

‘Yes they are, I don’t even realize.’

‘But how can you know they grow when you don’t?’ He teases.

‘I don’t know.’ Ndugu said slightly disgruntled.

‘I know.’ Eliasse says as he bursts into merry laughter at his friend. ‘It must be a girl who sees them, and you must know that she sees them!’

‘It is true, yes my friend. You have guessed right. But I haven’t as much as talked to her yet.’

‘But why not? You are not shy?’

‘I’m not. I promise you. It has only been a week now. I met her on the farm where I managed to get a holiday job after school closed.’

‘That is great! You must tell me all about this working experience. I insist you tell me all of it right now.’

On their previous get together at the clinic Ndugu told Eliasse of a visit the school had to a farm. Since they are such good friends he told Ndugu of all which quelled him of this. He told him that he spent the day there in investigation of all of the many workers and what they did. He told him all that he had seen. But ever since their discussion on Ndugu’s previous visit, something bothered Eliasse and he kept inquiring into it, until it even quelled Ndugu as well.

What quelled Ndugu were some people walking around the place on that day. The two friends concluded them as ghosts. They walked around briskly. That is all Ndugu could remember of them. He did not see their faces; he did not come to know their characters. They were absent and distant. Eliasse could not stop asking about them. But that was all Ndugu had to give him, since on that day the farm owner took them on a guided tour of the farm and he told them everything about the farm. He is a man Ndugu got completely absorbed in, a man whom Ndugu could truly relate to, and felt free to work out his position and purpose on the farm with, even though he still knew so little. Eliasse had to make peace with the lack of his friend’s knowledge, though he was glad at the prospects for his friend. But his questions haunted him at times when he was alone.

In the letter he wrote to Eliasse since this visit Ndugu told of the tutor they have at school, whom he is very fond of. The tutor told them of The Great Man. It was a story and the religious believed in this man. He described how this man did not heed to any authority at all, but only to that of the deity. The people of authority did not like him and condemned him with lies, saying that he said that he was the son of the deity, and king of some of the people there. They even crucified him for this lie they had made up about him, because they could not accuse him for being wrong to the Truth which is written in the Word.

He also confessed to Eliasse that after a class he asked the tutor shyly if this Great Man ever had any sex with anyone, and the tutor said that not all knows it, but no, he had too

much to worry about to enjoy such pleasures. Everybody who heard it laughed. He was a pure man, the purest yet, the tutor said.

‘It was wonderful, much better even than the first visit.’ Ndugu ensured Eliasse of his repeat visit to the farm. He soon became engrossed in all he did that week. He surely did enjoy it thoroughly. Eliasse patiently gave him time to finish, listening to everything he said and asking questions. Only once Eliasse were satisfied that his friend told him everything he wished to know, he proceeded to call up their last conversations.

‘Oh no, it was all so nice to see and experience. This Great Man really does his thing well among these people who believes in him.’ Ndugu laughs pleasurably to the inquiring face of his friend. ‘The men we thought were ghosts really weren’t ghosts at all. They were men, and oh, I must tell you, they were men who looked the meanest of war mongering evil creatures. But I laugh silently, because they will forever be protected from the silliness of wars by this deity. They are the overseers of all the duties on the farms, and ensure everything gets done as the farmer wants it. They are his foreman. They are really very nice people; they are ‘measured’ as one man told me, who is also a good friend of the farmer. This prophecy of the Great Man brought peace to their hearts it is true. They all speak to the farmer a lot; he discusses all that needs doing on the farm with them. We seldom see the farmer and barely ever speak to him. He is a very clever and busy man surely, planning all things on the farm.’

‘That is the most beautiful, astounding news you are giving me Ndugu.’ Tears of joy pour down his cheeks as he speaks. ‘It all makes the most perfect sense. I thought about this Great Man and the deity a lot. And I like the farmer too, he sound like a very, very wise man.’

‘Oh yes they all are indeed.’

In another time altogether, in a time when Eliasse and Ndugu were still the youngest of innocent little children running around happily, playing with sticks as guns, there was a white man. He was a good man. A man not many knew. He drove a big car with big wheels of which all four made the circular movements which can be seen when it gets stuck or struggles to go through difficult terrain. He had with him a GPS which guided him on his way in some places, in others it gave direction to those who wished to follow where he once went.

He traveled long distances. He met leaders and talked to them, the warmongers of these lands. His ideas caused them to rebel and want to murder him at first. But he was clever; he talked to them wisely and never wished to take away their positions of hierarchy or money. These leaders were men of great wealth, the greatest seen in these areas. They

spent lifetimes to gather their wealth. They would receive him with threats, but he would show them possibilities. He would show them they cannot continue their strife for ever, and they would come to understand, though reluctantly. These leaders would have murdered any other men who talked to them and did not honor them enough. But this man was a man of great wisdom. He saw and showed things the way they are, and never claimed the rights these men possessed for his own or for other men that came after him, and followed him there.

‘I see what you are saying. But not all of them would come to accept this proposition of yours, and some would never do so.’ These leaders would say to him of the people in the lands.

‘That is true, but they have no hope.’ He would answer him. ‘Ah, hope. I see, so you will leave them then?’ And the white man would reassure them that their power and might will not be forsaken and they will be able to forth their dominion and wars where they could not be hurt or shaken. With careful consideration then this proposition came, in time, to the great appeasement of all the leaders and citizens of many lands. In time they grew wise and also became enthralled with their increased wealth and power for not tampering with the hope of people, for this they came to learn, no leader can ever propose to do.

Much later...

Eliasse’s request to be taken outside in his slowly worsening condition was still often granted, but on this particular morning there was some time delay caused by the retarded middle aged man. The man came the morning with his deceased dog which he carried in a bag. The dog died due to some disease, but probably from malnutrition, or from thirst. He found the dog astray and had it for a week, during which he tied the animal to a tree at home to keep it from running off. He cried with the nurses, and the one who, after seven years of being the most annoying creature to Eliasse’s existence with her persistence to care for his ‘faltering spirit’, was the one the overgrown boy got his sympathy from. This much needed comfort the retarded man demanded to get, only happened for him after he took the bag containing the dead dog to a tree some distance away from the clinic to leave it there for the day. He emptied the bag. The dog was stiff and his body curled over, and fell to the ground. The boy eagerly started running back to the nurses, taking the dirty bag with him to the caring but heavily disgruntled nurse.

It was because of this holdup, only some time later than usual Eliasse could finally be escorted outside by this nurse as his usual aid. This has become the custom since he got weaker. This was what the retarded man despised, Eliasse getting special attention from the caring nurse.

Eliasse coughs badly. It sends shivers down his spine, but he soon comes to peace within his self, though the coughing continues for another hour. He watches the birds and knows that it will not be too long now before he will be forced to greet them one last time, and greet this globe forever.

He feels their freedom, their quick chit chatter on the branches, their mating rituals, feeding the newborn infants, and their flight. He adores their ability to fly, freedom from

being forcibly confined to condescendence towards others, like he is forced to in the clinic. They have the freedom from having to be convinced spiritually for such compulsory acts to condescendence, or be tortured until one subject, yes, to be able to fly off to another branch and to clean one's feathers in defiance. He feels enthrallment at this sight. For so long he wondered at them, but now he understands them completely.

It was then when something overcame him completely, something which he could never have predicted. Way up in the sky a big bird literally hung on the wind. This bird did not use the flapping of its wings. At first he thought of it as a hawk, but it was no hawk. He sat watching as it circled round and round one spot far down on the ground. The bird made wide circles high up in the sky, and gradually came lower. The bird started flying lower; downwind from the spot he came to circle. This feathered creature did not miss a single object from its view. It slowly narrowed the wide circles it made as it came closer to the ground and watched every movement with its sharp, well trained eyes. All the time in the air it did not use a single flap to hold it self in the air, floating as such, and much rather, only on the wind. It was almost an hour later when the bird lowered it self onto the surface with a minimum amount of wing flaps, running as it touched down. The bird first made a thorough investigation of the whole area, including of Eliasse sitting on his chair next to the big tree. The bird was wary of him all the time, this he could see, not only of him, but of each and everything that surrounded him. The bird walked slowly up to the rotting carcass of the dog, and walked a wide circle closing in on the dead animal, then walked back to near the carcass from a downwind direction in order to smell it. Soon enough he was devouring the carcass. Eliasse was smiling in absolute delight as the animal pulled its head up backwards to free the meat from the sinews that still kept it on the body he held down with one of his giant claws. It was not until much later that the bird, having nearly devoured the entire carcass had to have a long run to gather speed to lift its heavy body off the ground again. All the time as he watched this magnificently alert bird he thought of the farmer whom Ndugu now works for, and the white pickup three-wheeler vehicle the farmer drives around with which Ndugu told him about, and the wish Ndugu has of also driving one some day, and laughingly wishes for the retarded man, and then his nurse, to see the newly mutilated dog carcass the boy would then have to be asked to bury.

Much later still...

The grave in which Eliasse was buried is situated on top of this hill, near the cool shade of a tree, which Ndugu sees and approaches. Many birds busily flew over the landscape in all of their many doings, nestling in the trees. Sprouts of green grass made their appearance on his grave in early spring, and grew to grasslands in summer. The pair of shoes which Ndugu bought him, which he never had the honor of wearing, stood on the grave. The one got chewed by an animal some time, maybe a wild animal scenting the leather. Ndugu inspects the little damage the animal did. He gently puts the weather beaten shoes back to where he had originally placed them on top of the grave some years ago. He sits watching the grave intently. He gets up, moves over to hammer fresh nails in the wooden cross which he had made and inscribed with Eliasse's name. He pulls the

thing straight afterwards and gets seated again at the foot of the grave, contemplating the birds flying around. He never learned to know them like Eliasse, but then again, there were other things he had learned that Eliasse never did.

And he was alive too.

He stares into the distance from the view he gets here on top of the hill. He thinks of life, and the way it fell like pudding into these hands of his from the heavens above. Tears form in his eyes. Just then his son comes running towards him and embraces him with a hug. The child is filled with love.

‘What are you doing dad?’ He inquires innocently.

‘This is the grave of a good old friend of mine, Eliasse. He had Aids. Aids patients don’t live very long. But he amazingly lived almost eighteen years.’

‘Why did he live so long then?’

A smile forms on Ndugu’s face. ‘It was because he had hope, my son.’

A friend of Ndugu, whose daughter came with them soon wanted to know the same. Ndugu’s beautiful wife, who had been unpacking the picnic basket under the tree, held her gently as she spoke.

Ndugu felt as if he was alone between them. He had his self as his company, and they were there too, but they depended on him for their happiness.

He watches them with joy in his heart, seeing once again the beauty of his life. They were all there with him, and they all were there for one another.

His loving wife watches intently as the children investigate the grave. The children deprived the grave of the weather beaten shoes, wanting to know why the soles had never been worn.

They definitely thought it a waste of a pair of perfectly good old shoes.

Ndugu looked over his shoulder at the white pickup three-wheeler vehicle. It is similar to the one the farmer works with, and he got it from the farmer as an assistant.

Ndugu complied ever so cautiously to the children’s many questions and conclusions. He did so while his wife held him with bright, glistening eyes, kissing his cheek ever so gently.