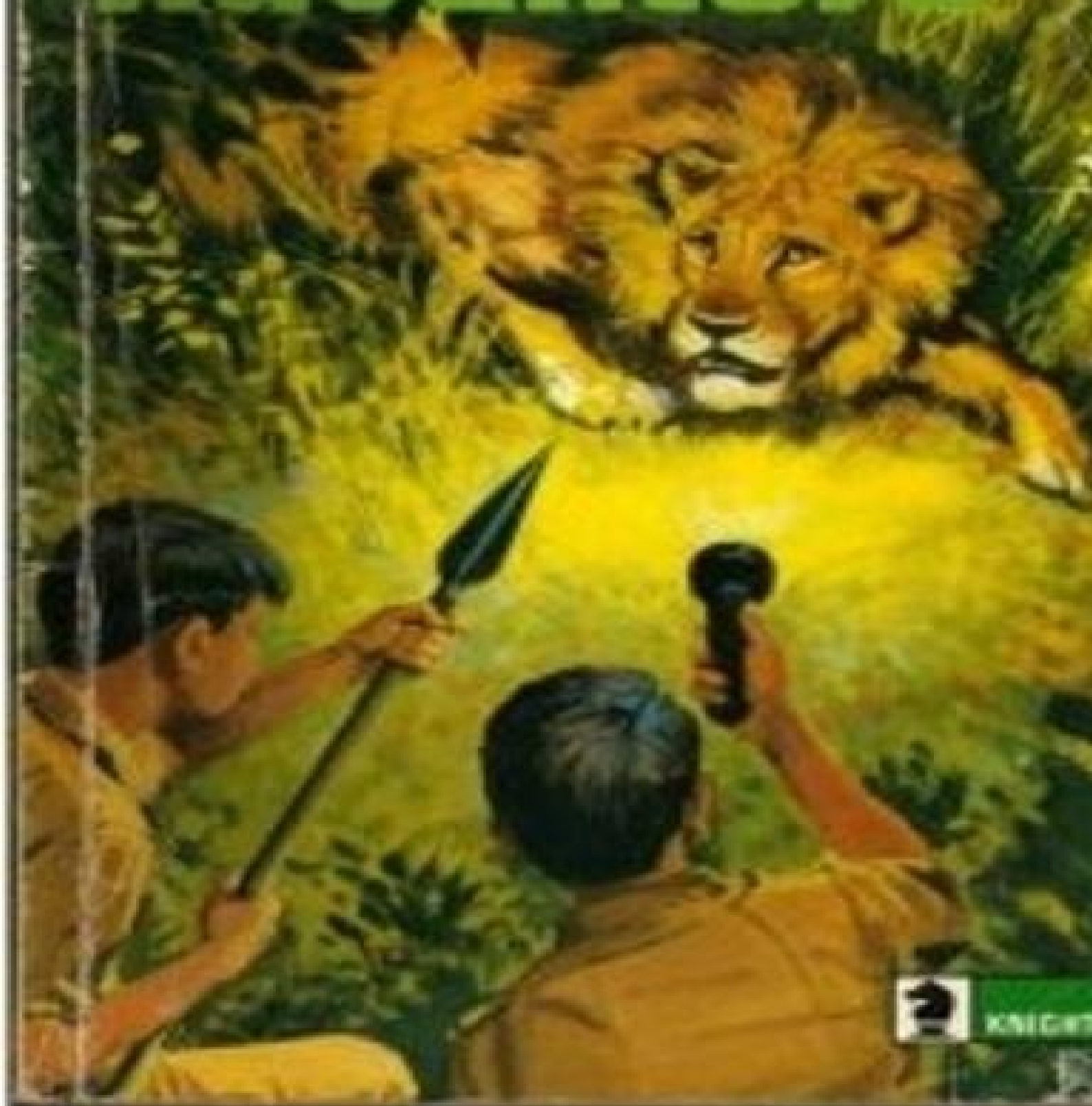


LION

Willard Price

Adventure



KNIGHT

Lion adventure

By Willard Price

Note

The characters in this story are fictional with the exception of Michael Grzimek, Dr Louis Leaky, and Joy Adamson. The descriptions of the habits of animals and customs of the people are factual. The Emperor Haile Selassie, mentioned on page 90, was deposed in 1974. He died in 1975.

Chapter 1

Man-eater wanted

It seemed a wild thing to do - lie out in lion country waiting to be attacked by a man-eater.

But Hal was not wild. He was a steady nineteen-year-old, six feet tall, with the strength and brains of a man. He had thought it over carefully. This had seemed the best way to go at it.

His brother, thirteen-year-old Roger, agreed - not because he was a heavy thinker - he wasn't - but it sounded like an exciting adventure.

So now they lay on the ground within a circle of piled-up thorn bushes. In Africa they call it a boma. It is supposed to protect you against wild beasts. Roger didn't feel very well protected.

'It's only five feet high,' he whispered. 'A lion could easily jump over it.'

'But he won't,' replied Hal. 'Not unless he's a real man-eater. Most lions leave you alone, provided you leave them alone.'

'Then why have a boma at all? Why not just sit out in the open?'

'You'd be inviting trouble if you did that. Suppose a lion or leopard or rhino or elephant or most any animal stumbled on you in the dark. He'd be surprised. He'd probably take a swipe at you in self-defence. One swipe would be enough. But all animals hate thorns. If they touch this boma they'll veer off. At least, I hope they will.'

'Except a man-eater.'

'Yes, except a man-eater. We've got the welcome mat out for him. If he gets our scent he's pretty sure to pay us a visit.'

'And you'd like that.' Roger said with a sort of shiver in his voice.

'Sure I'd like that. That's what we're here for. What's the matter, kid? Scared?'

'Not on your Hie,' protested Roger. 'Just cold.'

Hal and Roger had come to Africa, not to kill animals but to take them alive. They had been trained by their father, John Hunt, famous animal collector, in the difficult art of capturing living animals and shipping them to zoos and circuses. But tonight their job was not to save animals but to get rid of them.

It had been a strange day. It began with five murders. Five men repairing tracks on the Nairobi-Mombasa railway near the village of Tsavo were killed and eaten by lions.

The lions of the Tsavo region had always had a bad reputation. Years ago when the railway was first

being laid, newspapers the world over told the grim story of 'the man-eaters of Tsavo' who were killing and devouring railway workers by the score. Now these lions or their descendants were at it again.

The boys, already well known for their success in taking animals, were asked to help find the killer. This was no easy job. How were they to know which lions were man-eaters and which were innocent? The innocent must be saved, for they are one of the great sights of Africa. Visitors come from all over the world to see the African lions. Africa is their last home. Long ago there were lions in many lands in Europe, Arabia, Palestine, India ... As men multiplied, lions were killed off, and now Africa is the last stand of the 'King of Beasts'. It would be a pity to let this most majestic of animals become extinct.

But how save the good lions and yet get rid of the bad actors? You could not simply go out with a gun and kill all lions. You must have a way of discovering which were man-eaters and which were not.

Hal had found a way. He would offer the lions two kinds of bait: one was animal, the other human. The animal was a dead goat and it lay in the clearing ten yards in front of the boma. The human bait was the boys themselves.

An approaching lion could smell both the goat and the boys. If it preferred to eat the goat it was not a man-eater. But if it turned up its nose at the goat and attacked the boma it was a man-eater.

Roger didn't like the idea of being set out as dinner for a lion.

'Besides, it won't work,' he said. 'Suppose the lion eats the goat. That doesn't prove he isn't a man-eater.'

'Yes it does,' insisted Hal. 'A real man-eater won't touch an animal so long as it has a chance to eat human flesh.'

'Why? Are we so delicious?'

'The lion thinks so. Once he has dined on a human he's not satisfied with animal meat. Scientists say the reason is that human flesh is salty. And tender. A man's muscles are soft compared with those of an antelope that has to keep jumping all day every day to make a living. And Man's hide is not tough. And there is no fur or feathers or sharp quills to get stuck in His Majesty's jaws. Anyhow, there's no danger. We have our thirty safari men to protect us.'

It hadn't quite worked out that way. When Tanga, the station master who had reported the death of five workers, took the boys to the Tsavo district officer, that black giant said sourly:

'No. No thirty men. Just you two.'

'But how can we do the job alone?'

'That's your problem. No men.'

'Would you give us a reason?'

The officer glared. 'Why should I give you a reason? I was a chief, and my father and grandfather

were chiefs. My people called me King Ku. I am still King Ku. A king gives no reasons.'

'You are not a king,' Hal reminded him. 'You are a district officer responsible to the people of Kenya.'

King Ku leaped to his feet. 'Pig! I should have you flogged. You whites should remember that Kenya is a black man's country now. We owe no reasons to whites.' He waved his fly-whisk, symbol of a chief's authority. 'Ail right, X'U give you a reason. Your crew would kill many lions, bad ones and good ones. We can't have that. So you must act alone.'

Hal said no more. Later he said to Roger, 'I wonder what his real reason is. Why is he so down on whites? Almost seems as if he wants to get us killed.'

Chapter 2

The innocents

There was a scraping sound in the bushes.

‘Listen. Perhaps that’s His Nibs.’

Hal took up his Lee Enfield -303. It was a good gun for a lion hunt. It had a ten-cartridge magazine. And there was another cartridge in the chamber. Eleven shots. It just could take that many to kill a lion.

Hal had not allowed his brother to bring a gun. The kid might not know how to handle it. Besides, someone had to hold the electric torch and throw its spotlight on the lion. That was Roger’s job.

But Roger was not entirely unarmed. Beside him lay a ten-foot spear. One of his men had urged him to take it along. The man was a Masai, and the Masai are famous for their skill in killing a lion with nothing but a spear. Roger’s Masai friend had taught him how to use it.

Hal thought it was all nonsense. A Masai warrior might kill with a spear. But it was foolish for his brother to think he could do anything with it. Oh well, it would do no harm to let him bring it along.

Roger had also brought a thunderflash. It could be thrown at a beast and would explode in his face and was supposed to scare him out of his wits.

‘Light up,’ whispered Hal.

Roger turned on his torch. A dozen animals were tugging at the goat. What a disappointment - they were not lions but those homely humpbacks, the hyenas.

They paid no attention to the light but kept tugging at the carcass. They began to drag it off towards the bushes. If they got away with that, it would spoil the whole plan.

‘Take a crack at them,’ Roger urged. ‘Scare them away.’

‘And scare off the lions too? No - we’ve got to keep quiet.’

‘But we can’t let them spoil everything. How about stones?’

‘Okay, if we can find some.’ He explored the ground with his hand. ‘Here’s one.’

Hal stood up and hurled the stone. It smacked a hyena on the jowl and brought forth an unearthly scream.

But it did not scare off the hyenas. Instead, they raised their heads from their dinner and started sniffing about for their enemy. Then they came snarling and sneaking through the grass towards the boma.

The hyena is said to be a coward. Those who say it do not know the beast. True, a lone hyena will not attack a man unless the man is asleep. Then the beast will not hesitate to slip under the tent flaps and bite off a foot or a face. Many a hunter has been disfigured for life by a single hyena. But a man awake and alert will not be touched, if the hyena is alone.

If the hyena is one of a pack it is quite a different matter. Knowing that his companions will help him, he becomes bold and savage. So now the boys were completely surrounded by big-jawed bone-crushers seeking a hole large enough to admit their slinking bodies.

Roger kept circling the light along the inside of the thorn wall, watching for the first nose to come through. When it did, Hal whacked it with the butt of his gun and the nose withdrew, leaving nothing but a hole and a howl.

But another nose pushed through, enlarging the hole. Another whack. A growl on the other side signalled the breaking through of another hole. Then another.

It was impossible to look in all directions at once and punish every impertinent nose. In a few minutes the pack would be inside the boma.

The boys were saved by the very sort of animal they had come to hunt. A deep roar made Roger turn his light outside the boma. There was a huge lion, who had heard the hyenas scream, and had come to investigate. The hyenas had a sudden change of mind. They left the boma and ran yelping into the underbrush.

The lion approached the boma. Hal levelled his gun. 'Keep the light on him,' he said. This was a poor bargain' Hal thought. They had traded a pack of hyenas for something more dangerous.

The light danced on the lion's face - Roger's torch hand was wobbling.

'Keep that thing steady,' said Hal.

'Pot him,' Roger urged.

But Hal did not fire.

The lion stopped, staring into the light. It was not afraid, only fascinated. Lions are like humans - a little different. Some fear light, some do not. Lions have been known not only to approach a campfire, but to lie down in the hot ashes to get warm.

The eyes of the beast, twice as large as man's, shone like golden lanterns. It is the presence of a mirror in a cat's eye that accounts for the glow whenever a strong light is played upon the eyes at night. Roger found something terrifying in those blazing eyes.

'Shoot, you dope. What's stopping you?'

Hal still waited, finger on trigger.

The big beast was sniffing. A breeze carried the boys' scent straight up those wide nostrils. The lion stood still, within five feet, an absolutely perfect shot.

Hal was tempted to pull the trigger. This animal might or might not be a man-eater, but he was too close for comfort. Why take a chance? It was better to slaughter the wrong animal than to take the risk of being slaughtered.

But still he waited, and the light danced. The lion put up his head as if he smelled something that did not please him. He turned slowly and went back to the dead goat. He began to feed.

Hal put down his gun and relaxed. He felt as if he had been bound hand and foot and his blood had stopped circulating. He put his arm around his younger brother.

The boy was trembling, but refused to admit that he had been scared. "Sure is cold, isn't it?" said Roger. "Sure is."

Anyhow it was true. The night air of mile-high East

Africa becomes surprisingly chilly no matter how hot the day.

The lion raised his great bushy head and looked off into the brush. Then he made a most peculiar sound. It was not a roar. It was a soft, penetrating um-um-um-um. 'Calling his mate,' Hal whispered. Hal knew lion talk pretty well. He was already a trained naturalist. He had dealt with animals all his nineteen years on his father's animal farm and in the world. He knew that lions make a greater variety of sounds than almost any other animal, and every sound means something.

A deep muffled ugh-ugh-ugh means that the lion is looking for food. A charging lion is apt to give out a series of deep coughing grunts. A lion usually does not roar before he has eaten - that would scare away all the game. After his dinner he roars - and what a roar it is! It can be heard for many miles. It reaches much farther than even the scream of an elephant. It means something like, 'I have come and killed and eaten - I am a great fellow.'

Two lions walking along together will indulge in almost constant conversation. It consists of sighs, low grunts, wheezing noises, snoring sounds, moans, deep rumblings like those that come from the low notes of an organ.

When a lioness is talking to her cubs she sounds very much like a human mother, using soft, gentle, comforting baby talk. The cubs reply with plaintive little miaows that sound almost exactly like those of a house cat.

But this lion's mate replied with none of these sounds. She answered him with a low whistle. It sounded quite like the note of a sleepy bird. Who would imagine that a lion could whistle? The sound could deceive a human and would not alarm game.

A big tawny lioness came padding out of the bushes in the light of Roger's torch. The lion stepped aside to let her share his dinner. A lion is not like a hyena. The hyena never wants to share anything with anybody, even his wife. The lion is a family man. He eats first - but he doesn't forget his mate and his cubs.

But the lioness, approaching the goat, suddenly stopped and stared at the boma. She stretched her head towards it and sniffed strongly. The boys wished at that moment that they were not so smellable.

She lowered herself to a crouching position and crept towards the wall of thorns. Roger's legs wobbled, and even Hal felt a sudden chill crawling up his backbone. He brought his gun to his shoulder.

Chapter 3

The twisted gun

The lioness came straight up to the boma, asking questions with her nose.

She raised her paw and gave the wall a light swat. The whole structure shivered. If she swatted again, little harder, it would fall down. But she evidently didn't like the feel of the thorns. She started on circuit of the boma and Roger followed her with his light.

'I'd shoot if I were you,' he whispered to Hal.

'Perhaps she's just curious,' replied Hal, knowing that lady lions were much like lady humans.

Having completed the circle, the lioness stood on her hind feet, put her front paws on the top of the wall, and looked inside. Roger put his hand on his spear.

'Steady,' whispered Hal. 'Don't move.'

For tea seconds that seemed like ten minutes the lioness looked. Then she gave a snort as if expelling a bad odour from her nose, dropped to the ground, and padded out to join her husband at dinner.

Hal lowered his gun. She had passed the test with flying colours - she was no man-eater.

One goat was not enough food for two big animals. And yet it was not in lion nature to be selfish. When the male and his mate had partially satisfied their own hunger, they stood back. The lion raised his head to the

skies and let out his thunderous after-dinner roar. That notified all lions within miles that dinner was being served.

In a matter of minutes they began emerging from the brush. Eight lions made short work of what was left of the goat.

But there was a ninth lion that did not take part. He looked different from the others - evidently not a member of the same 'pride' or related group. He was older, bigger, bore a heavy mane that was black instead of the usual light brown, and he sat alone, staring straight into the light from the boma.

Though he would have nothing to do with the goat he was apparently hungry, for moisture kept dripping from the corners of his mouth. Presently he rose and came slowly towards the boma.

'Here we go again,' said Hal, a little wearily.

The boys were getting used to it. They could not remain scared every time a lion came sniffing around. Probably this one would behave like the others. He would be disgusted with the man-smell and would go back to the goat.

It was at this moment that Roger began to itch.

‘Something’s biting me,’ he said.

‘Probably just nervousness,’ said Hal.

Then he felt it himself. A crawling over his skin and a nipping at the most tender parts.

‘Ants!’ he exclaimed.

Why couldn’t they have waited until this lion hunt was over?

The ground had been carefully examined for ant-nests before the boma was built. These were evidently army ants, coming from heaven knows where, marching in a column like a well-trained army, eating up everything on the way. They had chosen to parade straight through the boma.

‘Let’s get out of here,’ said Roger, standing up and trying to shake the pests out of his clothes.

‘You stay right here and keep quiet,’ Hal ordered.

‘Keep quiet! How can you keep quiet when you’re being eaten alive?’

‘Better the ants than the lions.’

‘Oh, I’m not afraid of him. He’ll be just like the others. Give us the once-over and then leave us flat.’

‘I don’t know,’ said Hal. ‘He acts as if he meant business.’

The lion’s tail was twitching back and forth. Then it stood up straight and stiff like the mast of a ship. The ears were laid back. The teeth were bared. There was no roaring - just a soft ughing.

At this angle Hal could not use a heart shot. He must hit the brain. The brain was not up there in the top of the head - he knew that. That was all hair and nothing else. To get the brain he must strike between the eyes. He aimed his gun accordingly.

The lion flattened himself on the ground. This was called the ‘spread’. After the spread comes the spring.

The ants were biting. Hal tried to ignore them. As the lion’s claws bit into the earth, Hal fixed. At the same instant Roger hurled the thunderflash. It struck the ground directly in front of the lion’s, noisily and exploded. The lion gave it a contemptuous swat with his paw, then leaped into the boma. Things happened fast. The torch was knocked from Roger’s hand. It lay blinking in the grass. Roger tried to get his spear. It was buried under five hundred pounds of lion.

Hal, leaping about to keep clear of the lion’s claws, did not dare to shoot again for fear of hitting his brother. He finally got the muzzle close to the lion’s head. Then a great paw, more powerful than any baseball bat, the paw that could knock a zebra dead with one slap, struck the barrel and bent it into a V.

If Hal had fired at that instant, the gun would have exploded, killing all three, and that would have been the end of the story.

He took his finger off the trigger. As the lion lunged for him, jaws agape, he jammed the bent barrel down the beast's throat.

The lion fell over and clawed at the gun with his hind paws. He rolled about on the ground. He rolled himself of the gun barrel but he got something else.

Ants.

He stood up and shook himself. He bit at his flanks and pawed his ears and throat. He dashed about the boma. He had forgotten the boys.

The ants that had tortured them promptly left them to attack their new victim. They were large fat ants, almost an inch long, and had jaws like pincers.

Attacking by the thousands, they could strip an animal to the bone. They entered the throat, the eyes, the ears. One of the smallest of creatures was conquering the king of beasts.

The lion leaped out of the boma and dived into the dark. They heard him plunge into a near-by water hole.

Roger picked up the torch and they looked themselves over. Their faces, arms, clothes, were smeared with blood. But they couldn't find where the blood came from. They had many scratches, but none deep enough to produce all this gore.

Hal breathed a sigh of relief. 'It's the lion's blood, not ours. I thought I missed, but I must have creased his skull.'

'Well, let's get out of here,' said Roger. 'I've had enough for tonight.'

'You know better than that.'

Roger did know better. He knew that when a hunter wounds a wild animal he must follow it and finish it off. He knew that a badly hurt animal cannot be allowed to go loose. It must be tracked down and put out of its pain. There is another reason. A savage beast after being wounded is far more savage than before. It would revenge itself upon the first human being it could find.

'We'll go after it in the morning,' Roger said.

'We'll go after it now. It could be fifty miles away by morning.'

'But your gun is busted.'

'We still have the spear. Come along. But first, those scratches.' He took a tube of penicillin out of his bush jacket pocket.

'Why fool with them now? They are not bad.'

'Just a little scratch from a lion's claw could kill you. Blood poisoning. Lions don't manicure their nails. They are really pretty clean animals - lick themselves all over just like a cat. But they can't get under the nails. Scraps of meat get under them and rot and become poisonous. One fellow I knew who got a light scratch from a lion's claw spent the next six months in the hospital. He was lucky. He lived.'

Hal rubbed a little of the ointment into Roger's scratches, then into his own.

'That ought to do it. Let's go.'

'How about the other lions?' Roger said. He picked up the torch and played it on the goat, or the place where the goat had been. It was gone, and so were the lions.

'Good,' he said. 'We don't have to worry about them.'

'We can't be sure of that. They may be lying near by, digesting their meal. Perhaps they're all around us. If we bump into one of them, we're in trouble. They may be harmless old pussycats if they're left alone, but they don't like to be stepped on.'

He took the spear and pushed the thorns aside at the point where the man-eater had leaped over the wall. He stepped through and Roger followed, carrying the torch.

There were deep gouges in the ground where the Hon had landed. Then he had made straight for the water-hole, leaving a trail of blood. The boys followed warily, watching every rock to be sure it was a rock and not a lion. Sleepy growls came from the bushes. At the edge of the water-hole three lions that had been drinking looked into the light.

'Steady,' whispered Hal. 'No sudden moves.'

It was important to show no sign of fear. Even a well-behaved lion can't resist the temptation to chase a man who runs.

'Walk backwards,' Hal whispered.

Still facing the animals, they stepped slowly backwards along the edge of the pool. They took their time about it. If they tripped on a root or a hummock and fell the chances were good that they would not be allowed to get up again.

Hal felt he was getting cross-eyed, trying to watch the lions and at the same time watch the ground to see where the man-eater had come out of the pool. There was no use looking for footprints. The prints of lions' feet were everywhere.

They had gone halfway around the water-hole before he saw what he was looking for - pebbles stained with red, and a blood trail leading off into the jungle.

This was going to be worse than he had expected. The lion had not stayed in the open, but had crawled off into the underbrush. It might be hiding behind any bush, with an aching head and a heart full of hate. If it heard and smelled hunters approaching, it would brace itself for a spring. Lions had been known to leap twelve feet high and span a distance of forty-five feet in one jump. This one would

need to do as well. Bushes pressed close on both sides-if the lion were lurking behind one he might reach his enemies with a spring of only ten feet or less.

Roger stepped on a log. It rolled, dropping him on his back, then came up on four legs and made off.

‘Watch your step!’ Hal said angrily as Roger picked himself up. ‘Lucky that wasn’t the one we’re looking for.’

‘Perhaps it was,’ admitted Roger.

‘Not a chance. He wouldn’t have let you off so easily. Besides, the blood trail shows he didn’t stop here.’

They followed the red-stained bushes a little farther.

Then Hal stopped.

‘Shine that torch down here - close.’

He examined every leaf, every twig. No sign of blood. Perhaps the wound had stopped bleeding. But that was not likely. It was more probable that the lion was right here, somewhere, behind these bushes.

He approached a bush cautiously, trying to peer through it or around it.

‘Look out,’ cried Roger. ‘Behind you.’

Hal wheeled around. He braced himself for the lion’s spring. But lions seldom do what is expected of them. There was no spring.

A pair of great yellow coals burned in the bush. Above them was a shaggy head matted with blood.

The beast was flat on the ground. He crept forward inch by inch. He did not roar, he did not cough. He purred.

It was not a friendly, catty purr. It was a dreadful thing to hear, full of anger and revenge, and seemed to come not just from the throat but from the whole furious beast. It was like the rumbling before an earthquake.

‘Give me that spear,’ Roger said.

‘No, I’ll use it. You get back out of the way.’

‘Give it to me,’ insisted Roger. ‘They showed me how to use it.’

‘You’re not strong enough.’

‘It doesn’t take strength.’ He yanked it out of Hal’s hand. ‘You hold the light.’

There was no time to argue. Hal held the light. He realized with a jolt that this youngster was growing

up. In ten seconds he would either be dead or he would be a man. It was Masai custom - no Masai youth was considered a man until he had killed a lion.

Roger was already regretting his burst of courage.

Those glaring yellow eyes, the tail erect and as stiff as a gun barrel, the deep deadly purr, brought the sweat out in beads on Roger's forehead. He clenched his teeth. He tried to quiet his fluttering nerves.

He was big and strong for his age—yet he knew better than to trust his own strength. He called on Mother Earth to help him. Instead of hurling the spear, he planted the butt firmly in the ground. He pointed the blade directly towards the lion's chest. He held it in that position as steadily as his dancing nerves would permit.

The final charge of a lion comes like a bolt of lightning.. By comparison, a charge of an elephant, rhino or hippo or even a buffalo is slow motion.

At one instant Roger was watching a creeping animal still a good ten feet away. At the next instant it was

coming out of the bush like a bullet, but a bullet with five hundred pounds behind it.

But behind the spear was the whole weight of Mother Earth. The point penetrated the chest. The great jaws jerked down, gripped the shaft, pulled it out, and snapped it as if it had been bamboo. With a roar of rage and pain, the man-eater fell on his side, struggled to get up, fell again, and lay still.

Roger felt suddenly very young. He sat down weakly and mopped his face. Hal put his hand on the boy's trembling shoulder. He tried to speak - but the words wouldn't come.

Words were not necessary. They both knew what that touch on the shoulder meant - not the comfort given by a man to a child, but the respect of a man for a man.

Chapter 4

The man-eaters of Tsavo

Hal and Roger were not happy about it. They had not wanted to kill the animal - it was just a job that had to be done.

Someone else was not happy. King Ku.

'I don't believe it,' he growled when Tanga, the station master, told him the news. Two boys - alone. Their crew must have helped them. I thought I gave orders...'

'Your orders were obeyed,' Tanga said. 'The boys did it alone.'

'Were they hurt?'

'The lion mauled them.'

King Ku's eyes brightened. 'Ah, that is too bad. Are they in the hospital? Will they live?'

'They will live - they did not need to go to the hospital.'

'But you say they were hurt. Soon they will find-poison in their blood and they will die. It is very sad.'

'They treated the wounds with the white man's strong stuff. They will not die.'

King Ku's dark face seemed to become darker. 'We'll see about that.' Then, noticing the puzzled look on Tanga's face, he added, 'I mean, we'll see that they are protected. I'll order my medicine man to cast a spell over them. Tell them to have no fear of claws or teeth. No harm can come to them. You will tell them?'

'I will tell them.'

He did. In the dingy little railway station the boys listened to Tanga's assurance that King Ku would take care of them.

Then, leaving Tanga at his desk, they went out to walk up and down the railway platform and wonder what it all meant.

'Why is Ku so anxious to have us think we can't be hurt?' puzzled Hal. 'Is he trying to throw us on guard? Does he want us to take chances so we will be hurt? What can that old geezer have against us?'

'He looks savage enough to be capable of most anything,' Roger said. 'And Tanga - you know he was the one who got us into this. Do you suppose the two of them are trying to do us in?'

'Tanga seems such a good guy.' Hal said. 'Always smiling.'

'I know. But smiles don't mean much. You know what Hamlet said - about how a fellow can "smile and smile, and be a villain".'

'Well,' Hal said, 'I'm not going to worry myself sick about it. Let's go get a little shut-eye to make up for last flight.'

In their tent which had been pitched close to the railway track they tossed restlessly on their cots.

'What I can't understand,' Roger said, 'is how all this man-eating got started. Why is it so bad here?'

'You've heard of "the man-eaters of Tsavo"?'

'It sort of rings a bell. What's the story?'

'It happened right here. A couple of thousand men were building this stretch of railway. Their boss was a construction engineer named Colonel Patterson.

'Some of the men got sick and died. Colonel Patterson ordered several men to bury the dead, and paid them extra for digging the graves. The men took the money, but they were too lazy to dig graves. They just hid the corpses in the bushes.

'Game was scarce that year and the lions were hungry. Two of them found the bodies and ate them. That gave them a taste for human flesh. More men died and were eaten. The lions came every night. One night they found no corpses - so they broke into a tent, dragged out two men, killed them, and ate them.'

Roger sat bolt upright. 'You mean they came straight into a tent - a tent like this?' 'Exactly like this. And they kept coming every night.' 'But didn't this Colonel Patterson do anything about it?'

'He tried. But remember, he was an engineer, not a hunter. He had plenty of courage, but he didn't quite know how to go about it. He would sit up in a tree with a gun near the spot where a man had been killed the night before. The lions had too much sense to go there again. They would attack somewhere else.'

'One night he sat up on a branch above the body of a man who had just died. Having been up every night, the colonel was very tired. He went to sleep. A growl below disturbed him. He moved a little and fell plop on to a lion. Luckily the lion was so startled that it ran off into the bush.'

'The colonel built a lion trap. It was a big box made out of wood and iron and the door was fixed so it would close and lock if a spring in the floor was stepped on. At the back of the box he fenced off a small room and put a couple of men in it. They were safe behind bars. The idea was that the lion would come into the cage after the men and would step on the spring and lock himself in.'

'One of the man-eaters did walk into the trap, stepped on the spring, and the door snapped shut. The lion roared and woke the camp. The colonel and four of his men with rifles came running and fired twenty bullets into the cage. They couldn't see very well - they missed the lion but one of their bullets broke the latch, the door swung open, and the lion escaped.'

‘The colonel tried tin pans. He had his men surround a man-eater where it lay in the brush. Each man was armed with several tin pans. A passage was left open for the lion to escape. There the colonel posted himself so that he could pot the lion when it came out of the brush.

‘When he was all ready the men beat their tin pans together and the frightened lion came running through the brush. The colonel pulled the trigger but the gun only clicked. A misfire. Before he could use the other barrel the lion got away.’

‘The colonel didn’t get much help from his men because they believed the lions were really devils and could not be killed.’

The lions did show devilish intelligence. The colonel had strychnine put in the corpses of two men and laid them out in the bush. The lions were heard prowling about during the night but in the morning the bodies were still there, untouched. But two more men were missing from the camp.’

‘More than a thousand of the men went on strike. They leaped on a train bound for Mombasa.

The men who were left built shelters for themselves up on tanks or roofs or in trees. Some dug pits under their tents, covered the pits with logs, and slept down in the hole. Surely there they would be safe. But the lions pulled aside the logs, leaped down into the pits, and dragged out the men.’

‘They didn’t take the trouble to pull them off into the brush but ate them just outside the tents in spite of a hail of bullets.’

‘So many men climbed one tree that it fell on a man-eater, pinning him to the ground, but before they could call the colonel with his gun the lion wriggled loose and disappeared.’

‘Two experienced hunters came down from Nairobi. They had shot plenty of lions and were sure they could get these two devils. As soon as they stepped from the train a lion leaped upon one of them, knocked him down, and proceeded to eat him. When the other hunter attempted to interfere the lion jumped on his back and ripped it to shreds. The hunter was taken to the hospital. He never did show that lion.’

‘One night a dead donkey was put out where the lions could easily get at it. The colonel had a hunting platform —they call it a machan - put up about ten feet from the body. The machan was twelve feet high and consisted of four poles stuck into the ground and supporting a plank that served as a seat.’

‘The colonel perched up on this seat, gun in hand. A little after midnight he heard a sigh - a lion often sighs when he is hungry. The rustling in the dark told the colonel that the beast was close to the donkey. The colonel tried to keep quiet - but as he raised his gun it bumped against the plank and the lion at once left the donkey and began circling around the man.’

‘For two hours the horrified colonel heard the beast creeping round and round in the darkness, gradually coming closer. At any moment he expected the lion to rush the machan and perhaps break one of the flimsy poles and bring the whole thing to the ground.’

‘Suddenly something came flop against the back of the colonel’s head. He was so terrified that he nearly fell off the plank. He thought the lion had leaped upon him from behind. Then he realized it had

only been an owl which had perhaps mistaken him for the branch of a tree.

His sudden movement when the owl struck him made the plank creak. The lion heard the sound and came growling up to the machan. There was just enough dawn light so that Colonel Patterson could see the dark form against the whitish undergrowth.'

'He took careful aim and fired. The lion let out a terrific roar and began leaping about in all directions. The roars died down to groans and the groans to deep sighs - then nothing.'

'Men from the camp a quarter of a mile away came running and when they saw that the "devil" was dead they beat tom-toms and blew horns and threw themselves down on the ground before Colonel Patterson crying, "Mabarak! Mabarak!" It means "Blessed One" or "Saviour". They were sure that the colonel must be some sort of god to have conquered this devil.'

'But there was still the other man-eater to be reckoned with. It tried to get into the station where some men were sleeping, but the doors were too strong. It climbed up on the roof and tore away the corrugated iron sheets - it made a hole and dropped through. The men decided in a hurry that it was safer outside than in. They ran out, the lion after them.'

'One man hid in a water-tank. The lion upset the tank, pulled the unlucky fellow out, and ate him.'

'Then a very important man, Superintendent Ryall of the Railway Police, arrived in his own private railway car. He was a good shot and he knew it. He thought he could do in a day what Colonel Patterson had failed to do in nine months. Just give him one chance at that man-eater.'

'He got his chance. He had his car shunted to a siding, and with two friends, Hubner and Parenti prepared to wait all night for the lion. If they heard him grunting around, they would just go out and kill him. It would be as simple as that.'

'One would keep watch while the other two slept. Ryall took the first watch, but he fell asleep. Hubner suddenly woke and found to his horror that the lion was inside the car. It had pushed open the sliding door and jumped in. The door slid back and closed.'

'The lion leaped up on Ryall's bed, struck the sleeping man's head with his paw, sank its teeth into his chest, and that was the end of Ryall. The lion dragged the body off on to the floor and in doing so he disturbed Parenti, who woke to find a quarter of a ton of lion on top of him.'

'Hubner jumped over the lion and got to the door. He couldn't open it. The reason was that men who had been roused by the commotion were holding it shut so that the lion would not escape into the camp.'

'It must have been a bad shock for those two fellows to find themselves shut in with a man-eating lion. Hubner groped for his gun, but before he could find it there was a terrific crash - the lion had broken through a window taking Ryall's body with him.'

'The next day a search was made for the police officer's body. Nothing was found but his boots.'

'It was Colonel Patterson after all, the man who was not a good shot, who finally potted the second man-eater. The animal tried to get at some men sleeping in a tree. The next night Patterson was up

that tree. The lion came, tried to climb the tree, and was shot. He roared off into the bushes. In the morning Patterson went looking for him.'

'He saw what looked like a dead lion - but the "dead lion" suddenly came to life and charged him.'

'The beast was too weak from loss of blood to finish the charge. He died only five yards from Patterson's feet.'

'Those two lions alone had killed more than a hundred men including twenty-nine Indians and two Europeans. The story was told and retold hundreds of times in newspapers and magazines all over the world. The two skins were mounted and put on view in the Field Museum and if you ever go to Chicago you can see them there.'

'But you haven't answered my question,' Roger said. 'Those lions are dead. But still we have man-eaters here. Why is that?'

'For a very simple reason. The man-eaters of Tsavo often brought their cubs along and taught them how to hunt man and enjoy human flesh. Those cubs when they grew up taught their cubs. And so it goes on.' 'Why doesn't it happen in other places too?' 'It does. Lions are the greatest man-killers in Africa. Not long ago in Malawi fourteen persons were eaten by lions in a month; in Mozambique twenty in one month; in Ankole over in Uganda a dozen lions went on the rampage and it took eighteen months to kill them off. Near Entebbe the wise old lions discovered that whenever elephants raided plantations the people would come out to drive them away and in the confusion the lions could easily grab a few victims. Seventeen lions had to be killed before the people were safe. In Sanga a single lion killed forty-four people and another took eighty-five. It will go on as long as there are lions.' 'Then why not get rid of all lions?' 'That's like saying why not get rid of all motor cars. They cause a lot more deaths than the lions do. The lion is one of the most magnificent animals we have on this planet. People come from all over the world to see him. And even if lions kill one or two hundred Africans in a year that's not many out of a population of three hundred million. Of course we don't want them to get even one hundred. It's not much comfort to a woman whose husband has been killed to know that most lions are not dangerous. Get your beauty sleep. We've got to find another of these rascals tomorrow morning.'

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