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ON THE GORILLA TRAIL

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THE BIG GORILLA OF KARISIMBI



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CHAPTER XIII

THE LION THAT CAME TO LIFE

MY DAYLIGHT LION ON THE RUINDI PLAINS

ONCE the gorilla hunt was over we had planned to turn our attention to some of the smaller fry of the African fauna which usually lure the adventurous overseas—the elephants, the buffalo, and the lion.

We were not at all bloodthirsty, and we hadn't the slightest desire for indiscriminate slaughtering, but we did feel the lure of big game hunting, and I was convinced that I was offering any of the animals I mentioned a more than sporting chance in the present state of my shooting. I had shot at one elephant, two targets, and three crocodiles in the three months in Africa.

Mr. Bradley particularly wanted a buffalo, Miss Miller and I were eager for lions. Miss Miller already had one elephant to her credit and I was hoping for similar luck. We had very little time, for, although Mr. Bradley and I were unhurried, Mr. Akeley had lecture engagements in America, and the constant delays of safari had reduced our hunting plans.

The volcano had cut ten days from the schedule, but the gorillas and the volcano were the high spots of the expedition. Anything else was an after-climax. Still, a lion can be a vivid after-climax.

There is distinct difference of opinion among hunters

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as to which is the most dangerous, the lion, the elephant, the buffalo, or the rhinoceros. Drummond puts the rhino first, the lion second; but Mr. Akeley has discredited the dangers of the rhino, believing most of his so-called charges are simply blundering rushes, not actuated by any sight of the enemy.

Mr. Akeley puts the buffalo first, with the elephant a close second, yet he said he would rather hunt elephant than lion; he knew he could stop an elephant—he demonstrated that the day on the plains—but that Leslie Tarlton's experience had shown that a charging lion could come fifty yards with a bullet in his heart.

Stigand puts the lion first, the buffalo last. Frederick Selous, mightiest of big game hunters, puts the lion first and the buffalo and elephant on a par. Colonel Roosevelt stated that the weight of opinion among those best fitted to judge was that the lion was the most formidable opponent of the hunter under ordinary conditions.

In the Congo we had not been in game country to any extent, so we accumulated few stories until we reached Kivu, and most of these were about leopards. We were warned to close our tents and never stir without a light at night for fear of prowlers, and the native runners were never sent alone, but always in pairs.

If half the native stories were true, the leopards exacted an amazing toll. Even allowing for exaggeration, their terror was so real that it must have a good basis of fact. The Belgian officials and missionaries had many instances. At Lulenga the Father Superior pointed to a banana grove that we were passing one day

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and remarked casually that there a leopard had eaten a young native woman about two months before. The beast had entered the hut at night, seized her, and dragged her into the banana grove. The natives had not attempted a rescue, but at daybreak had gone for the White Father, who came down with his gun, but the leopard made off and there was nothing left of the poor woman but evidence.

At the Mission was a child with fresh leopard marks on its forehead. The leopard had entered the hut, not for the child, but for something else, a dog, I believe—a leopard delicacy—and had wounded the child in its spring.

It is rarely one sees a leopard. They are too wily and catlike. Men have lived in Africa for years without a glimpse of one. Most of those that are killed are got by gun traps at night. On the other hand, Monsieur Flamand of Ruindi, ran into three one afternoon and shot two.

For months we had heard of the Ruindi plains as one of the richest game fields left in Africa, where we could find antelopes by the thousand, and buffalo, elephants, and lions everywhere. There were no rhinos, but we were not after rhino. It seemed the very place for our needs and we planned to move out there with all speed.

Moving with all speed in the Congo means going into camp and waiting for porters. Porters from Lulenga would go no further than Ruchuru, two days away, and at Ruchuru we would have to get fresh porters to take us out on the Ruindi plains, a three days' march. There we would have to get porters from Luofu, two days

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farther on, because the Ruchuru porters would not remain on the plains.

With real regret we bade farewell to our good friends at the Mission, and on December 4 started north through the Rift Valley to Ruchuru.

As usual, we had sent a runner ahead to notify the chiefs, and at noon of the first day we found a chief out to greet us, with the grass cut for a camping place and eggs and delicious bananas for a present. I spent that afternoon writing on the Corona with the usual crowd of natives sitting curiously about; they believed the typewriter some sort of musical instrument, and must have marveled at the monotony of the air.

Next morning we made a leisurely departure at seven-thirty, and about noon we crossed the wild-rushing Ruchuru River on a picturesque bridge and wound up the slopes into Ruchuru, one of the most important stations on the Eastern frontier of the Congo. It is on high ground, at an elevation of about five thousand feet, with Lake Edward on the north and the M'fumbiro volcanoes to the south. From the elevation the climate ought to be very healthy, but it is not considered as excellent as Kivu. Its wide, spacious, flower-bordered avenues gave it the air of being quite a place. Like Kissenyi and Albertville, it seemed a stage setting waiting to be filled with the actors.

There were several officials at Ruchuru, the Commissioner, the *chef de poste*, the *agent territorial*, a banker, and there had been a doctor, but he had left to escort Madame Deriddar home, leaving the infirmary in charge of native orderlies. It was here that Monsieur Deriddar