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LIFE STORIES OF BIG GAME

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

**MAN-KILLERS
AND
MARAUDERS**

Demy 8vo. Illustrated.

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"ROLLING TO EARTH FAST LOCKED IN THE GRIP OF A YOUNG
MALE BABOON."

(Continued)

LIFE STORIES OF BIG GAME

By

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WITH SKETCHES BY

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PREFACE

It may be considered that these stories of animals are rather grim, so anticipating this objection, I will answer that the lives of these animals—as of most forest-dwellers—are indeed grim, and that the warp of savagery and terror is inextricably woven with the woof of beauty.

In any case I hope they may prove interesting to many readers in other countries than Africa, and that hope is based on the knowledge that they faithfully reflect the observations of twenty-six years lived mostly in solitude, and on the further knowledge that many town-dwellers, condemned to an artificial environment, are sportsmen and children of Nature at heart.

May these word-pictures be accepted, therefore, as “the next best thing.” If so, I am well rewarded for hardships encountered and labour expended ; also by the knowledge that an insight has been given into lives the lessons from which are not without value to mankind.

W. S. C.

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LIFE STORIES OF BIG GAME

CHAPTER I

"GREATHEART," THE BUFFALO

I HAVE called him "Greatheart" because he was a little buffalo bull, and all the buffalo bulls I have met have been greathearted in the sense of being courageous.

He was born one night in a dense, shady forest, where his mother had stayed alone to await his coming when the herd went to graze on the big vlei bordering the river, five miles away. For it was October and very hot ; and at such seasons the buffalo herds seek the deep shade in the daytime, though in winter they will often stay all day on the vleis.

So, on the afternoon before his birth, the herd went to graze without his mother, and when she heard their passage through the bush next morning, as they returned to rest, she joined them with her little son trotting beside her.

In this the buffalo and antelope calves are different to the calves of domestic animals. Almost as soon as they are born they have strength to travel beside their mothers, and gain the protec-

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tion of the herd. If Nature had not ordered it so, if they had to lie helpless and alone for several days, many would fall victims to leopards, hyenas, and wild dogs. For the enemies of the weak and helpless in the bush are many. So, by the evening of the first day, when the herd went again to water and food, "Greatheart" was already strong enough to trot bravely beside his mother.

Looking at the small, slim creature, with his sleek, black coat, and smooth, silky head, you would not have believed that one day he would be big and fierce and shaggy maned, with a mighty mass of horn on his forehead, like the great bull—his father—who stalked in front of the herd. Yet within five years he was to give battle to, and defeat, the great bull who in another two years drove his father out of the herd. That herd he was to lead for more than four years; a terror to all challengers, and to lions and men alike; as this history will show.

Just before sunset the herd came out of the forest on to a long vlei running beside the Quando River, where the grass was green and short and succulent, owing to the old grass having been burned off by natives during the winter. Straight to a reed-fringed lagoon marched the leader, and with him went half a dozen younger bulls who had not yet challenged his leadership.

While the bulls drank, the cows and calves waited, the cows staring back across the vlei to

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the forest from which they had come. For they knew that from the forest danger, and sometimes death, could come ; and when it did they must warn the bulls whose duty it was to meet it.

But on this evening all was peaceful, and presently, when the bulls had drunk their fill, they came and stood in front of the cows, facing outwards, while the latter went in their turn to drink. When all had finished, they moved out on the vlei, and presently "Greatheart" saw calves a little older than himself lie down to rest. Being imitative—like all young animals—he went and lay down with them, while his mother and theirs grazed close by.

The bulls had placed themselves in a circle outside the cows and were grazing quietly, but from time to time they raised their heads and nosed the wind suspiciously for an enemy taint. Seldom throughout the night was there a time when one great head or another was not raised to watch and listen ; and when the cows lay down near their calves to chew the cud the bulls came closer in, and stood ruminating until they rose again.

At daybreak they left the vlei and wandered slowly into the forest, where presently they lay down to rest and sleep. But here, too, there was always one of the bulls standing motionless on guard ; with ears and eyes and nose ever vigilant. This day was particularly hot even in the shade, for it was near the time of the first rains, and

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thunder threatened. So soon after midday the great bull arose and led the way again to the waterside.

But while the cows drank, he and the other bulls dug great holes in the soft mud with their horns until head and mane were covered with it, which gave them an added fierceness of aspect. Then they lay down and rolled and wallowed in it until their black coats were also plastered; for the mud was cool to their bodies, and in the daytime they knew there was little to fear.

During the next six months little "Greatheart" grew quickly, and on his head appeared a black, shaggy growth of hair, and the knobs of two horns, with which he delighted to butt the other bulls of his own age in playful challenge. About this time, too, his mother formed an unpleasant habit of kicking him in the ribs whenever he went near her; but as her milk was growing scarce, and he was already accustomed to grass and water, he soon ceased to trouble her and became sturdily independent.

During this time the herd ranged for a hundred miles up and down the river, for where grazing is good buffalo seldom desert a district unless molested. "Greatheart" had already learned a good deal about the perils of land and water, and how to avoid them.

Once he had turned off from the shallow back-water where the others were drinking, and had

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gone to the main stream. His nose had barely touched the water when there was a swirling rush, and a crocodile's wicked head shot into the air with great jaws clashing just as he sprang clear. He did not know how lucky he was—for a crocodile seldom misses—but he realised why the herd sought always the shallow backwaters and pools, and he did not again venture to the river. For these clashing jaws brought to his brain a message of death.

On another occasion he wandered off, unperceived, about fifty yards beyond the outer line of bulls in the night time, when suddenly a fearful scent assailed his nostrils and he raced for the herd as iron jaws nipped the flesh of his rump painfully. His shrill bellow of pain brought an answer of thunderous quality from the nearest bull as he charged to the rescue; and before that angry bellow and thunder of hoofs the cowardly hyena, which had been tempted by his youth, fled hastily. So “Greatheart” learned that safety for his small self lay within the circle of the watchful bulls, and in future he stayed there. More than ever was this brought home to him when he was a year old.

The herd had returned to the locality where he was born, and one of the first showers of the season was falling in a soft drizzle as they grazed in an open plain of short grass. Suddenly there came a warning bellow from the great herd leader, a note half of warning and half defiance.

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Instantly the cows and calves and yearlings drew closer together, while in front of them stood the larger bulls. Every head was turned towards the outline of the bush, from whence came a curious fetid smell which caused strange little tremors of fear and anger in "Greatheart's" body.

Presently he made out two great, slinking figures moving along the edge of the forest belt. They were not hyenas he knew; their size was too great. And he had not yet met lions. But the great leader knew, and so did the others; and as the soft-stepping figures advanced they lowered their heads with angry bellows, pawing the earth in furious challenge. For themselves they were not afraid, for they knew well that each of them was more than a match for any single lion. But there were many calves in the herd, and it was these the lions sought.

Suddenly the lions crouched to spring, at about ten yards distance, but before their bellies had touched the earth three of the largest bulls dashed towards them, and with evil snarls they pivoted hastily and bounded away. Back came the bulls on the instant, and for a time no more was seen of the attackers. Then suddenly a cow bellowed, and a long shape flashed into the air between the sentry bulls with intent to seize a calf from behind them; while just behind him followed the lioness, his mate.

The herd broke and scattered, but only to bunch



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again about twenty yards farther away. As they broke, the three nearest bulls dashed with lowered heads at the two yellow forms, beneath which lay a struggling cow and a yearling heifer. Before the killers had time to make the quick death twist, or even to fix their claws in the victims, mighty thuds echoed on the night air, and two snarling, heavy bodies were hurled yards distant, each with several broken ribs.

This was enough it seemed. Picking themselves up, with savage snarls of menace, they retreated to the bush, and soon their complaining grunts were heard a mile distant.

As the bulls struck them each had struck back with powerful talons, and the big leader and one other bore bleeding scars in the neck and shoulder. The yearling heifer had been bitten deeply in the neck, and the poisonous fangs had tainted the blood stream so that in three days she fell out and died. But the cow suffered only from claw marks and a lame shoulder. So once again "Greatheart" learned that behind the big herd leaders alone stood safety ; a lesson he would one day teach to other youngsters.

Six months after this he learned the existence of a greater terror, when he met man for the first time. But he learned also that this enemy, too, might be put to flight or killed by those of his breed.

The herd was grazing near the river about two

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hours before sunset, and had detected no sign of danger, when suddenly there came two sharp cracks of sound such as he had not heard before, followed instantly by a thud close to him. Turning his head in startled haste, he saw one of the big bulls collapse and lie kicking helplessly, while some distance away a big cow sank down and attempted unsuccessfully to rise.

Instantly there was wild confusion, as, led by the old bull, the herd thundered in mad haste towards the shelter of the trees, a hundred yards away. As they went there came two more cracks of sharp sound, but this time they were followed by a droning noise as of great winged insects passing over. Reaching the bush the herd halted, and, looking back with them, "Greatheart" saw two brown, upright figures—like and yet curiously unlike baboons—walking towards the fallen bull.

They had arrived within a few yards, and "Greatheart" was wondering why the bull did not follow the herd, when he suddenly jumped to his feet and charged with lowered head at the nearest figure. Next instant that figure was hurled into the air to fall again several yards away. As it fell, the bull reached it and, kneeling beside it, tore savagely at it with his great horns until it lay still and inert.

The other figure had run from the bull's charge, but now stood with something which glittered in

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the last sun-rays, projecting from the upper part of his body. From this figure came again the curious sharp sound, and at the heavy thud which followed the bull fell in a heap upon the other figure, and after a few spasmodic kicks lay still.

Then from the bush came a sound of strange voices and a crowd of running, black figures. These seized the bull and turned him over, and then lifted from beneath him the figure he had attacked. This they bore towards the bush, and "Greatheart" knew then that his comrade had killed the figure which in some way had killed *him* with the sharp noise.

On the air, as the black figures ran on to the vlei, there had come a strange scent, a scent which in future he always associated with danger, just as he afterwards associated that sharp crackling sound with danger and death.

That night the herd grazed ten miles up the river, and throughout the dark hours the bulls were restless and vigilant. At the first streak of dawn the leader headed for the bush—though it was winter and customary for them to remain in the open until ten o'clock or later—and they had not gone far before "Greatheart" knew that something unusual was on foot.

In this he was right. The old bull had been hunted before, and knew that man returns again and again to the scene of his killing, so he had decided to forsake their usual haunts for a time

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and head for the Okavango marshes—a hundred and fifty miles away. It was well for the herd that the old bull knew the route well, for water was scarce, and in some directions there was none for a hundred miles.

But he led them along the course of two small rivers for half the distance, and then from reed-pan to reed-pan, until the Okavango was reached. And unconsciously he revenged himself upon human kind in doing so, for after the herd had passed, more than one wandering, thirsty native reached those pans to find them masses of dried mud, where the thirsty beasts had wallowed and tramped after drinking all the scanty fluid.

This trek—the first he had seen—impressed upon "Greatheart's" mind the danger of mankind even more than the death of the bull. For their leader had evidently feared them more than all other enemies; and "Greatheart" knew he feared but little!

For several months they stayed near the Okavango, and then one day two little brown figures appeared near the edge of a forest glade where they rested. Before the herd had realised their presence a heifer near to them sprang to her feet and dashed away with a rush which the herd followed.

"Greatheart" had heard no sound, but from the heifer's neck protruded two little poisoned arrows, planted there by the small Bushmen. As the

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poison took effect she dropped further behind and the herd was out of sight when she fell. Now, like "Greatheart," this heifer was about two years old, and, like himself, was beginning to feel the mating urge. For some time past he had instinctively stayed close to her, not knowing that he was inviting challenge he could not meet from the older bulls a little later, and he had been lying beside her when she was struck.

Suddenly missing her now, he turned back on his tracks, and presently found her lying stiff in the tracks of the herd. At the same time a twig cracked sharply some distance away, and without knowing why but governed by some instinct transmitted by long dead ancestors, "Greatheart" lay down and concealed himself in a patch of cover close by.

Presently the two small Bushmen came cautiously through the trees and, seeing the dead heifer, ran joyfully towards her. Laying down their deadly bows they produced small knives, and as they bent over the heifer a sudden fury assailed "Greatheart."

Springing to his feet, he dashed down with lowered head in the first charge he had ever delivered, and, quick as the Bushmen were, he caught one fair in the loins and hurled him against a tree. As the man dropped senseless to the ground "Greatheart" horned him savagely, and left only a mangled corpse for his mate to find when he

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returned hours later. For the Bushmen had not expected any of the herd to remain with the heifer, and it was indeed only "Greatheart's" youth and desire of his first mate which had led him to note her fall and turn back.

When he rejoined the herd, where they rested seven miles away, he had learned by experience what all buffalo seem to know by instinct, viz., that the men-folk follow the beasts they wound and may be looked for by the body. Perhaps the breed first gained that knowledge in such accidental manner and have perpetuated it by example to each succeeding generation? At all events, it is knowledge they turn to terrible account; as "Greatheart" did before he died.

A month later he witnessed the deposition of the great leader who—although he did not know it—was his own father. Ever since he was born he had witnessed periodical battles for leadership. They always began as this one did, but, until now, his father had always won.

A big bull had for some time past associated with a particular group of cows, and to-day he suddenly left the herd and walked off to the bush followed by this group of about half a dozen. Some distance away he halted in front of them, pawed the earth, and bellowed a challenge. Instantly the herd leader roared his defiance, and with small eyes glowing redly with rage he charged down on his adversary.

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At perhaps five paces he halted with lowered head, pawing the earth and bellowing savagely. Then came the rush and the shattering shock of conflict as the great horn-bosses—with a weight of nearly fifteen hundred pounds behind each—met and the horns interlocked.

Then the leader slipped to his knees and, wrenching his horns free, the challenger whipped round and drove a horn into his side, rolling him over. But almost instantly he was up, and catching the younger bull fairly in the chest lifted him clear from the ground.

For nearly an hour the battle continued, sometimes one and sometimes the other gaining an advantage; but at last age began to tell and the big leader returned more slowly to each charge, drawing great sobbing breaths. At last he went down before a savage blow on the shoulder and stayed down for fully two minutes. When he arose he made a quick feint at his adversary, and then wheeled and made for the bush at a limping, painful trot, to live out his brave, old life henceforth as a solitary wanderer, or in company with other old warriors, like himself, whose days of leadership and dominance were done.

Cruel perhaps? But Nature is always just. The fate of one becomes sooner or later the fate of all. And there is wisdom in such a provision, for the leader of the weak and helpless in the danger-filled forest haunts must himself be the

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strongest and cleverest of his breed. So that night the new leader bellowed his joy in his victory, and the herd followed him as was his right, without regret for the defeated leader who had served them for so long.

A year later, when a little over three years old, "Greatheart," with the rashness of youth, essayed his challenge to this new leader, but the result was swift and ignominious. Within five minutes he lay with the breath knocked out of his body and two ribs broken, for although he weighed a thousand pounds and was well muscled he lacked the battle craft of the leader. So he was glad to scramble up at last and wander off alone to await the time when solitude and wise living should give him the weight and strength to claim successfully his right of leadership and fatherhood.

For the herd law is that he who challenges authority unsuccessfully must go into exile, and this is why immature and old bulls are found wandering alone, and with small herds only the great leaders and those who yield to them without challenge. Sometimes several herds combine temporarily and the leaders respect each other, but in each herd there is only one.

For nearly a year "Greatheart" wandered alone or in company with chance met outcasts like himself, learning much of good grazing grounds and isolated water supplies, of enemies and defensive tactics. All of which knowledge equipped him for

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good leadership later. One great adventure he had which I must tell you.

One day, when wandering with a bull of about his own age, training like himself for successful challenge and command of a herd, there fell on his ears snarls and grunts, also thuds, and roars of pain and anger. Hastening forward they came to a small glade in the forest where the rays of the late afternoon sun showed an old buffalo bull nearly blind with age fighting for his life with two young lions.

One clung to his massive shoulders, and this he was trying to dislodge, while one was rising from the ground where the bull had hurled him, with blood streaming from a hole in his side where the old warrior's horn had entered. Without hesitation "Greatheart" and his comrade dashed forward just as the old bull, with a mighty heave, jerked the lion from his hold.

As he fell "Greatheart's" head took him in the stomach and lifted him high into the air, while his mate dashed at the badly wounded lion on the ground. Seeing the new enemies the latter wheeled swiftly, and with an angry snarl bounded into the forest and disappeared. But the one "Greatheart" had struck was less fortunate. Coming to earth with all the wind knocked out of him he had no time to recover before all three buffaloes drove their horns into his soft body, and though he struck desperately with power-driven

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talons, his ribs were stove in like cardboard, and one great horn tore out half a lung through the hole it had made in his side.

In less than two minutes there was only a mangled corpse and three bleeding buffaloes in that forest glade. If "Greatheart" had not arrived so fortunately it is possible that the lions might have pulled the old bull down—for he was very old indeed—but there is no doubt that they would have carried the marks of that battle always, and have learned the old lion's wisdom, which is to leave such shaggy warriors alone, unless plenty of help is available.

A few months after this "Greatheart" felt the mating urge with resistless force and headed for the flats by the river where he had grazed so often. Two days later he found his old herd again and wasted no time in preliminaries. A hundred yards away he bellowed his defiance and pawed a challenge. Then he went slowly forward. The herd leader was no less ready and came to meet him.

The battle was long and bloody, and at one time an onlooker might have thought "Greatheart" had lost, but that reserve of force which belongs to youth was his, and the blood of his father—the greatest leader that herd had known. Making a last desperate charge at his failing adversary, he drove his horn clean over the heart, and one of the sharp, curving points entered that

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organ. The bull dropped with a groan and when "Greatheart," that night, led the herd upstream, bruised and sore and blood-besmeared, but triumphant, he left his dead antagonist to the hyenas.

Perhaps such an end was merciful, for it is one to which most creatures of the wild come at last, and the few years an old bull may spend in solitude are not happy. "Greatheart" had ably avenged his father, but this of course he did not know. What he did know was that he had won his heritage at last, and for four years he held that heritage, and was as proud and defiant as his father had been.

During those four years men-folk had hunted his herd several times, and the glittering rifle-barrels which spat death—and the upright figures which were so like and yet unlike baboons—were now familiar to him. His herd had lost several bulls and six cows to them, and although he left the district each time these enemies seemed to grow more numerous, and were met with in many places as the years went on.

So, when, one morning, his quick eye detected a flash of metal and a patch of brown under the trees, he stamped a warning to the herd and turned to lead it in flight. But quickly as he moved he was not quite quick enough, and following on the sound he hated and feared, a sharp, hot pain flashed down his hindlegs, for a bullet had passed through the thighs. Simultaneously a

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young bull who had not moved quickly enough dropped dead with a bullet through his heart.

For two miles he led the flight through the forest, but the pain in his thighs grew greater and he wanted to rest. Then hot rage erased the pain from his limbs and he suddenly wanted to kill and kill and rend these upright creatures who had caused his pain. Memory stirred, and he saw again the Bushman he had killed and the manner of the killing. Wheeling aside, he turned back the way he had come, but parallel to his tracks, while the herd halted and watched him go, for instinctively they knew he had a vendetta to attend to.

For about a mile he continued, with the pain in his legs growing greater, until he came to a dark clump of evergreen bush about ten yards from the trail. Here he sank to earth and waited concealed, knowing that his enemy would follow. Now the two hunters that morning were new to the country, and knew not the cunning and courage of "Greatheart's" breed. So, when one suggested that his friend should see the dead bull skinned while he followed "Greatheart's" trail, the friend agreed and native warnings were laughed at.

"Greatheart" had lain concealed and vigilant perhaps half an hour when the brown, khaki-clad figure of his enemy approached with eyes fixed upon the blood spoor. When he was almost abreast "Greatheart" sprang to his feet, and, despite the burning pain which shot through his

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limbs, he thundered down in fury upon the unsuspecting man. Before the latter had time to take in the situation, or to raise his rifle, the great head took him in the chest and hurled him backwards.

Then the great beast knelt on the prostrate body and drove the life from it, during which a horn entered the neck and nearly tore the head from the shoulders. The natives fled, and when "Great-heart's" fury had abated he arose from his victim, and left only a shapeless mass where recently had been a man.

Then he turned and followed the herd through the forest, but about midday he reached a water hole, and because of the pain in his legs he stayed there. When night fell instinct warned him that in his crippled condition he was unfit to take his place as leader, and so for a month he wandered alone.

Grass and water were plentiful and he rested a great deal, while Nature set to work to repair the damage. The bullet had been a solid, and not a "soft-nose," so, as with all herbivorous animals, the wound healed quickly, and at the end of a month only a slight limp remained. But in the wild perfection is necessary to existence and indirectly that limp proved fatal to "Great-heart."

When he rejoined the herd another leader had already fought for, and assumed, the vacant place, nor was he in mind to step aside for "Great-

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heart." So when the latter arrived he promptly gave battle, and that slight stiffness in the hind-legs turned the scale against our hero, the result being that after a desperate battle he was left helpless and sorely hurt on the plain.

Staggering presently to his feet he made shift to reach water and shade, and for three months wandered alone with rage in his heart against all the world and man in particular. For he had not yet reached the age when solitude can be endured contentedly by the deposed monarch, though he had enjoyed four years of mastery.

Then one morning, as he stood nosing a suspicious taint in the air, with his great form bulking blackly against the newly-risen sun, the dreaded sound of a rifle shot rang out and a red-hot pain stabbed through his chest. He fell to his knees and as he half rose he saw two of the familiar brown forms he hated walking quickly from the bush towards him.

He knew by experience that if he attempted to charge they would run, while the pain in his lungs and a rush of blood in his throat made even rising painful. So he rolled over on his side and lay with legs stretched out stiff and motionless, as he had seen so many of his kind lie in death. But his small, red eyes glowed wickedly with hate and rage as they watched the oncomers, and this the men could not see.

They saw only the dead form of a magnificent

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bull, and one was congratulating the other on his accurate shot. Nearer and nearer they came, while through half-closed lids “Greatheart” watched, with the life-blood welling in his throat. Three paces from the body they halted to survey their prize when with a strength lent by hate and rage and the courage of the buffalo heart “Greatheart” sprang to his feet and charged on the instant.

Only two strides the nearest man took in retreat when the great horn bosses drove into his loins smashing spine and kidneys with the force of impact, and as he fell to earth “Greatheart” collapsed on the top of him. When the other man fired the light of day darkened and a sound of rushing waters flooded “Greatheart’s” senses. So he died. But it is doubtful whether the bullet which reached his brain, or the rush of blood which that last great effort brought from his shattered lungs, was the cause of his death.

Under his corpse his slayer, too, lay dead, for the buffalo charge—unlike that of the lion—spells death always, his own or his enemy’s. In a great country house in England his splendid head hangs to-day, a monument to the courage and tenacity which killed its master’s youngest son, and a warning to others that while life remains to such as “Greatheart” fighting courage dwells in them also.

CHAPTER II

“ POWERFUL,” THE LION

I HAVE called him “ Powerful ” for a reason this story will disclose, though he was born nameless. When his eyes first opened upon this world he could not see very much of it, because, for one thing, he was little more than two days old, and his eyes were weak. For another, daylight was breaking outside the cave in the Matoppos where he was born—making twilight in the cave itself—and his eyes were made by Nature to see best with in the dark.

Yet he could see two small yellow bodies lying near him, and because they felt warm to his nose—like the body where that nose had always found warm milk since he was born—he sought now for the teat to satisfy his hunger. But these were his two small sisters, and they too were hungry. So they answered his whining little grunts with small snarls, and struck at him with baby paws ; for even as babies lions snarl and bite when hungry or disturbed.

Soon he raised himself on his small legs and stood swaying drunkenly, until his weak eyes fell on

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some reedbuck ribs a few yards away. He lurched comically over to these and smelt them, for from birth lions examine all things with their nose, instead of with eyes and tongue like human babies. The ribs smelt good to "Powerful," though he did not know why, for he had never tasted meat. But while he smelt them curiously, his little legs bent under him and he collapsed with a snarling moan—half fear and half anger.

At that moment a shadow darkened the cave entrance, and the long yellow body of the mother he had not yet seen came silently towards him. She carried in her mouth the hindquarters of a duiker ram, but, on seeing "Powerful" struggling to rise to his feet, she dropped her meat, and with a swift stride forward seized him by the back of the neck and carried him gently to the corner where his sisters were.

Then she brought her meat over to the corner, dropped it, and stretched herself beside her three hungry babies, with her head lying where her yellow eyes could watch the cave-mouth. While the cubs drank their fill she licked each body over with her rough tongue, for lion cubs, too, must be washed, as well as fed, even if the mother has travelled all night in search of food, and is as tired as human mothers who have worked all day.

Presently the cubs gave little sighing grunts of satisfaction, and, curling into balls against their mother's body, they fell asleep. But suddenly

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that body jerked itself into the air with a snarl, tumbling the cubs over and over in a heap, so that they never saw the great head of their father look into the cave, or its quick vanishing as their mother struck at it with an angry paw.

For lion fathers will sometimes eat their babies when very young, and, knowing this, the mothers will never allow them in the cave or thicket where they are born. The lion father may only see his sons and daughters when they are strong enough to accompany the mother on their first hunt.

This lion we will call "Strongfang," because, as far as I know, he was the greatest killer in all that country. Knowing he had done wrong, he made a quick leap to avoid the lioness's blow, and went sulkily off to his lair under a great boulder half a mile away, while the lioness returned to her discontented little cubs.

That day "Powerful's" sisters, too, opened their eyes, and after this their mother returned always before daylight—though sometimes she had not killed and was hungry—because she feared they might wander outside the cave and be seen by dogs or men.

During the next two months she often found them awaiting her outside the cave when they tired of playing and snarling and worrying each other, or the bones and shreds of meat she brought them; but much of their time was spent in sleep,

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for it is during sleep that strength and growth comes to all young creatures.

Then, one morning, she returned an hour before dawn without meat and would not enter the cave, but lay down outside it. But when the cubs attempted to suckle her she arose and walked off. The cubs followed for about two hundred yards and then sat down hesitant, not because they were tired, but because they had never yet been far from the cave.

When they stopped the lioness lay down invitingly and stretched herself, while the cubs dashed joyfully towards her. Immediately she arose and went on, and this was repeated until at last the cubs understood that she wished them to follow. At last she led them beneath a mass of dark, cool undergrowth five miles away, where, hungry and empty, lay the great lion, “Strongfang,” their father.

For, owing to the cubs, both he and his mate—whom we will henceforth call “Terror”—had stayed longer than usual in one district, and in consequence the game was leaving it and food growing scarce. So both he and his mate desired to hunt further afield and take the cubs with them, and, since she could not tell them this, “Terror” had obliged them to follow her by refusing food until they did so.

As they approached the big lion rose to his feet, and so mighty and menacing did he look that

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the cubs sat down and eyed him in solemn silence. Then he came slowly forward to inspect them. Like small statues they sat as he sniffed them gingerly all over, while "Terror" stood beside them with bared fangs, ready to punish any offence to her babies. But after a moment's inspection "Strongfang" seemed to lose interest, and with a mighty yawn turned and retired to the shade of a great evergreen bush, where he promptly stretched himself in slumber.

Throughout that long, hot day the cubs slept near to their parents, and they regretted the cool cave which had been their home, for outside the circle of shade the sun beat fiercely down and dazzled their sight, while the hot sand was painful to the tender skin of their pads.

At sunset "Strongfang" arose and gazed intently at "Terror." She must have understood him, for as he turned and stalked silently out under the great trees she arose and followed. Seeing themselves being left alone in a strange place the cubs hastily followed their mother, though the sand was still hot to their feet.

For two hours they moved silently through the shadowed forest, always facing the wind, for on the wind alone could "Strongfang" depend to bring to his nose news of the meat he needed. In that time they covered ten miles. Travelling lions move with long silent strides that eat up the distance.

Then "Powerful's" two sisters lay down ex-

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hausted, and he, too, was glad to rest with them, for his legs were not yet used to travel and he was very tired. To them came “ Terror ” and lay down beside them, while “ Strongfang ” sank down in his tracks with head on paws and nose and ears searching for sign or sound of game. For an hour they rested, refreshing themselves with milk from their mother’s failing supply, and then as the parents moved onwards again the cubs followed.

One hour more and they came to a long, open vlei, perhaps a mile wide, and dotted here and there with pools of water. Turning up the side of this “ Strongfang ” proceeded slowly and carefully for another hour, when, just as the cubs would have rested again, their father sank swiftly to earth. Where there had been an upstanding mighty figure was now only a dull grey streak in the starlight, which might have been a fallen log !

Swiftly “ Terror ” sank beside him, her head—like his—facing the valley, and her nostrils twitching with excitement. On the air, at the same instant, came a strange, new scent ; a scent that grew faint and then strong, and came from many directions ; a scent like that of the meat their mother had brought them, yet unlike it, and which caused a strange quiver of excitement in the cubs’ small bodies.

The difference was that this meat was still alive, with warm blood running through it. They did

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not know that scent—never having met it before—but to their brains it sent a message and, without knowing why, they sank beside their mother and pressed their stomachs to the now cool sand, while with heads stretched flat they lay motionless and tense as their parents. For lions learn to hunt by instinct as well as example. To-night the cubs had both teachers.

After a few minutes "Strongfang" arose and went silently back the way he had come; but "Terror" lay silent and motionless, and the cubs copied their mother. Half an hour passed, and the scent seemed to pass further up the vlei, for the troop of hartebeeste from which it came had faintly caught "Strongfang's" scent where he was working cautiously upwards on the other side of the vlei. But they were not sure, and only went on half a mile before they stopped to graze again.

And on the leeward side—where the wind brought their scent but did not carry hers to them—"Terror" and the cubs moved with them until the blood scent came warm and strong to their nostrils, when they sank down and waited as before. Then a deep, vibrating grunt on the opposite side of the vlei shattered the stillness. The very earth seemed to tremble to the mighty voice of their father, and in an instant there was a thudding of hoofs crashing down on them.

Against the starlit background the cubs saw leaping forms rushing towards them. Suddenly

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their mother's long shape flashed upwards and outwards, landed on one of the racing forms, and next instant came to earth, entangled with the kicking legs of a hartebeeste bull. But the legs did not kick long, for already her claws had fastened on his nose and twisted the head upwards while her teeth sank deep in his throat.

In the brains of the bewildered cubs savage instincts awoke and, dashing to their mother, they seized parts of the dead bull in their mouths though their small teeth could not penetrate the tough skin; so “ Terror ” herself had to secure for them a soft, juicy morsel.

When all had eaten their fill “ Strongfang ” led the way over the vlei, waking the echoes with his great voice in satisfaction at a well-filled stomach. For the lion does not roar when he kills, as many people think—he is too busy with his meat then—but after he has eaten. On the way he and his mate drank at a pool and, seeing this, the cubs awkwardly attempted to lap too; for a certain saltiness in the meat and blood had made them thirsty. But it was another month before they learned to quench their thirst with water, and during that time they still relied on their mother's milk. An hour after sunrise they entered a deep, shady grove of “ mabolo ” trees and here “ Strongfang ” stretched himself to rest for the day.

Night after night for six months the cubs hunted with their parents, sometimes travelling fifty

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miles in a night when water and game were scarce.

When they had been so hunting for two months "Terror" ceased to give milk and struck at them heavily with her paw if they approached her. Two months later—when they were six months old—she would not allow them to sleep near her, and more and more they were obliged to fend for themselves. So that when tragedy came to them, at eight months' old, in the terrifying death of their mother, they did not suffer much from her loss.

It happened in this way. Game had been scarce and one night they came upon a bush kraal filled with young cattle which a trader was taking to market. "Strongfang" led the way round the leeward side and there "Terror" crouched with the cubs as usual, while the big lion stalked round to windward. As the scent came to them the sleeping cattle sprang to their feet and burst through the lower side of the kraal like an avalanche.

After them the lions bounded and "Powerful" and his sisters dragged down a two-year-old heifer while their parents killed an ox each. It was a pitch dark night and none followed. But behind them "Powerful" heard the strange, shouting voices of men, while a strange, new scent mingled with the cattle smell.

Gorged with meat, "Strongfang" decided to



"GAME HAD BEEN SCARCE AND ONE NIGHT THEY CAME UPON A BUSH KRAAL,
FILLED WITH YOUNG CATTLE."

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sleep in the shade of a great ant-heap only five miles away, and his mate and the cubs slept with him. The sun was three hours old when a low snarl came from "Terror" and the cubs awoke to see her and "Strongfang" sniffing the breeze with raised heads and twitching nostrils. On the air came that strange scent "Powerful" had noted at the kraal, but stronger now.

It was not the smell of meat, of lions, hyenas or dogs, all of which he knew. Yet it was the smell of killers and brought to his brain a strange sensation of fear. Where before he had always been ready to challenge, from this new smell he only wanted to go quietly and quickly away. So it seemed did his parents. For, with a low growl, "Strongfang" turned and made quietly for an open vlei in the middle of which stood patches of thick bush and tall grass.

The others followed, and as they broke cover there came a shout of men's voices and two sounds like short and distant thunder claps, followed instantly by a whine like bees passing over. But over his parents they did not pass for one bullet flicked a piece of skin from "Strongfang's" back, while another smashed "Terror's" shoulder, so that she pitched forward on her nose.

With a savage snarl "Strongfang" bounded forward for the tall grass fifty yards away, followed by his mate and the cubs. But "Terror" was heavy in litter and with her broken shoulder

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could not keep pace, so that another bullet smashed through her lungs before she reached the ten-foot grass. As she reached the others, twenty yards within the grass, she sank down, but facing on her tracks, and with lips drawn back, flattened ears and a light of fury in her eyes such as "Powerful" had never before seen there.

Across the open ground in pursuit came a white man and ten blacks. The first the cubs had seen. As the men reached the grass, and stood hesitating to enter, "Terror" moved slowly towards them, flat on her belly. For ten yards she advanced and then lay motionless while the others watched. Then the white man came slowly forward, following the blood stains on the grass.

Six, eight, ten paces he took. Then "Terror" sprang erect as he almost stepped on her. A lightning sweep of her talons and with a scream the white man sank to earth, his throat torn out where her savage claws had struck. As he fell "Terror" collapsed on his body, and her fangs bit deep into his skull as she died, for the last bullet had wounded her mortally.

With terror-stricken yells the natives fled, and behind them bounded the snarling form of "Strongfang." But he only took three bounds and then, as a rifle—fired by a native—spoke again, and the bullet whined overhead, he wheeled and came swiftly to where the cubs stood beside the bodies of "Terror" and her victim,

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Knowing her dead he went onwards into the deeper forest and until noon he travelled, though the burning sand made travel painful to the cubs who followed. So, after that, "Powerful" knew that where the cattle scent was the man scent was close by and spelt danger. It was two years therefore before he again killed an ox—the ox which led to the killing of a man and his own death, as you shall hear.

That night "Strongfang" did not hunt but travelled with long, swift strides to the north and east, covering nearly sixty miles before dawn. "Powerful" and the cubs went with him though they would have preferred to kill and eat again, for instinct told them that "Strongfang" feared danger and that the danger was in some way connected with the man they had seen "Terror" kill. And they were right; for until a lion has actually killed and eaten a man himself he avoids every district where he has been hunted by them.

Next night they were all hungry, but only two hours after sunset they came on a herd of wildebeeste with calves. For the first time "Strongfang" did not drive these because he distrusted the young lions' skill at killing. So he ambushed himself on the leeward side of the vlei and lay motionless, watching the herd.

As they grazed onwards along the vlei the lions moved stealthily abreast of them under cover, and presently a clump of trees appeared in the centre

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of the vlei. The wildebeeste passed behind this, grazing slowly, and "Strongfang" started at once across the vlei to the clump of trees which hid him from them. In quick but silent rushes of a few yards at a time, and dropping flat on his stomach between each rush, he came at last to the trees. Then he crept forward slowly, a yard at a time, avoiding every dry twig which might snap and alarm the game. Coming to the outer edge of the trees he saw the herd standing with raised heads, sniffing the air suspiciously. For although they had heard nothing instinct warned them that danger was afoot.

But the warning came too late. With a single bound "Strongfang" landed within five yards of a cow and as she turned to flee his body rose in the air and landed on her shoulders, sending her to earth beneath him. "Powerful" and his sisters landed a little behind him, for they could not spring so far; but close to them were three calves and before they could move "Powerful" sprang upon one—as he had seen his mother do—and his sisters dragged down another.

It was lucky they did so, for when "Powerful" went to sniff at the dead cow his father snarled and struck at him savagely. So on this night "Powerful" learned two things. First, the infinite care and patience to be exercised in stalking game, and secondly, that "Strongfang" would not permit him to touch his kill—as their mother

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had done—until he had finished with it. So in future, although they accompanied the old lion always and gained much of his skill by watching him, “ Powerful ” and his sisters usually attacked together and shared the meat they killed themselves.

Four months later, when the young lions were just over a year old, they had hunted and killed one night at the junction of the Sabie and Lundi Rivers. Game was plentiful and just before dawn they heard the deep, booming note of another lion perhaps a mile away, answered by another which had in it a note of anger and pain.

“ Strongfang ” halted and listened, and as the sounds came again he sent forth a mighty roar in answer, which was different to any “ Powerful ” had heard him use. Often he had answered such roars when travelling with “ Terror,” and had then gone quietly on his way to shade and sleep. But this morning he acted differently. His mane bristled erect and he turned and headed quickly in the direction of the sound. For he knew that the first roar was that of a lion who had fought and won a mate ; and the second, that of the loser.

For “ Strongfang,” too, wanted a mate. So he had determined to fight this boastful winner and had notified him of his coming. Yet perhaps it is wrong to say he “ roared,” for the sound he made seemed to come from his stomach, which

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lifted up and down with each booming note, while his mouth was nearly closed. But in that deep, reverberating grunt there was a harsh note, usually absent when he raised it to drive game or to call other lions to help him hunt—as he sometimes did.

The young lions followed as usual, and presently they saw in a clearing amidst the trees a lioness lying down and facing them, while beside her stood a big, black-maned lion, almost as big as "Strongfang." As soon as "Strongfang" saw him his mane rose erect, and snarling with a continuous hissing note the two lions moved slowly towards each other, a pace at a time.

At ten paces distance they sank on their bellies and lay filling the air with furious sounds of rage, while their tails swept up little dust clouds behind them. As "Powerful" watched, they suddenly sprang at each other in the same instant, and for two minutes nothing could be seen but two great bodies rolling over and over in a great cloud of dust.

Then "Strongfang" arose with blood streaming from a dozen wounds; but the other lion lay snarling weakly, with his limbs twitching spasmodically, and made no effort to rise. For "Strongfang" had bitten clean through the jugular vein and blood spouted from it in great jets, while flesh hung in strips just over the heart where "Strongfang's" claws had struck.

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Then the lioness came to "Strongfang" and smelt him, and rubbed her body against him, while he licked her head with his great tongue. And after a little while he turned and walked away a few yards, looking back at the lioness. When he saw her following he went on, and the young lions followed, leaving the beaten lion to die or recover as luck might have it.

But "Strongfang," too, was badly hurt and, coming to a group of shady trees, set in thick undergrowth, two miles away, he lay down, while the lioness lay beside him and commenced to lick his wounds. The young lions would have lain near them as usual, but as they approached "Strongfang" snarled menacingly, and the lioness sprang up and struck savagely at "Powerful" so that he jumped hastily aside.

Then it was borne in on "Powerful" that he might hunt with his father no more, but that in future he must lead his sisters and form his own troop. This he knew at once and by instinct. So, turning away, he passed on and his sisters followed him. A mile away he stood and boomed a farewell to "Strongfang" with the deepest note he could yet summons, and that day he and his sisters slept alone for the first time, five miles from where "Strongfang" and his new bride lay.

A week later "Powerful" and his sisters met a troop of three young lions and two lionesses of about their own age, composed of two families

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whose parents had turned them adrift a few months earlier. For a lioness has a new family each year, and before it comes she and her mate always drive the last batch of cubs away. It is probable that if "Terror" had not been killed "Powerful" and his sisters would have had to hunt alone much earlier, temporarily at least.

So they joined company with the young lions and the troop of eight made up in numbers what they lacked in skill and strength. Since game was plentiful they feasted royally and grew fat and strong. But in every troop there must be a leader and "Powerful" soon discovered that already there was one in this.

They had killed four reedbuck between them on that first night, and one of the three young lions appropriated one to himself while the others ate in company. Some instinct moved "Powerful" to go over and attempt to drag the carcass from him. With a vengeful snarl the young lion sprang at him. "Powerful" leaped aside and struck a flashing blow as he passed which laid open his side. Then for a few minutes a battle royal ensued, which ended in "Powerful" standing triumphant over his snarling antagonist. To clinch his victory he promptly proceeded to eat his enemy's meat and no one interfered with him.

From that time onwards "Powerful" led the troop, and one of the lionesses—whom we will call "Fearless"—attached herself to him particularly.

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When he drove game she accompanied him, and wherever they slept she lay beside him ; while once, when, because of a thorn in his foot, he failed to make his kill, she brought her own to him and shared it with him. So in that one battle “ Powerful ” won leadership and a mate, too, which shows him to have been a lucky young lion, for usually a lion must fight separately for each !

For nearly a year the troop hunted in company, but after that there were fights and quarrels almost daily amongst the other three lions, while the young lionesses showed a strange restlessness. At last one of “ Powerful’s ” sisters and one of the young lions turned from the troop one evening and went off to hunt alone. They did not return. A week later his other sister and the lion he had beaten left the troop.

That same evening there came to “ Powerful’s ” brain a dim memory of the cave and the great hills where he was born ; and suddenly he wanted to go there. So he turned from the game trail he was following and headed with the long stride of the travelling lion to the south and west, where three hundred miles away lay the cave and the hills he sought. And “ Fearless ” turned and went with him, leaving the other pair alone.

Although he had never been back there “ Powerful ” travelled unerringly and within a fortnight he was on the Samokwe River, in the foothills of the Matoppos range. There he found a cave much

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larger and cooler even than the one in which he was born, and for one day he and "Fearless" slept there.

Then they hunted the district for six months, until one night "Fearless" went to the cave and would not come forth to hunt. Therefore, at dawn, he took there a reedbuck he had killed. But when he would have entered she snarled in his face. So he left the meat and went to sleep near at hand. That night when "Fearless" came out to hunt, and left him after the kill, a few hours later, he knew that she had babies in the cave.

But "Powerful" did not know how scarce the game had become and the difficulties which had driven his parents north. So before "Fearless" brought forth her two cubs for their first hunt both he and she had grown lean from several nights' starvation.

On that first night the cubs could only travel slowly, and when the wind brought the cattle scent to him a memory of the night his parents had raided the kraal came to him, and, although the memory of the danger came with it, hunger drove him on.

The cubs could travel no further and "Fearless" would not leave them. So, turning from the bush where they lay, he went forward alone to the dark wagon road from which the scent came. Coming near he saw fires and men, but between him and the fires he saw rows of sleeping cattle, where two transport teams rested. Circling cautiously down

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wind he crept stealthily as a snake to within ten yards of the leading ox. Then with a single bound he landed on its back, seized the upflung muzzle and twisted it skywards. As the team sprang to its feet "Witfoot"—their leader—was already dead.

Then the oxen rushed back on the wagon with a clatter of yokes and skeys and the riem on "Witfoot's" head broke, leaving "Powerful" alone in the dark with his prey. From behind the wagons came shouts and yells, while the flames from the fires leapt higher. Then came towards him cautiously a white man, followed by natives with torches.

For an instant fear assailed "Powerful," but the taste of fresh blood in his mouth made his hunger more desperate, and the memory came to him of how these men had run in fear when his mother, "Terror," had attacked them. That memory decided him and, crouching low, he sprang as the men halted ten paces from him.

As his body flashed through the air the white man fired and missed, then turned and ran, while "Powerful" landed full on the shoulders of a native who had dropped his torch and turned to run also. With a single crunch he bit through heart and lungs from chest to back, and next instant bounded into the dark forest with the black body in his mouth.

A mile away he dropped it and sniffed it

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undecidedly, but the blood had tasted good and he was hungry. So with a growl he wrenched off an arm and in an hour only the skull and feet remained. As he ate he grew amazed at the softness of the flesh and the amount of blood in so small a creature, for he had never eaten men before or known how easily they might be killed. Had they left him the ox he would have eaten and been satisfied.

His meal finished, he remembered hungry "Fearless" and her cubs waiting for him, and decided to take her one of these small creatures—so easy to kill and to carry. The shouting at the wagons had died away, but the fires burned brightly and the white men sat at one while the terror-stricken natives whispered round another, waiting anxiously for the dawn.

"Powerful" crept up opposite the natives' fire, for it was a native he had eaten. But the fire was in the open and fully fifteen yards separated him from his intended prey. Yet he decided to try it. Gathering his great quarters under him, he shot upwards as though from a catapult and before ever the natives could move he had crashed upon the nearest, having made a clean spring of forty-five feet!

Pandemonium ensued. Firebrands were hurled, shots fired and shouts and curses filled the air; but almost before they realised the attack "Powerful" was striding through the bush a hundred

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yards away with a black body—dripping and dead—held fast in his jaws.

Coming at last to “Fearless,” where she waited three miles from the wagons, he dropped the body in front of her with a pride born of his knowledge that he had conquered the fear all hunting lions have of man. “Fearless” sniffed the body and hesitated. For she, too, had never tasted human flesh. But she was hungry, as he had been, and at last she seized it and bit deeply. In a little while only a few bones and the skull remained.

Then “Powerful” moved on, and instinct warned him to travel far and fast. But the cubs could not keep pace. So at last he was obliged to turn into a thicket and rest, for “Fearless” would not leave them. At earliest dawn the wagons had moved on, and five miles on the road they came to a store and police camp, when there the tale of that night of terror was told.

At ten that morning six mounted men with dogs, and fifty natives, started on “Powerful’s” trail, and at three that afternoon the man scent came strong and menacingly to him where he blinked sleepily in the shady thicket. With bristling mane and bared fangs he sprang erect, with “Fearless” beside him, and sniffed the air anxiously. But from every direction came the taint, for the dogs and the spoor had betrayed his lair and the thicket was surrounded.

So, at last, with a mighty snarl, he broke cover,

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followed by "Fearless" and the cubs. But as his body rose into view six rifles crashed, a blackness passed before his sun-dazed eyes, and he fell dead midway in his first bound. "Fearless" crashed to earth mortally wounded, but the instinct to defend her cubs kept death at bay, and as a native raised his assegai to finish her she disembowelled him with one sweep of her talons. Then she, too, died.

Meanwhile the dogs had fastened to the two cubs, where they fought a plucky and snarling fight for life. One of the men drove them off and said: "Let us keep the cubs for a time and tame them!"

But one—a hunter of repute—answered: "No! They are the spawn of man-eaters and the man-eating taint is in their blood. Better kill them at once!" So two shots sent the cubs to join their parents.

Yet that hunter was wrong, as are all those who believe a man-eating taint to be hereditary, and to be transmitted in the blood like a disease. They have thought so because a particular district gains a reputation for man-eaters. It gains that reputation because an evil example has been given to the lions there and not because of hereditary taint.

A lion kills a man when driven by hunger, or pain great enough to conquer his fear of man, as "Terror" did. Other lions see him kill and

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remember, as “ Powerful ” did. And when they, too, are driven desperate, the memory helps them to overcome fear. When once they have eaten human flesh they prefer it because it is easy to get and to eat, and all who share it with them prefer it, too.

But those cubs had not seen “ Powerful ” kill and had not yet tasted flesh. There was no taint in their blood. An old lion who has had no such experience will live on rats and rabbits when he can no longer kill game, and often dies at last of starvation with no thought of killing man.

It is hunger and desperation that drives a lion to kill men and become a criminal, and it is his evil example which infects other lions—just as in human societies ! If when a man-eater is killed every lion which saw him kill could be killed with him man-eating in that district would cease.

But, of course, that is not possible. So, perhaps, the old hunter was right to take no risks with the two cubs ; for he did not know the story I have told to you.

CHAPTER III

"GREY GIANT," THE ELEPHANT

IN the grey dawn of a day, a hundred years ago, a black shape passed silently through the forest shadows—silently, yet swiftly. A great shape, whose black silhouette was relieved by white, where two slender tusks gleamed in the dawn light.

This was "Greatmother," the cow elephant, and through twelve hours of darkness she had continued her silent march northwards, away from the herd she had left sixty miles behind her. In that herd were several of her sons and daughters, and in other herds were great elephants who had drawn their first food from her breasts. For she was nearly ninety years old ; yet still in the prime and strength of elephant life.

Feeling that once again her time was near, she had left the restless herd—as she had done for twenty years past—and was heading for a solitude a hundred and twenty miles away, between the Cuando and Okavango Rivers. A solitude where food was plentiful, and water within easy range. For in the first days of motherhood she desired to be always near her offspring, and could not range

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the many miles for food and water which the herd travelled daily.

This solitude of the Lomba district she had discovered by accident, when, with the great bull, "Black Monarch," she had fled from the drive of thousands of native hunters. She remembered that day still—though it was more than twenty years ago. A sad day—that on which she first met man, the killer—a day on which her fifteen months old son, and ten others of the great herd, had died in the deadly forest fire the natives had encircled them with. But she and "Black Monarch" had escaped, and, coming to the Lomba district, had found a sanctuary where forest folk of all kinds dwelt; but in which were neither men nor elephant folk.

So, for a time, she and the great bull had remained there, feeding enormously, and waxing fat. At last the mating urge drove "Black Monarch" forth to wander alone, or to spend a week with this herd or with that, in the vast elephant country to the south.

But she had remained and suckled the calf which came to her three months after his departure; and later guiding him to the great herds and introducing him to others of his kind. Every two years since then—as the time of her motherhood drew nigh again—she had departed silently, and travelled far and fast—as she was travelling now—to this sanctuary where peace and plenty might be found.

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On the evening of that day whereon we meet her, she stood at last under the shadow of great trees in a little glade ; within five hundred yards of a " pan " the rains had filled with water. On every side, for many miles, stretched the thorny " Mak-ona " bush, with its red berries which she so loved. Here and there were tall trees and thickets, where shelter from the noonday heat might be had, and the thorns she did not fear.

Stepping slowly down to the " pan," she stood an instant listening ; then raised her trunk and sent forth the shrill trumpet call of challenge and inquiry. For sometimes during those years " Black Monarch " had sought this retreat to rest, while she was there on more serious business. But to-night he was two hundred miles to the south, and her call remained unanswered.

For never had another elephant wandered so far north, in spite of the food abundance the sanctuary contained. Perhaps this was because of the barren, sandy waste which lay between it and the elephant country—a waste she herself had only crossed when panic-driven. And a hundred years ago it was seldom the men-folk challenged the iron-grey forest kings.

On that day when she and " Black Monarch " had been driven in trumpeting terror from their usual haunts a migrating tribe of many thousands had stumbled on the herd, had ringed it in sheets of flame, killing with spear and arrow such as

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the fire had partly suffocated. That tribe had settled three hundred miles to the east, and had molested the herds no more.

Yet in a few years now the female elephants she had borne were to revisit their birthplace as motherhood came upon them. For the elephant folk forget but little. Years of panic, too, lay ahead; and fifty years from that night many elephants were to drink at this "pan"; while the son she was this night to bear was to fight the most desperate battle of his life there, as we shall see.

When her call remained unanswered "Great-mother" drank long and silently. Then, raising her trunk high in the air, she sent jet after jet of water over her dusty back and sides. After this shower bath she rolled and wallowed luxuriously in the soft mud wherein she stood knee-deep, until sides and flanks were plastered. Cooled, refreshed, and comforted, she stepped slowly towards the thorny thickets, and passing from the glade came at last to a thickly interlaced clump of "Mutema" bush growing under the shadow of great "Mahoto" thorn trees.

In this dark security she entered a clearing she herself had made. Here she halted, and stood swaying rhythmically after the curious manner of her kind; yet with every sense alert. Here, during the dark hours, "Grey Giant"—whom men afterwards named "The Destroyer"—was

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born. When daylight came a small grey form stood weakly beneath "Greatmother," drinking greedily from the breasts he could scarcely reach ; though she stood two feet deep in the holes her feet had scraped in the sand.

Later that morning she scooped a large hole in the sand with feet and tusks, and with her trunk pushed her baby gently into it. As his weak little legs doubled beneath him he was glad to lie on the warm sand ; while his mother carefully screened him from observation with the branches she tore from adjacent trees.

When at last only his small head was visible she departed silently, to feed through the daylight hours. But for that, and for the three succeeding days, she never went far from her baby. And as she munched the "Makona" bush, or tore strips of juicy bark from the tall "Malombi" trees, she would pause often, and quest the gentle air currents with upcurled trunk, for taint of a possible enemy of her baby.

Of enemies there was but one, the tawny, soft-stepping, steel-taloned destroyer, whom all the forest folk knew as "Deathgrip," the lion ; and even he would pass in peace while the scent of "Greatmother" tainted the air.

For many years ago she had wandered too far from her little one, and a gaunt, hungry lion had seized and partly devoured it. Only one look had she given to the small, mangled body before she

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set silently forth on the trail of the murderer. Three hours later, a mass of tawny, bloody hide, and shattered bones, was all that remained of her baby's destroyer. And the tale of her great wrath was whispered by all the forest folk; so that "Deathgrip" avoided her baby's hiding-place in future.

Yet, on the fourth day, as "Grey Giant" stared wonderingly from under his canopy of bush at the green world around him, two sinuous, tawny shapes glided towards him; then lay for a space contemplating him with their yellow eyes. He knew nothing of lions, but as the shapes rose to their feet, and advanced with a quick rush towards him, he felt a curious little thrill of fear.

As he tried to scramble from beneath the protecting bush he uttered a weak squeal for help, and as the forms halted and glanced rearwards there came a shrill, vibrating scream in answer. "Greatmother" had scented the danger, and was advancing with a silent, whirlwind rush that would have brought annihilation to those taloned forms. But, with a snarl, and a quick bound, they vanished as suddenly as they had come. An instant later his mother's ponderous form stood protectingly over his trembling body.

So, on the following day, when "Greatmother" urged him towards his retreat, he squealed his protest, and ran this way and that to dodge the guidance of her compelling trunk. The big cow stood

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for a moment regarding him with wise eyes, then walked a few yards towards the bush and halted. When he ran to her she pushed him gently forward on the trail her feet had made, and guiding him with her trunk, marched patiently behind him. So "Grey Giant" entered upon his first day in the big, new world; earlier than any of her other babies had done!

But his progress along the elephant path was painfully slow. At every few steps some strange, new scent would reach him, and curiosity or fear induce a halt. On each occasion his mother pushed him gently forward with her trunk, and prevented his turning aside. It was his first lesson in walking straight, and, although hungry, his mother exercised a splendid patience.

Once he dashed back with a squeal, evaded the guiding trunk, and stood trembling behind his mother as a great buffalo bull dashed through the bush ahead, and stood surveying them morosely. But again she pushed him forward, and when he would have run back, slapped him gently with her trunk until he took courage, and staggered weakly forward.

For nearly a month he accompanied his mother to feed, and as he grew stronger the cow took a wider range; sleeping under the tall "Malombi" trees during the noon hours, and feeding much at night-time. At night, too, she went to water; and when "Grey Giant" saw great lions slink

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away at her approach he soon lost much of his fear of them.

Once, also, a cow rhinoceros stood with her calf directly in his mother's path, and refused to give way, squealing defiance. Then his mother's great ears spread wide, her trunk curled upwards, and she thundered down upon the challenger, while “Grey Giant” watched in fear. Came the shock of impact, and the rhino rolled over amidst the thorn bush, with blood streaming from her flank where a tusk had gashed it. Scrambling to her feet, she dashed hastily away in pursuit of her fleeing calf, leaving “Greatmother” to continue her way to water in peace. So “Grey Giant” learned early that he came of a line of kings to whom all the forest folk must bow, and became comically arrogant in consequence !

He enjoyed those visits to the water-hole. For, although his mother supplied all the food and drink he needed, he delighted in the shower baths she gave him, when she sprayed the cool water over him with her trunk. While she stood asleep during the hot hours, he would lie in the shade beside her ; but he noted that she never lay down except to wallow in the soft mud at the water-hole.

After a time he attempted to eat the thorny bush with the red “Makona” berries on which his mother fed largely. But his mouth was still too tender to endure the thorns, and he spat them out in pain and disgust. Seeing this, “Greatmother”

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reached for the tender green shoots at the top of some evergreen bushes, and dropped them before him. These he liked much better, and daily importuned her for supplies of the new food which he could not reach. So, at last, she decided to return to the herd country, where such food grew abundantly, and within reach of baby elephants as young as "Grey Giant."

One afternoon, when he was about six weeks old, she went early to water, and after drinking and bathing, she turned his head due south, and pushed him along a faint, new trail. Without question he stepped out bravely, confident in his mother's wisdom. But as hour after hour went by, and she continued to urge him forward, without halting as usual to feed, fatigue grew upon him. So he made determined efforts to double back to her breasts, and forced her to halt.

At last she permitted this, and stood patiently until his hunger was satisfied. But when he would have lain down to sleep she lifted him with her long tusks, and again urged him onwards. For the first time he rebelled seriously, and at last "Greatmother" lost patience. Suddenly he received a swinging blow from her trunk which sent him staggering sideways; but before he could fall, that same trunk was supporting him, and again urging him forwards. So, whimpering a little at the pain in his legs and body, he made shift to travel onwards.

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Near dawn, he lay down where a great mimosa tree shadowed the path, and this time “Greatmother” did not chastise him ; but left him to rest, while she tore strips of juicy bark from adjacent trees to appease her own hunger. But, soon after sunrise, she moved him onwards again. It was near noon when they came to the end of the timber belt, and she leaned against a great tree trunk to rest. “Grey Giant” drank thirstily from her breasts, but for his mother there was no water. Before them stretched sixty miles of sand and scrub which divided the elephant country proper from that wherein he had been born.

Travelling alone, “Greatmother” would have been twenty miles out on this waste by now ; travelling without pause until she reached the forest belt beyond, where was food and water. But because of little “Grey Giant” she had progressed slowly, and for his sake she now rested, though barely forty miles had been covered.

Before sunset she moved on again, going this time ahead, and travelling with a longer stride. “Grey Giant” made shift to follow ; but when twenty miles had been left behind he commenced to lag, and voiced his hunger and fatigue in a squeal of protest. At once his mother returned ; but this time she met his eager rush with swinging smacks of her trunk, until he forgot his fatigue in the pain they occasioned, and was glad to run ahead to escape punishment.

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When her long stride passed him again, he struggled gamely onwards, for his small brain feared the loneliness of this strange, new desolation ; and in that fear his fatigue was lost. Twice during that night his mother halted and allowed him to drink ; but he was a very weary little elephant when—two hours after sunrise—they entered at last the welcome shade of forest timber, and left that desolate waste behind.

Here “ Greatmother ” headed west, and in an hour reached a large pool in a sandy river-bed. Good was the feel of the water his mother sprayed over him, and he sank to rest beside her, feeling that she alone in this big, strange world knew how to satisfy all his desires, and that without her he would be lost.

From here onwards, food and water was plentiful and shade abundant. So for two days they wandered at leisure, south and east, until on the evening of the second day there came to him the scent of his kind. As his ears swung forward inquiringly the deep stomach rumblings of many elephants, and the booming trumpet call of a great bull, were borne on the night wind.

Instantly, “ Greatmother ” trumpeted in answer, and set off at a great pace in the direction of the sounds, while “ Grey Giant ” trotted in her wake. In less than a mile “ Greatmother ” suddenly halted, and beyond her “ Grey Giant ” saw the mighty form of a great bull, standing motionless

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in the starlight. Slowly the monarch advanced towards them, until he stood shoulder to shoulder with "Greatmother," their colossal heads almost touching. While they stood thus, in the silent, telepathic communion common to most animals—and especially developed amongst the elephant folk—"Grey Giant" gazed around him curiously.

On every side, under the tall trees, stood great black forms, silent save for the continuous rumblings occasioned by their digestive organs. This herd had been heading for the water at the end of a sixty-mile journey, when the scent of "Greatmother" and her son had reached them, and they had halted to greet the new-comers.

But what interested "Grey Giant" especially was the presence of small black forms no larger than his own. These waived the grave ceremony of their elders and trotted eagerly to welcome "Grey Giant." So that he was soon entwining his little trunk, and indulging in playful gambols with the first playmates he had ever known.

While he was so engaged, "Steeltusk"—the great bull—moved onwards and halted. One by one the herd followed; each pausing a moment beside "Greatmother" to give silent greeting and welcome. And as each mother passed onwards her calf left his gambols and trotted after her, until at last "Grey Giant" found himself alone with his own mother. Then she, too, turned and followed the herd, and, like the others, he went with her.

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That night they watered at the pool his mother and he had recently left ; afterwards turning south and west again, feeding at leisure as they went. In this herd were over a hundred elephants, and amongst them at least six large bulls, who at other seasons would wander alone, besides many younger males.

But " Steeltusk," the big bull who had first met them, was accepted by them all as leader, and there was seldom a combat between them. For in those days of large herds it was seldom necessary to fight for mates before the break-up of the herds. And the elephant is by nature a gentleman. He bears malice to none when unmolested, and is even-tempered and placid unless compelled to fight. His mighty strength is only used to destroy when danger threatens, or when challenged by an adversary.

Day after day they wandered through abundant feeding-grounds, ranging ten thousand square miles of country. Sometimes only ten miles lay between them and water, at others, sixty or more. But always water was obtained in every forty-eight hours, and the long treks no longer fatigued " Grey Giant " as the first had done..

In the new herd life he found much of interest, and many lessons to be learned. Amongst others he learned that to lag behind on the water trail ensured an irate mother's return to look for him, and subsequent chastisement. He discovered, too,

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that to make himself an uninvited guest at a feast of green leaves or bark, pulled down by another elephant for her own baby, led to a swinging blow from that lady's trunk, which sent him screaming his woes to his mother.

"Greatmother" usually consoled him by procuring him a similar delicacy, and dealing equally effective chastisement to any misguided calf who attempted to share it. So he soon understood that under herd law each mother looked after her own, and that, though cow elephants might be many, he had still but one mother! Yet when a young bull pulled down a delicious "umglosi" tree he made no objection to the younger fry sharing his feast!

Again, he noted that each of the big bulls stayed close to a particular cow, and for her they would tear off long strips of juicy bark. Or should she desire the leafy crown of a tree, too tall to reach with their trunks, they would lean their heads against it and push until it commenced to sway; then with a final mighty heave send it crashing down. Or, should it resist their efforts, they would carefully loosen the roots with their tusks. Snapping them one by one, they would tear them free with their trunks, until at last only a single push with head or shoulder would bring it down.

From time to time these big bulls would disappear with the lady of their choice, remaining absent for several days. Each time they returned,

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they transferred such gallant attentions to a new cow, or remained morose and solitary.

When "Grey Giant" was three months old the great bull, "Steeltusk," began paying such attentions to his mother. By this time all but one other of the large bulls had left the herd, and that one returned two days later with the lady companion of his rambles. For three days he fed alone, and "Grey Giant" noticed that whenever "Steeltusk" came near he would raise his trunk and emit a deep rumbling noise, different to any he had yet heard.

On the evening of the third day "Steeltusk" passed close to him, and the rolling note changed to the deep trumpet of challenge. "Steeltusk" turned and eyed him fixedly, then sent forth a mighty answer. From every side came the cows and young bulls, to stand in a circle watching the two great gladiators. For they knew that "Steeltusk" and "Ironheart" were on this day to make elephant history.

"Steeltusk" was more than a herd bull; he was a herd *leader*. To him belonged of right the last mate that herd would furnish for many months. But "Ironheart" was of an age and size to contest possession and future leadership. Should he succeed in defeating "Steeltusk" the latter would be but a herd bull in future; unless he could meet and defeat a weaker leader.

But the day of his defeat was not yet come.

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Slowly he approached “ Ironheart,” curling his trunk inwards as he went. Nothing loth, his adversary came to meet him, curling his trunk in like fashion. At ten paces the rivals commenced to trot, and with a clash of interlocking tusks, two great heads met in the shock of collision.

Then commenced a most desperate struggle. Pushing and swaying tremendously, this way and that, with mighty backs arched, and knees bent under the strain, the giants ploughed deep furrows in all directions ; while their stertorous breathing raised little fountains of sand around their gripping feet.

At the end of ten minutes “ Ironheart’s ” legs doubled beneath him, and he gave ground. Instantly “ Steeltusk ” gave a mighty heave, and next moment “ Ironheart ” rolled on his side. But as “ Steeltusk ” took a pace backward to deliver a stroke with his tusks “ Ironheart ” scrambled up with surprising agility, and met the dangerous rush head on.

Again tusks interlocked, and for nearly fifteen minutes neither secured an advantage. Then “ Steeltusk ” dropped on his haunches, and swung away from his adversary. As “ Ironheart ” staggered past under the impetus occasioned by the sudden cessation of resistance his enemy’s tusks took him in the flank, and sent him staggering away with blood streaming from the wound.

With a scream of rage he charged back, and

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again they met in collision. Five minutes more and "Steeltusk" repeated his trick—a manœuvre which had won him many battles—and this time one of his tusks penetrated "Ironheart's" stomach fully three inches. It was enough. As "Steeltusk" drew back for another charge, his defeated rival scrambled up, and trumpeting with rage and pain staggered away into the forest depths.

Instantly two young bulls followed, and ranging themselves on either side accompanied the defeated giant into exile; supporting him with their sturdy shoulders as they went. For one of the herd laws is mutual help, and none of the herd monarchs may be left to die alone when wounded or defeated. Two years afterwards "Ironheart" won his leadership; and retained it until "Grey Giant" himself deposed him, as we shall see.

Two days later, "Greatmother" turned aside into the forest, followed by "Steeltusk" and "Grey Giant." Within three hours she halted in a cleared space of soft sand under the tall trees. Afterwards, she commenced to scoop out a great hole, and presently stood knee-deep in this, while above her loomed the shape of the great bull.

"Grey Giant" would have approached to drink from her breasts, but to his surprise and indignation he was met with a swinging slap from her trunk. So at last he sulkily contented himself with what leaves and bark he could reach, and left the pair to their own devices.

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It was after sunrise next morning before "Greatmother" moved again. As she came from the pit "Grey Giant" ran towards her, and eyed her pleadingly. This time she allowed him to drink, and afterwards followed "Steeltusk" through the forest. Next day they fell in with the herd again, and the same night "Steeltusk" took his farewell.

Standing alone on a broad elephant trail heading north, he raised his trunk and trumpeted three times in succession. The feeding groups turned towards him with one accord, and in turn echoed that clarion call until the forest rang with the din. Ere it ceased "Steeltusk" marched slowly forward down the forest aisle. In a few moments he vanished from sight, and it was nearly a year before "Grey Giant" saw him again.

Three months later "Greatmother" began to oppose "Grey Giant's" advances. Soon she refused him all access to her, and left him to seek his own food; though she would still permit his company on the march, aid him in securing food, or in crossing dangerous swamps. By this time he could tear off the bark and leaves of young trees, and masticate them, and by this process the skin of his lips and mouth toughened; so that he no longer feared the thorn bush the herd fed upon as winter advanced.

Soon after "Steeltusk's" departure the herd broke up into small groups of a dozen or so, though

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always maintaining communication. Such small groups found no difficulty in obtaining food, even when the bark grew dry and sapless, and the leaves wilted on the trees. "Grey Giant" discovered in the swamps also, during that first winter, many edible roots ; so that he grew fat and strong.

Adventures were few in that first year ; for the elephant folk had few enemies, and the days when life should be lived in terror of man were still to come. Once, however, he stepped on a sleeping python, and, as the great snake started to coil round his trunk, "Greatmother" seized it in her own, placed one foot upon the writhing coils, and tore the shapeless body asunder.

On another occasion he imprudently attempted to gambol with a morose old buffalo bull, and next moment found himself rolling over and over under the impact of a massive head. Before worse could happen to him "Greatmother" descended upon the enemy, trumpeting her wrath, and the bull decamped at discretion.

One night, at the end of that first year, and soon after the first rains, the herd was browsing peacefully when there came a sudden trumpet call from the east. As they listened, there came another from the south, followed by a crashing of the undergrowth ; and before dawn more than fifty elephants had joined the small herd. This happened night after night, and at the end of a week the herd numbered over two hundred. Then,

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under the leadership of an old bull, they headed north again for eighty miles.

Coming at dawn to a large, cleared space in the forest they fed largely ; and afterwards leant against well-worn trees and slept. That afternoon, as though to a rendezvous, came first one huge bull and then another, until eight were present. Amongst them " Grey Giant " recognised " Steel-tusk," but the others he did not know. Soon after sunset the full moon arose, and when it was an hour old the herd stopped feeding, and mustered in a circle with their heads facing inwards.

Soon a huge bull stepped forward, followed by another, and another. In the centre of the clearing they halted ; then, turning towards each other, began a rhythmic bowing and swaying ; occasionally entwining their trunks in a light embrace. Soon others joined them, until in an hour the space was black with huge figures stepping back and forth with stately step, and lightly swaying bodies.

Throughout the night this went on, and in after years—when fear of man often prohibited the yearly dance when the rains were come, and the moon was at the full—" Grey Giant " remembered with sadness this first dance of the elephant folk he had witnessed. During that night the bulls selected their mates, and when they moved off next day each conducted a small group of cows and youngsters. But " Greatmother " and some fifty other

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cows remained unattached, and with this group "Grey Giant" wandered that season.

It was near the end of the following year that "Greatmother" and the others of this group disappeared silently at intervals, and "Grey Giant" found himself one of a troop of two-year-olds like himself. This did not trouble him, for by this time he was self-reliant and strong, and learning more of elephant lore daily.

For thirty years life for "Grey Giant" followed the same placid course. But for the last five of those years he became strangely restless in the cows' company, and morose and solitary when the herd strength gathered, on the advent of the great bulls. Yet although he felt some hatred for those giants of his kind he would watch their retreat wistfully when they departed; and would sometimes wish to follow. Why he did not he did not know, but some instinct warned him against it.

During his thirty-first year the mating urge awoke definitely, and with three other young bulls of about the same age he attached himself to a group of young cows, about a month before the advent of the herd bulls.

Alas for these precocious ones! On the night after the yearly dance a great bull joined the group and drove them forth remorselessly. There was no fight. The impact of a massive head sent each staggering in turn, and a flailing, heavy trunk, swung with giant strokes on breathless bodies,

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until with one accord the four youngsters departed in company, trumpeting a hobbledehoy defiance.

For ten more years he wandered with outcasts like himself; sometimes with one only, sometimes with a dozen others. Each was consumed with a devil of restlessness, and moved as his spirit listed. Then, one night, as he stood morosely considering his hard fate, came three great forms along the trail, with one no larger than himself. For, although actually ten years older, this last was not so well grown as "Grey Giant."

He knew these bulls were heading for a rendezvous, and instantly decided to join them. As they came up he fell in beside the younger bull, and was astounded to receive a vicious dig from the latter's tusks. For, hitherto, those of his own age had been companions and playmates, and not enemies.

Those ten years of exile from the herd life had aroused pugnacity in his placid nature, and with a scream of rage he turned truculently upon this insolent aggressor. The older bulls drew aside to watch the contest, for they knew that the youngsters must establish their mettle by combat; as they all had done. Being gentlemen they did not interfere.

It was a great fight. When after nearly half an hour's struggle his adversary stepped from the path and leaned weakly against a tree, with his head turned towards the back trail, "Grey Giant"

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himself felt too sore and breathless to move. But he made shift to trumpet his song of victory, and to follow the old bulls through the forest. His defeated rival departed whence he had come ; for the losing bull may find no mate in company with bulls which have witnessed his defeat. He must seek a weaker adversary before he may triumph.

Two days later " Grey Giant " joined a herd with the three veterans, and being a large one he secured two mates before the older bulls in turn drove him forth to wander again. From that year onward he joined the herds with the old bulls ; and as year after year went by he waxed stronger, and grew wiser in fighting strategy. He was defeated less often, until ten years after his first battle—when he was about fifty years old—he fought his great battle with " Ironheart." Thereafter, he was named " Grey Giant," whom none would challenge.

It was just after he became a herd bull—in 1868—that " Grey Giant " found in man the first adversary to disturb his placid existence. The Matabele had extended their hunting forays to the west, and one day, as he stood in short scrub, lazily switching flies, in company with eight other bulls, he suddenly became conscious that the dry thorn scrub was afire. A ring of flame and smoke encircled them on all sides, save that to the east.

On this side lay the trails to the Chobi and Zambesi Rivers, and towards these the bulls headed.

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An old bull led the way ; but they had scarcely gone two hundred yards along the broad forest trail when the ground collapsed under the leader, and half his great bulk disappeared. In the cunningly contrived pit were sharp-pointed stakes, and as these penetrated his stomach the bull screamed with rage and agony.

"Grey Giant" and the others rushed to his assistance, and with tusks and feet tore away the shelving sides of the pit. But this only allowed the big bull to sink deeper on to the cruel stakes. Seeing this, they pushed their trunks beneath him and tried to lift him. It is possible they might have succeeded, but at that moment came a fetid taint on the air, which "Grey Giant" ever afterwards associated with danger, and which roused him to a frenzy of rage.

At the same time the forest seemed to vomit hundreds of yelling black forms, hurling short assegais as they came near. Two of these stuck quivering in his side, and in a transport of rage and pain he charged, screaming, at the nearest of the enemy, followed by his comrades. At once the natives scattered ; but one received a blow from "Grey Giant's" trunk which broke his back, and another he impaled with a tusk, dropping the mangled form beneath his feet as he ran, and crushing it to nothingness.

Then on and on to the silences, leaving the yelling throng far behind. When at last they

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halted, two besides himself had assegai heads in their flanks, from which the shafts had broken off in flight. In one a part of the shaft still protruded, and seizing this in his trunk "Grey Giant" drew the weapon slowly forth, then stood patiently while his comrade performed a similar service for himself.

For the third bull their wisdom could do nothing ; for two cruel blades had worked deep into his stomach, beyond reach of their trunks. Two days later he fell in agony, and all their efforts to raise him were fruitless, so that at last they left him to perish.

Then to "Grey Giant" came memories of his birthplace, and leading the others he headed north for the sanctuary where he was born. There his wounds soon healed ; but ever after that he and the six bulls with him fled with their troops to the sanctuary in time of danger, sickness, or wounds. And some died ; so that thirty years afterwards, when white hunters trailed "Grey Giant" to his death there, and found the remains of seven elephants, men named it "the place where the elephants die." But it was safety and not death they had sought ; and until men learned to dare that hundred mile "thirst," many elephants had *found* safety there.

Ever after this, "Grey Giant" and his comrades examined carefully every inch of disturbed surface in a forest trail ; and searched always for the

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hated man-taint. Many a treacherous pit they uncovered, and taught cows and calves to do likewise. So that, although many careless ones perished in the beginning from this danger, at last the elephant wisdom conquered, and the natives abandoned a profitless labour.

Then came a new danger. One day, as "Grey Giant" marched along a forest aisle, behind three others, the leader passed under the spreading branches of a mighty tree. In swift succession three heavily weighted assegais descended. Two sank down through hide and muscle and reached the lungs, while one stood quivering in the vertebrae.

With a scream of pain the leader lurched forward, while "Grey Giant" and the others dashed left and right, making a wide detour round the danger spot. For three miles they supported their wounded comrade on either side, but at last his strength was done, and he fell helplessly.

Into "Grey Giant's" brain came a red-hot lust of revenge. He suddenly wanted to tear and rend these pigmy enemies who had made of the peaceful forest life a thing of terror, and filled the calm solitudes with danger. So thoughts of flight were dispelled, and he led his comrades a little way off into a dense thicket, from which they might watch the fallen bull, and there waited.

Presently there came down the trail silent black forms, searching the ground carefully as they came.

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As the leader saw the fallen bull he gave a yell of jubilation, and in a few minutes the fallen monarch was surrounded by a hundred yelling, stabbing forms. Upon them "Grey Giant" and his comrades charged in silent fury. So silently and swiftly that they were within fifty yards before the yelling figures noted their approach. The yell of exultation changed to one of fear, and next moment "Grey Giant" was amongst them.

Many died where they stood—very painfully and nastily—and of these "Grey Giant" killed ten. As the others fled he followed; and within a mile killed six others. After that the Matabele named him "The Destroyer," and despite the rewards to be obtained for ivory such as he carried, his presence with a herd, or his great spoor on a trail, many a black hunter turned to seek prey elsewhere.

But during the next few years many died under the great trees, and even the yearly rendezvous was no longer safe; until at last—about 1871—"Grey Giant" and the other leaders took counsel together, and from then onwards avoided the heavy forest save when on the trail to water. Thereafter, the elephant folk fed and slept and rested in thorny scrub country, where the bush grew no higher than themselves, and provided neither ambush nor security for an enemy. And that is why they favour such country to this day.

True, the heat at noonday was sometimes great,

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and water far to seek. But at such times the elephant people would draw with their trunks upon the reserve in their own bodies, and spray it carefully over head and shoulders. Or if they had no reserve, they would pick up and spray the fine sand in like manner.

But "Grey Giant" soon discovered that his new enemies were devilishly resourceful. Having overcome the dangers of trail and treetops, he and his kind now met the third and last. This was the danger of the rifle. The little shining black tube which spat the winged death from afar; and which in sure hands can drop the greatest of the elephant leaders in his tracks. This danger they could not overcome; and with every year afterwards it increased.

It was in the winter of 1872 that he first encountered this danger. He was dozing one afternoon, with a group of bulls in open scrub, when there came a strange whip-like crack, followed by a thud, and a great bull in front of him screamed in pain. Up went every trunk, questing the source of the danger, and as the sharp sound rang out again "Grey Giant" caught the taint he loathed and feared. Pivoting swiftly, he charged down whence it came, followed by the others.

As they thundered down, uttering short, sharp screams of rage, panic-stricken natives fled before them, yelling madly: "Run! Run! It is 'The Destroyer.'" Before him ran a yellow figure, a

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form with white face and hands, which clutched a shining, black tube as it ran. From this figure the hated taint came strongly, and as he thundered closer he seized it and whirled it aloft with his trunk, then dashed it beneath him. In savage joy he knelt upon it and wrenched it asunder ; rising only when most of the remains were mixed deep with the sand.

His comrades dealt similarly with several of the natives, and from the day the survivors brought the tale to Lake N'gami, " Grey Giant " was the aim of every white hunter, and the terror of every native who visited the country. But from that day " Grey Giant " and many of the elephant folk forsook their old haunts, and ranged from the Lomba sanctuary far east into the Barotseland country.

It was well that they did so, for during the next few years the herds in Matabeleland and Bechuana-land were decimated by increasing bands of hunters ; more than a thousand being destroyed. Even in Barotseland they were hunted by natives. But native methods " Grey Giant " knew and could circumvent. Only against the winged death was he powerless, and the shining steel tubes had not yet come to Barotseland.

But no longer was the yearly rendezvous a thing of joy and frolic, and seldom was the dance held. Experience had taught the leaders that large herds attracted enemies, and as they had changed other

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age-old habits through fear of man, so this too was changed.

Communication between the scattered herds was kept up, but when they met at the season of reunion it was only to separate again ; with the addition of a herd bull, and perhaps half a dozen cows and youngsters to each small group. Seldom after this did a herd total more than thirty ; and the great bulls wandered for the most part alone, or by twos and threes.

For four years “ Grey Giant ” ranged the new territory ; the acknowledged monarch of the elephant folk he had led there. In each year his wisdom and cunning, and his hatred of man, grew greater. When he was a little over fifty years old he stood one night with three other bulls in the Lomba sanctuary, and drank from the well-known pool there. From the south came suddenly the scent, and quiet tread, of travelling elephants. The four bulls faced to where they came, and soon great shapes materialised in the moonlight, as a long line of elephants stepped towards them from the shadows.

In the lead came the mighty figure of “ Iron-heart,” now a hundred years old, and big as “ Grey Giant ” himself. Of those he led, many were wounded, and standing head to head in silent, telepathic communion “ Grey Giant ” learned that they had escaped from a great elephant drive on the Matabeleland border, and had been led

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hither by one of the many descendants of "Great-mother."

Now "Grey Giant" and his comrades wanted more herds in the new territory to the east, and when they had rested two days each of the four bulls gathered ten or a dozen of the new-comers to him, and would have led them east. But "Ironheart" would not permit this, and standing squarely in "Grey Giant's" path he trumpeted sonorous challenge.

At once the scattered groups drew aside, and ranged themselves in position to watch the combatants. Advancing slowly until within six paces "Grey Giant" and his adversary met at last with a rush; great foreheads touching, and tusks interlocked. For fifteen minutes they swayed and rocked under the exercise and pressure of giant force, but, although each gave ground in turn, neither gained a real advantage.

Then by an accident "Grey Giant" secured the first point in the battle. Slipping to his knees on an exposed root, his interlocked tusk bore heavily down, and snapped that of "Ironheart" close to the jaw. At the sudden breakage his weight was thrown forward, and his own tusk drove unintentionally into "Ironheart's" off shoulder. As the blood gushed forth, "Ironheart" drew back with a scream of rage, and then thundered upon his kneeling adversary.

As he came "Grey Giant" straightened his

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forelegs, dropped on his haunches, and pivoted clear. As "Ironheart" also dropped on his haunches to check his own impetus "Grey Giant" came to his feet and charged. Both his tusks took "Ironheart" in the stomach, leaving deep wounds where they entered. Wheeling swiftly the great bulls faced each other again head on.

But as they rushed together, "Ironheart" found that owing to his broken tusk he could not hold his foe in position. As "Grey Giant" swung to the left at his first heave his tusk entered "Ironheart's" ribs just behind the damaged shoulder. But at the same instant "Ironheart" pivoted away, and drove his sound tusk into "Grey Giant's" side, the point entering the right lung.

Both combatants were now infuriated, and, drawing apart, they met again time after time with a shock that nearly dazed both. But at last age and loss of blood began to tell on "Ironheart," and a rush of "Grey Giant's," catching him unprepared, he staggered and fell sideways. As he scrambled up "Grey Giant's" tusks took him behind the near shoulder, and with his weight behind them the near one penetrated to within a fraction of the heart.

"Ironheart" fell before the impact, and lay groaning with pain. "Grey Giant" stood watching him, while each laboured breath stained his lips with blood-flecked foam from the damaged lung. When "Ironheart" did not rise, two bulls

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came and mounted guard beside him. Throughout that night and the next morning, they fetched water from the pool and sprayed it over their dying comrade. But it was all in vain, and at noon next day "Ironheart" died. His skeleton and tusks led men to believe years later that he had sought that place to die.

After this, the most desperate battle of his life, "Grey Giant" felt in no shape to face the dangers of the elephant range. Next day he watched his comrades lead the troops east, while he remained alone in the sanctuary. A month later his lung was sufficiently healed to allow his departure; but for the rest of that year he wandered alone, and avoided the yearly rendezvous.

The following season he joined the herds—the biggest bull, and the acknowledged monarch of all that district. During the next thirty years white and native hunters took heavy toll of the herds, and five times "Grey Giant" himself was wounded, and fled to the sanctuary to recover.

Many times his spoor was followed to the edge of the twenty-mile swamp which lay between, but the deep Quando River ran midway through this, and no canoes were available; so pursuit was always abandoned. Often, too, during those pursuits, he had turned on and killed many of his pursuers; so that amongst the Barotse he was known as "The Fighting Devil."

When eighty years old he was probably the

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most dangerous enemy to man in an area of twenty thousand square miles, though in his prime, and by no means "soured" by exile from the herds. About this time—1908—the whim seized him to revisit his old haunts, and he wandered alone down the Okavango.

That same year a very high German official was touring the country with a large party, and combining business with sport. So it happened that as "Grey Giant" wandered one night towards a "pan" known to him there came to him suddenly the scent of many men. Without thought, and driven by panic rather than hatred, he charged silently down upon the scent.

At the end of half a mile there loomed before him the white tents and fires of an encampment. Instantly his rapid, silent trot increased, and he dashed through the clearing at the rate of more than a hundred yards in ten seconds. A maddened horse went down before him, and sleeping black forms were crushed beneath his feet. Then, amid a bedlam of yells and curses, and wild, aimless shots, he tore through the line of tents. The high official's tent stood right in his path, and when he had passed only the smashed form of a dead man lay amidst the tangle of torn canvas, splintered poles and broken camp furniture.

Consternation seized the party, and at dawn a hurried council decided that "Grey Giant" was too dangerous to be allowed to live. Yet, as we

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have seen, it was terror which man had himself inspired, rather than malice, which had incited his devastating charge.

Before sunrise six mounted men were on his trail; but it was late afternoon before they sighted his great ears swinging lazily above a "Makona" bush, where he stood amidst the tangled thorn scrub on the edge of the great "thirst." For he was heading again for the sanctuary. A moment later two heavy express bullets struck his massive head, dazing him, and as he turned, a smaller bullet entered one lung. Trumpeting savagely, he headed north for his birthplace, and the thorn bush which could not stay him hindered pursuit.

The next morning, despite lack of water, the hunters took his trail. Travelling all that day and night on the well-defined path, they came to the sanctuary at noon the next day. "Grey Giant" had watered that morning, and was now feeding five miles away; but the hunters knew he would return, and they prepared a careful ambush.

As he came down the trail to water at sunset—the trail he had trod so often—his keen scent noted nothing suspicious; but as he stood above the pool six rifles crashed simultaneously, and on the spot where his earliest and happiest days had been spent "Grey Giant" fell dead with two bullets in his brain.

He had lived a great life, had been a great leader.

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A wise teacher of his kind, and a worthy foe of man—the supreme destroyer. And in these days of high-powered weapons he may be accounted fortunate in having lived through happier days than his kind will know again, though he may have lived but half his lifetime.

From that day the place where he fell is known as " the place where the elephants die," and it is a sanctuary no more. Because of that it may be that " Grey Giant " will be the last of the elephant folk to die there.

CHAPTER IV

"CRUSTY," THE RHINOCEROS

SHE was an ill-tempered little beast from birth, or at any rate from two days old, and so deserves the name of "Crusty" which I have given her. We usually reserve that sobriquet for gouty old gentlemen and retired Indian Colonels; but I can assure you that "Crusty," the rhinoceros, was more choleric than either!

She was born at the end of a heavy rainy season. How Mother Nature taught her parents to arrange this I do not know; but it is certain that she did so—and for a very good reason.

During the rainy season—when most of the forest folk grow fat—the rhino family becomes lean and gaunt, and in no condition to rear growing progeny. This is partly due to the heat—and the heavy coat the rhino wears at all seasons—and partly to scarcity of appetising food. Dry food, dry weather, and dry country make a combination the rhino loves. Perhaps this accounts for his evil temper. One can imagine that the sight of fat forest denizens all around him, at a time when he is thin and hungry, might well inspire a sense of injustice.

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Yet even ill-temper may have its uses. It was owing to her first manifestation—when she was two days old—that "Crusty" lived the long and not uneventful life I am able to record in this history.

Her mother had placed her in a shallow pit she had dug in the sand, beneath a thorny acacia tree ; and carefully covered her with brushwood to hide her from prowling enemies. Whether she had learned this trick from the elephant folk I cannot say ; but she seemed to copy the forest kings in this and other ways, just as she resembled them in strength and size.

"Crusty" was lying half asleep with only her small nose protruding when a strange smell made her open her eyes and twitch her small ears. At the same moment two pairs of black hands jerked away the brushwood just above her head. Looking upwards, she saw two black, upright forms, and as these stooped towards her the strange scent became overpowering.

At once "Crusty" hated that scent, and the hatred remained with her all her life. Yet she did not know why, for she felt no fear. But with her breed dislike is the precursor of rage, and as four hands inserted themselves beneath her, and strove to raise her, she gave a shrill squeal of anger and butted violently with her small head at the disturbers of her peace.

That squeal saved "Crusty." Her mother,

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"Fury," was busily uprooting a euphorbia tree about three hundred yards away which promised succulent nourishment, and had "Crusty" remained silent through fear, the two natives might have made her captive without hindrance. But as her baby's thin plaint reached "Fury" she gave a loud snort and started towards her nursery at a clumsy gallop.

The two natives heard the snort and the crash of her passage through the bush. They waited to hear no more. Grabbing their flint-lock muzzle loaders from where they lay on the sand they started at top speed in the opposite direction. Even so, they were barely a hundred yards distant when the cow hurled herself into the small clearing where "Crusty" lay hidden. For in spite of bulk the rhinoceros can move with surprising speed when needful.

Fortunately for the natives, the distance was too great for "Fury" to see them clearly, and since they had raced down-wind she quested the air in vain. For, like the elephant, the rhino depends on scent and hearing for information rather than sight. But as she nosed her baby and smelt the man-taint on her body and on the disturbed brushwood the squeal of rage which reached the fugitives expressed her feelings so clearly that their speed over the next hundred yards increased.

The sun was about three hours old when this happened, and for the next three hours "Fury"

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did sentry-go over "Crusty," pausing once or twice to allow her baby a drink of milk. But as the sun rose higher she became obviously impatient, and stood gazing frequently down a well-worn path which disappeared into a patch of thorn bush to the east.

Occasionally she uttered a peculiar squeal which was totally unlike the angry sound the man-taint had drawn from her. The last time she did this there came a faint answer, like an echo, from far down the trail she had been watching. About ten minutes later there came into sight a huge, black shape, coming towards the clearing at a trot.

In a few minutes "Bighorn"—the largest bull in that district, and "Fury's" mate—halted in front of her and attempted to rub his ugly muzzle against her shoulder. But "Fury" was not pleased with her lord this morning. Perhaps she blamed his long dalliance at the water-hole for the threat to little "Crusty." Or perhaps she was thirsty. At all events, she met his advances with an angry snort, and gave him a vicious jab in the shoulder with her horn.

"Bighorn" grunted morosely and stepped over to nose the calf. He must have smelt the man-taint and sensed the cause of his mate's annoyance with himself, for he gave a short, angry squeal, followed by a succession of grunts, and commenced to hurl sand and roots into the air with his great thirty-six inch horn. "Fury"

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watched him for a moment and then, satisfied, that he realised the danger and might be trusted to avert it, she departed at a trot to quench her own thirst.

That she and "Bighorn" were obliged to do this in daylight was due to little "Crusty." As a rule she and her mate drank at night, but while the necessity of guarding their helpless baby from any prowling lions devolved upon them, both parents kept guard during the night hours, drinking only after daylight at water six miles distant.

"Fury's" confidence in "Bighorn" was justified, and when she returned, soon after midday, the big bull still lay, alert and vigilant, a few paces from their small daughter.

About four days after her escape from capture little "Crusty" refused to stay in her usual hiding place one morning. Twice her mother pushed her gently into it, and twice she scrambled out, squealing a peevish protest. The second time "Bighorn," who had stood watching, turned and walked slowly towards the thorn bush through which the water trail led. "Crusty" looked from the big bull to her mother for a moment in indecision, then trotted unconcernedly after "Bighorn." "Fury" promptly followed, glad, no doubt, of a prospective change from the near-by feeding ground "Crusty's" inability to travel had confined her to for a week past.

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For rhinos consume almost as much as elephants, and during that week she and "Bighorn" had sadly diminished supplies of appetising food—such as evergreen shrubs and bushes, roots, twigs of the thorny acacia, and euphorbia saplings—growing in the vicinity.

But "Crusty's" first pedestrian effort was not a prolonged one. After about four miles the bush belt suddenly ended, and the path continued across a wide, open plain. "Crusty" grew suspicious of such unaccustomed surroundings, and feeling tired about the same time she lay down and obstinately refused to budge.

"Fury" gazed around speculatively, and seeing a dense clump of overhanging "mutema" bush about twenty yards off the path she walked over to it, and with horn and feet soon hollowed out a shallow depression beneath it. Then she gently urged "Crusty" into the shelter, broke off a few branches with her prehensile upper lip, dropped them over her baby, and proceeded to search the new habitat for provender.

"Bighorn," meanwhile, continued a leisurely progress towards the water-hole located in the valley, whose contour could now be seen about two miles away.

During the next week little "Crusty" accompanied her parents in their nightly search for food, but always returned to her little nest before dawn and lay there through the hot hours. It

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was owing to this that a rather terrifying adventure befell her.

"Fury" and "Bighorn" had developed the habit of going to water, shortly before daybreak, without her; relying, perhaps, on their speedy return to prevent accident. One morning, as dawn showed faintly in the Eastern sky, "Crusty" awoke from a slumber which had lasted less than an hour to feel the brushwood above her being gently pulled aside. At the same moment a disagreeable smell greeted her nostrils, and, looking upwards, she stared into a pair of green, opalescent eyes.

With little thrills of rage and terror tickling her spine, "Crusty" emitted a lusty squeal for help and attempted to scramble out on the side farthest from the unpleasant eyes. But on this side she met another pair equally baleful, and again squealing her terror she crouched low in the pit and shrank as far as possible from the marauders.

Next moment two pairs of talons fastened on her head and shoulders and attempted to drag her from her hiding place. She was already a strong little beast and struggled bravely to free herself, but in vain. The two leopards which had scented her retreat were full grown, and much too powerful for her sturdy resistance. She was dragged forth on her side, and while the female leopard seized her short hind leg in her jaws her mate fastened on "Crusty's" throat and commenced to squeeze breath and blood from her together.

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A few minutes more and her short life would have ended. But it so happened that "Longclaw," the leopard now attacking her, had been trailed for the last hour by "Black Shadow" (the biggest leopard in that district) out of desire for his mate, "Lightfoot," and at that moment "Black Shadow" arrived.

He arrived silently, but with a quick rush that landed him on top of "Longclaw," so that for a moment "Crusty" lay struggling beneath two heavy bodies. At the shock of "Black Shadow's" weight "Longclaw" abandoned his strangling grip and writhed to his feet, while "Lightfoot" released her painful hold on the hind leg, and stretched herself at full length on the sand to watch the struggle. "Crusty" waited for no more, but as the cool air filled her aching lungs she uttered a squeal of pure terror, and in spite of the pain of her wounds dashed down the water trail as fast as her short legs would carry her.

"Fury" and "Bighorn," returning in single file along the water trail, heard that squeal. They were barely two hundred yards away, and dashed to the rescue, snorting vengeance. "Fury" pulled up beside her trembling offspring, and at the smell of blood from her wounds squealed with rage, and dashed forward again to punish the enemy, followed by "Bighorn."

So that "Black Shadow" and "Longclaw," writhing over and over in a desperate death

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struggle, suddenly found themselves lifted and hurled into the air, to fall painfully into a thorny bush some ten yards away. "Fury's" horn had driven clean through "Longclaw's" body, and lifted both leopards together. As they fell, "Black Shadow" disengaged himself and dashed hastily after "Lightfoot," who had vanished silently as the avengers appeared.

But "Longclaw" could not rise, and as he struggled to regain his feet "Bighorn's" great horn raised him high in the air and tossed him backwards into "Fury's" path. Two minutes later only a shapeless, blood-soaked mass remained of "Longclaw" the leopard.

Then the big beasts returned to "Crusty," and while "Fury" licked her wounds and comforted her, "Bighorn" stood sentinel beside them, grunting his defiance to all enemies within earshot. Thereafter "Crusty" accompanied her parents to water or elsewhere; but until she died, faint traces of "Longclaw's" teeth and claws showed on the thick hide of neck and throat which had saved her.

During the first month, when she followed her parents to water, "Crusty" discovered three things. The first was the existence of two creatures whom her parents feared; the second, that the ill-temper which she had often seen expressed in domestic quarrels was common to all her kind; and the third, that the said ill-temper made her kind the noisiest of all the forest folk.

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For the last mile to the water-hole the path led through rocky ground, and at this point many trails converged into one. But each was used only by rhino and had been so used for so long a time that the path in the hard ground was worn to a depth of nearly two feet. Indeed, "Crusty's" small shape was almost hidden from view when she entered this last section.

On the first occasion she followed "Bighorn" and was in turn followed by "Fury." Ahead of her she heard vengeful grunts and squeals and soon discovered the reason of these. Just ahead of her father loomed the black shape of another bull, who, instead of progressing peaceably to water, was engaged in combat with another rhino ahead of him which had turned to resent a vicious prod from his horn.

To add to the uproar her father promptly lunged forward and attacked from the rear. At once the assaulted bull turned on his new antagonist, while his former adversary hastened after his mate to water. Presently, after much uproar and many hard cracks, the bull ahead of "Bighorn" turned and trotted onwards, and "Crusty" and "Fury" were able to resume progress.

Behind them sounded similar grunts and clashes of horns, and it was not long before "Crusty" realised that such stupid obstruction and angry aggression was the nightly accompaniment of the

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progress of her relatives down the narrow trail their feet had worn.

The other forest folk knew this however, and gave the evil-tempered beasts a wide berth. When "Crusty" emerged at last on the edge of the big "pan" she saw shapes of scores of antelopes, zebra, bushpigs, and other animals which had arrived by different routes in peace and silence. About thirty rhino were gathered on that first night—made up of little troops of three or four—and even while drinking they could not refrain from quarrelling. The quieter animals viewed them with disdain or indifference from a distance, while watching alertly for enemies of their own.

While her parents were drinking here a week later two of those enemies materialised suddenly. "Crusty" stood watching a group of graceful impala drinking at the opposite side of the pool, when suddenly there was a frightened rush, and the bounding red forms scattered in all directions. But two remained, with legs kicking spasmodically, and a great tawny shape was fastened with tooth and claw to the throat of each.

At once the six or eight rhino drinking near "Crusty" ceased their quarrels and clustered close together in silence, gazing intently at the tragedy being enacted across the pool. Then an old bull set off up the trail at a trot and the rest followed. So "Crusty" learned that lions were at least avoided, if not feared by her kind.

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Although she did not know it, it was to secure the safety of numbers that the rhino folk used a single trail to water. A troop of lions might well prove too much for a single bull, but would hesitate to attack a number, even when meat-hungry.

Two nights after the killing at the pool "Crusty" stood there again, watching her parents roll and wallow in the mud with other rhino, when loud rumbling noises smote her ears, followed by a deep trumpet note. Next moment majestic black forms of mighty proportions, with huge flapping ears and pendent trunks, emerged from the bush on the opposite side of the pool, and "Crusty" gazed in awe at the first elephant she had seen.

Led by a huge cow eighteen of the forest kings stepped slowly round the edge of the pool towards the rhinoceros group. The latter drew together and watched in silence strange to them, as their great kinsfolk sprayed shower after shower of water over their dusty hides. Then, as the elephants drew nearer to them, they turned and retreated to a distance from the pool. Since they never gave way for other animals or for each other, "Crusty" got the impression that they feared these great beasts she now saw for the first time.

In this she was right, though as a matter of fact their fear was needless, for the elephant is placid and even-tempered, as the rhinoceros is irascible and aggressive. But before she died

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"Crusty" was to incur punishment for a display of aggression towards the elephant folk; and in the punishment she found sufficient reason for caution—if no more.

Her first year's education consisted principally in learning edible foods and classifying them in varying degrees of desirability. Many different leaves, twigs, and roots were sampled and enjoyed, in addition to those of the thorny acacia, and the stems of the euphorbia saplings her parents uprooted she also shared and enjoyed.

During the winter months her parents forsook the dense thorn thickets where they usually rested by day and fed by night, and spent most of their time on open, grassy plains, where at first sight she could discover no food. But soon loud championing noises in the grass near her told her that other rhinos had discovered food supplies. Just afterwards her parents introduced her to succulent evergreen plants growing amidst the tall grass.

Then, also, in addition to the luxury she found obtainable from a mud wallow, she achieved considerable enjoyment from a roll in the red and yellow dust of these plains, so that sometimes her colour was completely changed from its usual greyish black. An inexperienced hunter who chanced to have met her in such guise might well have startled his friends by an account of a red or yellow rhino!

But as the rains came on, and the heat increased,

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her parents took to the dense cover again and slept most of the day, though they sometimes went to water in daylight when not far distant from cover, as well as at night. She preferred the daylight drinks as only odd members of the rhino family were encountered, and the squealing aggressive tactics, incidental to the crowded nightly procession, were less in evidence.

For although "Crusty's" ill-temper increased as she grew up it was developed chiefly by contact with others equally afflicted. It is probable that, if by accident she could have spent her life amongst gentler folk, she might even have become good-natured. But amongst the rhino clan aggression and pugnacity seemed the law of life, and even in her gambols with young playmates she had to be ever on guard against a vicious dig from older companions whose progress she might accidentally obstruct. A tit-bit in the food line, too, was more often than not secured by an angry quarrel—even between her parents—and she learned (as we all do) by observation.

In the course of her second year she witnessed a tragedy which stirred memories of her own youth in her dull, stupid brain. She and her parents were proceeding to water just before sundown when suddenly a ferocious growl shook the ground beneath them. A few yards ahead a great tawny shape rose to his feet with bristling mane and bared fangs. Beside him crouched a lioness

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with paws outstretched on the body of a rhino calf they had dragged from cover and killed. From the opposite direction at the same moment the parents charged down on the killers, and "Bighorn" and "Fury" stood blinking with their dim little pig's eyes at a scene they had watched many times before.

That scene was an attempt to punish a more agile enemy in which the rhinoceros family is far too stupid to succeed. As they thundered down, the lion and lioness sprang aside and struck savagely at each with unsheathed claws. Squealing with pain and anger, they turned and charged again, to be met in similar elusive and painful fashion. A third time they essayed to reach their enemies with their terrible horns, only to receive another slashing stroke low down on the flanks. It was enough. This time the pair continued the charge until they reached "Fury" and "Bighorn," when they halted and stood staring at "Crusty's" parents in comical and stupid surprise.

Instead of offering sympathy or help, as the elephant folk would have done, "Bighorn" grunted savagely and charged at the bull, who promptly whirled aside and decamped, followed by his mate.

For a mile they could be heard squealing their woes to an unsympathetic world, while "Fury" and "Bighorn" continued their way to water without evincing further interest in the tragic couple. But "Crusty" noted that the snarling lions re-

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mained in possession, and as she sidled hastily between her parents, certain gruesome sucking and rending noises behind her sent apprehensive shivers through her body, and made her glance apprehensively backwards.

When she was nearly two years old her mother became decidedly hostile towards her, and "Big-horn" would, as often as not, seize food she had laboriously uprooted for herself. So falling in one night at the water-hole with a group of three young rhino about her own age "Crusty" conceived a preference for their company and left her selfish parents for ever. Since "Fury" produced a bull calf a month later perhaps they did not miss her?

Throughout that third year of her age she wandered with her new companions, but even with two of these she was obliged to assert fighting prowess constantly. These were two young heifers, and, although as yet their horns were embryonic, they would administer to "Crusty" or each other a painful dig, when by so doing they could secure a coveted morsel or right of way. The other member of the group was a young bull and with him she got on better. His attitude to his female companions was one of indifference or stolid curiosity, and on occasion he would even relinquish food in their favour. But towards the end of that year tragedy robbed her of his companionship, and induced her to seek safety with an older group.

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The three heifers were busily uprooting some young euphorbia trees they had discovered in a small glade, and the young bull was struggling to extract a root on the other side of the glade, about twenty yards from them. Suddenly a great form flashed from behind a bush and landed on the bull's shoulders. He sank to his knees under the impact, and before he could recover, two other lithe shapes seized him by throat and flank. The swiftness and silence of the attack—there in the bright moonlight of the peaceful glade—almost paralysed "Crusty" with an indefinable fear. But, as agonised squeals and savage snarls came from the whirling dust-cloud which hid their companion of a year, "Crusty" and her mates decamped, leaving their escort in the deadly grip of three great lions. They never saw him again.

Dashing panic-stricken through the moonlit forest they presently emerged on a dry river bed, and, following a game trail along its banks, they suddenly met two young bulls of about ten years' growth. These stood and watched them stolidly for a moment, then, as they stood trembling from their panic-driven exertions, the bulls advanced and sniffed them over carefully, but without sign of hostility. The inspection seemed to be satisfactory, for presently they stood aside, and when "Crusty" and her mates moved onwards the young bulls followed.

For two years these five wandered in company

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with no more incident than is usual in the life of forest folk. An occasional gory combat between mate-maddened bulls, a tragedy amongst the antelope folk, a hasty evacuation of feeding grounds before the elephant advent, and that was all. For the two bulls were well-grown and already carried horns of useful dimensions. They were beyond the size usually selected by lions for attack, and the heifers acquired safety from their company. Yet their presence at last brought tragedy from a deadlier source.

Few rhino groups numbered more than four at most, and a wandering white hunter, with a passion for investigation, became intrigued by the sign of five they left wherever they wandered. He decided to follow, not because he wanted trophies, indeed the spoor was too small to promise any, but to discover, if possible, the age and sex of an unusually large group.

But for that fatal irascibility I have referred to, his observation might have been harmless. As it was he approached the covert where they lay sleeping by the path they had made in entering, and unluckily he brought the wind with him. Rhinos evidence stupidity in many ways, but in none more so, perhaps, than in their invariable habit of using the same trail to enter and leave a covert. But for this, and their innate pugnacity, "Crusty" and her comrades might have vanished silently and unhurt when the man-taint reached

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them. Instead of which the bulls charged at once down the trail, followed by the three heifers.

The white man and the native gun-bearer sprang clear as they came, but a second native was not quick enough, and the leading bull caught him in the stomach and hurled him some yards away. Instantly a rifle shot rang out and the bull collapsed. His mate and the heifers blundered on and stood sniffing for the taint which was now behind them and down-wind. The native gun-bearer, incensed at his companion's death, fired at the standing group without instructions or definite aim.

The bullet scored "Crusty's" shoulder and passed onwards without serious injury. At the pain of the hot, searing missile she squealed in anger and rushed onwards, followed by the others. When they halted a mile away she was limping from the pain of the wound and blood flowed freely. Yet Nature is an expert healer, and within a month the wound was healing rapidly while her action was unimpaired.

Thereafter she and one of the other heifers joined this group or that for a week, a month, or a year, and anon wandered alone, until her tenth year was reached. When this was nearly completed a strange restlessness seized her, and she began to stay for hours near the water-hole, alone, waiting for, she knew not what.

One evening, as the sun sank, she stood watch-

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ing first one and then another of the shy forest folk stealthily come and go, when a well-grown young bull of perhaps twenty years of age proved to be the first rhino visitor of the evening. As he emerged on the water side he sniffed the air for a moment and then walked tentatively towards “Crusty.” She advanced to meet him, and instead of greeting him with the ill-tempered prod she usually handed to strangers at close quarters she stood passively, while he gently rubbed his ugly snout against her shoulder.

What they said to each other I don’t know, but after a time they seemed to reach some agreement, and when the young bull turned away from the water “Crusty” followed. They were about halfway along the path to the forest when two larger bulls met them. These halted simultaneously, and as “Crusty’s” escort halted too the leading stranger advanced again slowly towards him.

He had arrived within a few paces when “Crusty’s” escort gave a vicious snort and charged. He was met by an equally determined rush on the part of his adversary, and with the shock of collision came the clashing of horns and squeals of rage from both combatants. Charge after charge they made, first one and then the other going down under the shock of impact, and as the fight progressed blood flowed freely from both.

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Meanwhile the second bull trotted up to "Crusty" where she stood watching the conflict, unmoved by any feeling but that of mild curiosity. As he came up to her she lost interest in the fight, and with fine feminine faithlessness transferred her interests to the newcomer. After a few moments, that ill-favoured suitor moved tentatively towards the forest and she was on the verge of following when her first escort went down heavily and lay groaning with pain. At once his opponent dashed at her new suitor and a second battle began.

For five minutes she watched this second conflict without manifesting sympathy for, or interest in, her defeated lover, who remained where he had fallen. At the end of that time her second suitor placed his antagonist hors-de-combat. Whether his earlier exertions had handicapped him, or whether his new rival was really the stronger, may never be known, but when the winner of the first battle staggered to his feet he headed down the water trail at an unsteady trot, instead of resuming the conflict. For a few yards the victor followed, hastening his rival's departure with jabs from the rear. As these brought only angry squeals by way of retaliation he returned to "Crusty," and the pair headed for the bush, leaving her first escort to recover slowly and painfully from his severe gruelling.

But the following day her new husband "got



"CHARGE AFTER" CHARGE THEY MADE, FIRST ONE AND THEN THE OTHER GOING DOWN UNDER

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his," as the Americans say. They were feeding in the midst of thorn bush which only the thick hide of a rhino or elephant could afford to ignore, when a great, black shape emerged from behind a tall bush, and stood blinking at them with small, wicked eyes. This was "Red Terror," the hardest fighter, and one of the very biggest bulls within a twenty-mile range. "Crusty's" escort knew him, and at once stopped his rooting to eye the intruder dubiously.

As "Red Terror" stepped towards him he retreated a few yards and, encouraged by his hesitation, the newcomer rooted the ground viciously and hurled the flying sand over his head. Next instant he dashed at "Crusty's" mate with a pugnacious squeal.

But if the rhino brain lacks intelligence the rhino heart is courageous enough, and her mate stood his ground. Came the shock of impact, as the great bodies met shoulder on, and as each staggered sideways, a spurting blood stream on their sides showed an "even break" from this opening bout. For nearly half-an-hour charge alternated with counter-charge, until at last "Crusty's" husband of a day went down and stayed down, breathing painfully with laboured gasps.

The blood on his rusty hide showed the amount of punishment he had suffered gamely, but in place of offering sympathy "Crusty" squealed

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with anger, and horned the prostrate form viciously as she passed. Then, having shown the true nastiness of her evil temper, she headed with pretended indifference for the deeper thickets, knowing intuitively that "Red Terror" would follow. This he did, and for eighteen months she and another cow shared the wifely honours and followed him.

At the end of that time a little bull calf was born to her, but this happy event did little to improve her temper. Indeed, it was that same ill-temper for which I have named her that betrayed her into an act of unwisdom and caused the death of her first baby.

"Red Terror" and his second wife had gone to water just after sundown, leaving her on guard over the calf. The water was at that time only three miles away. For, as the time of her motherhood drew near, "Red Terror," with the wisdom born of experience, had changed their feeding grounds, which, until then, had been ten miles from water.

As she stood waiting for their return to allow her own passage to the water a great elephant cow suddenly appeared and came slowly towards her, followed by a small calf. At any other time she would have moved away silently from the grey shadow's path, but to-night maternal pride, or the irritability produced by thirst, led her to a display of temper.

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Without reflection she gave an angry squeal and dashed head down at the great form as it advanced. Resentment at the unprovoked attack, and fear for her own calf, stirred the elephant mother to a mighty wrath and made her unusually aggressive also. Trumpeting with fury she whirled aside, and as "Crusty" passed she drove her great head into the rhino's flanks, sending her crashing to earth and rolling over and over.

Her own small calf unluckily headed for the pile of brushwood under which "Crusty's" baby lay, and in fear for his safety she pursued. Next instant her front feet descended heavily into the shallow pit where "Crusty's" first-born crouched, and the breath was driven suddenly and painfully out of his small body. As the elephant mother swept onwards "Crusty" regained her legs, but when she arrived at her baby's shelter a shapeless and nasty red and black mess was all that remained of him.

When "Red Terror" and his second mate arrived an hour later they were met by a demented "Crusty," who charged each in turn with fine impartiality, until chastisement brought home to her the folly of inflicting her woes on her companions. For a week she sulked. Then the disaster passed from her short memory and food became again the chief aim of life.

Six months later "Red Terror's" second wife was equally unfortunate. He and "Crusty" re-

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turned from water one evening to find her rushing to and fro in the small glade where they had left her, while snarling over the remains of her week-old calf were two great, gaunt lions.

"Red Terror" charged instantly, supported by his two mates, and although all three received painful wounds from the deadly claws, weight of numbers told, and the assassins presently decamped. But this led indirectly to "Red Terror's" death. One wound in his stomach became septic and painful, so he took to resting by day under the shade of a tall and leafy tree where flies were less numerous and troublesome.

Now rhinos have the singular habit of dunging always in the same spot while using a particular cover or feeding ground. As a rule such heaps of fumets are found adjacent to thorn scrub, which forms the usual cover and affords no ambush for human enemies. While asleep he is efficiently protected by flocks of tick birds, which in return for the feed of ticks secured from his body give him prompt warning of the approach of enemies.

When "Red Terror" commenced to use the big tree for his daily sleep a pile of fumets rapidly collected in the vicinity, and two hawk-eyed natives chuckled with glee when they perceived from the spoor that the spreading branches of the tree formed an ideal and unusually easy ambush. His feathered attendants gave no warning because

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the natives were already concealed above them when they arrived with “Red Terror” one morning. He limped slowly beneath the spreading foliage and had barely lowered his bulk to the ground when two heavily-weighted assegais descended, driving through the spine sheer to the lungs and killing him where he stood.

So “Crusty” and her mate wandered widowed and childless and alone. But in the forest memory is short and Nature urgent. Life must be lived at all costs while it lasts. So a month afterwards, when two bulls had been killed in fight for them, the two cows accepted as lord a great bull whom the forest knew as “Grey Death” because of the peculiar colour of his hide and his habit of ferocious attack on the least provocation.

“Crusty” had wandered under his protection for over four years, and two of her calves with them, when natives armed with rifles commenced to hunt the district increasingly. Soon the sharp crack of weapons and the thud of bullets became a familiar sound, while crippled and maimed beasts lent terror to the old trails.

One morning, as “Grey Death” led the way along the trail to cover, the dreaded sound came from close at hand and the big bull lurched a few paces onwards then fell headlong. At the same moment “Crusty” caught the taint of the slayer and charged savagely at the bush from whence it came.

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The native, who had fired at thirty paces, slipped nimbly aside, and under ordinary circumstances "Crusty" would have blundered stupidly onwards and perhaps received a second shot. But when the taint reached her year-old-calf, hastening beside her, he squealed with fury, and at the sound she whirled in her tracks and darted back. Before the native could evade her her horn took him in the stomach and whirled him aloft. A few moments later his body was torn and stamped into nothingness.

But, although she had thus avenged her lord, "Crusty" was again a widow, and she liked neither widowhood nor loneliness. So that night she headed for a great plain fifteen miles away, where, owing to the persistent hunting in the bush, the rhino folk gathered in numbers. Here, within a month or two, she found a new mate, an old bull this time, of mediocre strength but great wisdom.

With him she roamed the plains for nearly two years, successfully evading both game-pits and snares, as well as the fires which the meat-hungry natives tried constantly to encircle them with. But when the time of her travail drew near again, and shelter for her baby became essential, the old bull led her to a remote, thorny thicket, many miles away, where the crack of the dreaded rifle was seldom heard.

Even here, however, scattered parties of native

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elephant hunters wandered occasionally, and when her calf was but three days old two of these un-luckily passed near her hiding place. With animals, as with men, Fate sometimes takes a hand in weaving a warp and woof of fortune or disaster, and history sometimes repeats itself in the animal world also. Such a combination occurred this morning, and against it the wisdom the years had taught “Crusty” and her lord was powerless.

It happened that a white hunter was camped ten miles away who sought a baby rhinoceros for a certain zoological garden, and he had promised the natives a handsome reward for assistance in securing one. That was circumstance Number One. Number Two in the chain of causation was this, “Crusty’s” old mate had gone to water in the small hours of the morning and had found a young bull there whose mate had recently been killed by native hunters. Smelling the cow-taint on “Crusty’s” mate he had given battle, and although the old bull had held his own and had at last driven off his adversary, he had not been free to return to her until after sunrise.

About the same time the two natives had come upon her baby’s hiding place. With the reward in mind, and also the probable presence of an angry mother in the vicinity, they decided, after discussion, to lead the white man to the spot and allow him to take his own risks in securing the prize.

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They set off at once, but it was well after noon before they approached the cover again, and meanwhile a good deal had happened there. Soon after their departure "Crusty" had returned to her calf for the twentieth time and gazed morosely down the trail which led to the water. Her mate should have returned by this time, but although her thirst had increased with each hour she was loth to leave the calf.

The intermittent battle through the night hours had prevented her lord's return, and now, sore and spent with wounds, he was returning by a circuitous route. For his victory had not been decisive, and he feared lest his fresh spoor on the usual path might lead the enemy to "Crusty," should he seek a resumption of the conflict.

So it was three hours after sunrise when he at last arrived, and by that time thirst had aggravated her usual peevish temper considerably. Hence, instead of her usual friendly greeting and prompt departure, she rushed at him and horned him viciously on his already injured shoulder. But he merely turned head-on and grunted warningly. Then, as "Crusty" forgot her ill-humour in desire for water and departed, he went and lay down near the calf with a rumbling groan.

As "Crusty" emerged at the "pan" her mate's late opponent approached from the opposite direction. He may have been seeking his late adversary, a possible mate, or merely water. However

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that may be, as soon as he espied “Crusty” he trotted towards her with friendly overtures. These she rejected in irascible fashion, but when she turned from the water and headed back for cover he followed a few paces behind her.

Pursuing her way indifferently she arrived at last at the clearing with the bull a few yards behind. No sooner did her prostrate mate’s dim eyes perceive her escort than he came to his feet and charged instantly. Nothing loth the younger animal rushed to meet him, urged to greater vigour this time by the proximity of the female lure.

Time after time the combatants staggered and fell under the shock of collision, or in stumbling endeavour to avoid a shrewd stroke, and at last her mate fell heavily and made no effort to rise. He was obviously done, and no sooner did she realise this than the faithless “Crusty” ran at her defeated spouse and added a slashing stroke to his already severe punishment.

For the law of the bush is expressed in Robert Service’s poem, *The Law of the Yukon*: “that surely the weak shall perish and only the strong survive.” “Crusty’s” action was not the result of reason but of natural instinct; an instinct which decrees that only the strongest and hardiest animals shall father creatures whose lives depend upon their physical energies.

Five minutes earlier the white hunter, whom

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the natives had informed of the calf's hiding place, had arrived. Being aware of its position he had approached from leeward, and the clash of conflict had effectually covered his soft approach.

Hearing the sounds of battle coming from a quarter where he had expected domestic peace he had drawn cautiously close enough to witness the end of the struggle, and "Crusty's" attack on her stricken mate. He had expected the necessity of shooting the cow in any case, and, being a kindly man, had deplored it. But now, as the cow nosed her new paramour in shameless congratulation on his victory, he felt that he could administer punishment with a lighter heart.

Next moment his heavy express awoke the echoes, and "Crusty" collapsed with a bullet through the heart. Two seconds later the bewildered bull fell in his tracks to a second shot as he searched the air for the source of danger. Then the hunter walked up to the dying bull and sent him, too, to the rhino hereafter with a merciful bullet.

So died "Crusty." Her life had not lacked adventure and had held its share of tragedy. In extenuation of her faults it must be remembered that it had been her rhino fate to be born with great bulk and little brain, and that her life had been spent in a school where few virtues are taught. Had she lived her allotted span she might probably have died from hunger, or injury by tooth

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or claw. For death in the forest is generally as painful as life is hard, so that the swift death which came to her in the prime and strength of rhino life was after all the best end we could wish her.

CHAPTER V

“STONEHEART,” THE LEOPARD

HIGH up on a boulder-strewn ridge overlooking the N’joko River—in Barotseland—“Ferocity” the leopardess lay in travail. It was two o’clock in the morning, and at this hour yesterday she had been pleasantly occupied in draining the lifeblood from a reedbuck fawn.

To-night, the whistles of the reedbuck sentinels on the vlei below her interested her no more than the snarling of the two jackals less than five hundred yards away ; though at any other time she would have settled their quarrel by removing the hare which was the cause of it. Her mate, “Steelspring,” had gone to hunt as usual, and might be relied upon to return with a meal for her.

For the moment she felt no interest whatever in food. To the soft sounds of insect life, and the rustling progress of soft-footed animal life, which pulsed through the starlit gloom, she added an occasional low moan, as a more than usually acute pain racked her lithe form. But an hour before dawn she lay peacefully with outstretched head, while three spotted, yellow balls of fur,

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about the size of small rabbits, kneaded her stomach with baby paws, while they sucked greedily at her swelling dugs.

As the eastern sky became faintly tinged with red a yellow, dappled head parted the bush cautiously, and the body of her mate followed. He carried in his mouth a small duiker ewe, and deposited this before her where she lay in the hole she had scooped out under the huge, overhanging boulder. He had already sucked the blood from his victim, and felt in no need of further refreshment, but he sniffed at the three cubs with fatherly interest.

“Ferocity” promptly resented this with a snarl, and a stroke of her forepaw which he easily evaded. Whether she suspected him of evil intentions, or merely considered such interest unwarranted and superfluous, I cannot say. At all events, “Steelspring” took the hint and lay down a few feet away, where, after watching her with sleepy eyes for a time, he at last fell asleep.

It was one of three cubs born that morning whom I have named “Stoneheart.” I have given him that name because, as far as I know, he never showed mercy or pity to any throughout a fairly long life, but delighted in inflicting pain and death as his history will prove.

He was bigger than the brother and sister born that morning, and opened his eyes a day earlier than they did, although he was but three hours

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older. He secured his first look at life when he was eight days old. "Steelspring" and "Ferocity" had returned an hour earlier, and it was just as he raised his head from a satisfying burial in the fur of his mother's stomach that the dim twilight of the past twenty-four hours gave place to real light, and objects became visible to him.

Five yards away, "Steelspring" lay licking the last drops of blood from the throat of the duiker he had killed, and yawning sleepily at intervals. Beside "Stoneheart" lay the bodies of his brother and sister, busily imbibing nourishment from "Ferocity's" outstretched form, and still unable to distinguish form and colour.

"Stoneheart" was full-fed and quite prepared to take an intelligent interest in what his eyes revealed. The long shape of "Steelspring" looked interesting, and he tottered on weak legs towards it. But as he approached, a delicious scent—the scent of blood—smote his nostrils, and turned his attention to the duiker shape lying in front of his father.

Sniffing gingerly at the carcase, his inquiring nose brought his muzzle in contact with the punctures in the neck made by his father's fangs, from which a few drops of blood still exuded. While the parents watched complacently, his tongue presently protruded, and licked tentatively at the red drops. Then he licked his mouth in

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appreciation, while his dim eyes stared into those of his father.

So “Stoneheart” learned the taste of blood, and the use of his tongue, while his brother and sister still sucked a milder fluid in a twilight world. Whether this precocity imbued him with an added savagery I cannot say, but throughout his life “Stoneheart” was remarkable for savagery in a world where all his fellows were savage. But for another six months he by no means despised the milk which had first nourished him, and which, in gradually decreasing quantities, formed a welcome addition to the meat and blood his parents provided as time went on.

He was only four weeks old when tragedy robbed him of his sister. His parents had been out all night hunting, and were lying under the welcome shade of the boulder, while the cubs played kittenish games a few yards away.

On a tall tree on the crest of the ridge perched a great eaglehawk—of the type the Dutch call “Lammervangers” (lamb catchers). The big hawk had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours, and his keen, hungry eyes noted the gambols of the three furry bodies with satisfaction. Circling high in the air he poised directly over them, then, suddenly closing his wings, he dropped like a stone. Beak and claws struck “Stoneheart’s” sister together, and in an instant her writhing form was lifted into the air, fast held in the clutching talons.

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At the thud of the blow "Ferocity" awoke, and made a lightning spring for the destroyer, with "Steelspring" a yard behind her. But the leopards were a second too late, and their striking paws encountered only empty air, as powerful wings lifted their enemy and his victim beyond reach. So, afterwards, "Ferocity" cuffed "Stoneheart" and his brother into the shelter of the rock, and that night drove them in front of her to a dense, matted thicket, a mile away. Here she made a nest for them, where they were secured from even the hawk's keen vision.

When he was three months old "Stoneheart" and his brother commenced to accompany their parents on the night's hunt. When prey was located they were left securely hidden while the parents proceeded to kill; and each day found them in a new retreat. The parents always brought them some small portion of the kill, for the time was approaching when they must hunt for themselves. The leopards never emerged from shelter until darkness had fallen. "Ferocity" would return after the kill, and wait until "Steelspring" joined them—usually near dawn—when they would follow him to the selected retreat.

Or, sometimes, "Steelspring" would leave his first victim to "Ferocity" and go off on a hunt alone. On such occasions she did not wait but proceeded to select a lair for herself, and "Steelspring" would rejoin her at some time on the night following.

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There seemed a perfect understanding between the leopards, and “Ferocity” always knew when her mate contemplated a day or two of absence. Perhaps such understanding was made easy by the regularity of his habits; for he only undertook such lonely excursions when game was scarce. The cubs could range quite fair distances, but were not yet equal to those he was sometimes obliged to travel.

The days when leopards could live their lives within a ten-mile radius were gone. Constant hunting by natives and white men had made the game wary, and it was always on the move. Native flocks and herds were generally well protected and inaccessible; so that activity was necessary to secure food, and a long sojourn in one place inadvisable.

If the leopard were content with meat only less travelling might be involved; for his consumption is not great. But his appetite for blood entails the killing of several victims nightly when possible. When fresh blood is obtainable he seldom contents himself with the solid portions of a kill.

So each day saw them lying up in a fresh lair. Sometimes a matted thicket, or a hole under some great tree or stone, and at others the great branches of some tall tree in thick foliage would be selected; but the retreat was always well secured from observation as well as the sun's rays.

The cubs soon learned to climb as expertly as

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their mother, and rather liked the roosts above ground. There was usually a stray squirrel or night ape to provide an appetising snack, and such game was well within the cubs' capacity. But whatever the retreat chosen, they were always under cover by dawn, and seldom emerged until darkness had fallen.

"Stoneheart" grew apace on the meat and blood his parents provided, but although he several times killed unwary hares before he was five months old his speed and strength were still unequal to anything larger.

During "Stoneheart's" sixth month his father went off one night to hunt alone as usual, and failed to return. From that time he ceased to lie up with them during the day, and "Stoneheart" was nearly a year old before he saw him again. The fact was that "Steelspring" felt one mate to be insufficient and desired a second. The cubs had reached an age when "Ferocity's" assistance and protection were sufficient, and she herself might be trusted to remain celibate for many months to come.

The first result of his desertion was that after a month or two food supplies shortened. "Ferocity" killed as usual, and still gave milk, but in lessening quantity. The cubs' taste was for stronger meat, and they took to hunting on their own account, when accompanying "Ferocity." But she would not leave the district, knowing

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instinctively that "Steelspring" would one day seek her there, and game became increasingly difficult for her unaided efforts to provide for the three. For their first attempts to kill often failed, and "Stoneheart" was nine months old before he killed anything larger than a hare.

The three leopards were stealing silently along the edge of a bush belt when "Ferocity" noted a reedbuck family, which included two fawns, feeding a hundred yards out on the vlei. She at once crept towards the unsuspecting group, followed by his brother. "Stoneheart" was on the point of following too, when he perceived a duiker fawn grazing daintily about fifty yards ahead. Without hesitation he selected a leafy tree ten paces distant, and in a few seconds had climbed noiselessly into the branches.

Stretched on a bough about twelve feet from the ground, he watched every movement of the duiker. Presently it came towards the tree, and halted immediately beneath it to nibble the green shoots he had counted on as a bait. Next moment his falling body struck it between the shoulders, and as it went down, his sharp teeth met in the throat. While his victim struggled he clung desperately with tooth and claw, and at last the vice-like grip told, and its struggles ceased.

He was enjoying his first satisfactory blood feast when "Ferocity" and his brother returned from an unsuccessful stalk. His mother waited

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patiently until he had finished his drink, and afterwards shared the kill with him. So that night he had the honour of supplying the family needs for the first time. After that his skill as a killer increased with his strength, and the three found life less difficult. But he soon found that he could not yet dispense with his mother's assistance.

One night they wandered hungry along the bank of the N'joko, and had almost concluded that all game had gone elsewhere when his mother espied a herd of hartebeeste across the river.

She at once slipped into the water and swam silently across the stream. "Stoneheart's" brother followed—all leopards are good swimmers by instinct—and at that moment "Stoneheart" saw the dim shapes of a family of bushpigs trotting towards him from the bush. He at once elected to kill his own meal, not knowing—in the exuberant confidence of youth—that he was committing himself to an enterprise even his father would scarcely have embarked upon.

The limitations of his year-old growth were soon brought forcibly home to him. Crawling stealthily forwards, he made a sudden bound and seized a squealing youngster which had tarried behind the rest. On the heels of the squeal came a wrathful grunt, and next moment "Stoneheart" found himself whirled into the air with a deeply gashed flank where the avenging tusk of the enraged boar had caught him.

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As he hit the ground he gave one glance at the grey form which pursued him, and streaked for the river like a flash. He plunged in with perhaps a yard to spare, and for the first time had reason to be thankful for his prowess as a swimmer. As he heard the angry squeals of the disappointed pig on the bank, he struck out wholeheartedly for the further bank, and the protection of the mother he had begun to despise.

His mother had heard the squeal and the grunt, and leaving the young hartebeeste she had killed, dashed to the rescue. “Stoneheart” met her ten yards from the opposite bank, and his harsh grunts of pain and rage changed to a whimpering purr of satisfaction. Afterwards he was glad to share the meal she had provided, having learned that he still needed adult protection. When he was about fifteen months old he was drinking at the river one night with his mother and brother, when there came the rasping grunt, like the sound a saw makes in cutting wood, from across the river. “Ferocity” listened intently, and as the sound came again she uttered a harsh grunt almost like a human cough. At once there came a similar sound in answer, and “Ferocity” plunged into the stream.

The cubs followed, and as they emerged on the further bank two leopards came towards them. One proved to be “Steelspring,” and with him came a small leopardess. He and “Ferocity”

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gambolled for a time in the gladness of re-union, while the cubs surveyed the new-comer. Presently they attempted to play with her, and were promptly rewarded with a cuff on the head. "Stoneheart" took an instant dislike to her, and this afterwards proved mutual.

"Steelspring" may have explained his plans to "Ferocity." At all events, when he headed south she followed, and the cubs—having nothing better to do—followed also. For three months the five wandered south in company, and although "Ferocity" would sometimes interfere when the new arrival became more rough than usual with them, she no longer provided them with food, but left them to supply their own needs more and more.

One day, when he was eighteen months old, the strange leopardess stayed behind one evening when the rest went to hunt, and next morning "Stoneheart" found four small cubs suckling her. He went to sniff at them in curiosity, and at once the mother sprang at him in fury. His brother joined the fray in his defence, and the stranger might have paid dearly for her surly treatment of them had not "Steelspring" intervened. This he did to some purpose, and blows from his heavy paws sent the brothers rolling and snarling with rage and pain.

"Ferocity" made no move to assist them, and "Stoneheart" decided on the instant to leave such

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scurvy company for ever. With a parting snarl of defiance he headed for a covert he knew of, about a mile away, and his brother followed. When evening came the pair emerged and crept silently south and west towards the Zambesi; and for the next three months hunted the banks of the big river in company.

In their travels the leopard family had already left “Stoneheart’s” birthplace fifty miles behind, and during the three months he hunted with his brother “Stoneheart” wandered yet further south; until they came to the huge flats beyond the Kasai River, and only about ninety miles from the railway. For although by instinct the leopard prefers to live and hunt in one locality—at any rate after he has mated—the constant native hunting, and consequent wariness of game, had made “Stoneheart’s” parents unwilling travellers from his birth.

Here, on the flats, however, there was plenty of reedbuck, lechwe, and cane rats, so for six months “Stoneheart” and his brother lived there in peace and waxed fat. They were expert and stealthy killers. Waiting in ambush on the paths leading to water, there was seldom a night when they did not secure one or more victims. A quick spring from cover, a snapping bite through the jugular vein, and a reedbuck ram heavier than themselves would go down beneath them. Their strength was out of all proportion to their size, and their

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skill in taking cover made almost every attack successful. So plentiful was food that they seldom went to the trouble of removing a kill, though in former days they had often assisted their mother to drag even heavy reedbuck from fifteen to twenty feet up a tree to foil prowling jackals and hyenas.

When he was two and a half years old "Stoneheart's" innate laziness and love of slaughter betrayed him into an indiscretion for which his brother paid with his life. Returning from the flats one night, after killing and partly eating a young lechwe, the pair came suddenly on a white man's hunting camp. Lying beside one of the fires "Stoneheart" saw the body of a deliciously fat dog, and knowing how tasty well-fed dog flesh can be he felt he wanted that dog, although he was not at all hungry.

Creeping forward on his stomach, with his brother beside him, he made a sudden rush and seized the dog by the neck, while his brother gripped a hindleg. At the sharp yelp of pain the sleeping camp woke. Firebands were hurled, and shouts and curses filled the air. "Stoneheart" promptly decamped with his victim, and half a mile away stopped to satisfy his inordinate thirst for blood. But he was still quarrelling with his brother over the last drops when men's voices, and lights, came through the trees towards them.

Fear stirred in his brain, and leaving the booty he and his brother crept silently away. That day

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they slept high up in the leafy branches of a great “Mabolo” tree, but evening brought regretful thoughts of the dog-flesh they had been compelled to leave. There was plenty of game on the flats it is true, but it was here that “Stoneheart’s” laziness brought disaster. He decided that the dog-flesh was easier to secure, and led the way towards it.

The white owner of the dog knew something of leopards. He knew their cunning and vigilance, and the hopelessness of sitting up over a kill. So he had attached a portion of the meat to a trap-gun, and fenced it at the side with thorn bush; while to make doubly certain he had buried a steel trap at either side of the fence.

“Stoneheart” and his brother approached the spot in a cautious, circling movement, and examined both ground and tree-tops for enemies before they approached the entrance from which the appetising smell came. Then, instead of entering from the front, they commenced to pull away the bush at the sides.

Came a snap of steel jaws, and, as “Stoneheart” leapt aside, his brother uttered an agonised snarl. When “Stoneheart” looked back, he was struggling frantically to follow, but was prevented from doing so by a huge steel trap which had closed on his front paw, and which was anchored by a chain to a great log buried in the ground.

Until dawn “Stoneheart” stayed with his

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trapped companion, but all his efforts at release were fruitless. So when he heard men's voices approaching he vanished silently, and was two miles away when the shot was fired which killed his brother. That night he headed east away from the flats, travelling for the first time alone.

For a month he hunted with varying success, killing reedbuck, impala, and the young of eland and hartebeeste, as well as guinea fowl, which he sometimes caught as they slept in the trees. Then he came one night to a ridge where lived a number of baboons, and poaching inadvertently on the preserves of a leopardess he secured his first mate.

He was prospecting the ridge slowly for a suitable lair when he saw the dim baboon shapes sleeping in two great trees. The smell seemed good to him, and he dropped to earth like a shadow, to creep forward on his stomach towards the trees. Arrived beneath the nearest one he commenced to climb, and was half-way up before an alert "old-man" detected his presence, and barked savage warning.

Came a scrambling descent to earth, and as one swaying form dropped to a branch near him, he sprang; rolling to earth fast locked in the grip of a young male baboon. The sharp teeth which met in his shoulder convinced him that here was no easy prey. But his own jaws closed on the neck, and his hind claws penetrated the hairy stomach;

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so that in a few moments all resistance ceased, and he clutched a lifeless form.

He was enjoying an unusual feast when he felt eyes regarding him fixedly, and raised his head to see a leopardess of about his own age watching him. Under the law of the leopard tribe he was a poacher on her hunting ground, and knew it. But he arose and walked stiffly towards her ; resolved to fight, if necessary, for possession of this new domain.

As he approached his hostility vanished, and an unaccountable friendliness replaced it ; so that he lay down on his back before her and invited her to play, as he had played long ago with his brother. She seemed nothing loth, and they soon became so engrossed with their gambols that a great, spotted hyena had seized the dead baboon before they noticed his advent.

Like lightning, “ Stoneheart ” sprang and struck. He struck but empty air, because that hyena had dropped the kill very hastily indeed, and had vanished, to return no more. So that night he ate in company with “ Slimshape ” the leopardess, and at dawn she followed him to his lair, and they became mates.

For six months they stayed within a ten-mile radius, and made the stony ridge their home. Once “ Stoneheart ” killed a female baboon, and the males of the troop attacked together ; so that, even with his mate’s assistance, he was glad to

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escape with a torn skin, and the surrender of his prey. Twice, also, he was obliged to fight wandering leopards who desired "Slimshape's" company, but these were little older than himself, and his strength and vigour gave him victory on each occasion.

Then "Slimshape" presented him with four small cubs, and shortly afterwards his love of dog-flesh again brought disaster. A Government official was touring the district, and chancing upon his camp one night "Stoneheart" proceeded to investigate it, leaving "Slimshape" on the edge of the clearing, to keep watch.

The official's misguided and much over-fed terrier was lying beneath the tent awning, dreaming, perchance, of succulent bones enjoyed—instead of exercising the vigilance expected of his breed—when a pair of powerful jaws gripped his neck, and half stifled his agonised yelp. Next instant, "Stoneheart" had reached the edge of the clearing with the squirming body in his jaws. Later that night, he and his mate demolished the small body between them.

Now the official loved that terrier beyond his deserts, and finding the spoor of the leopardess he decided to follow. For while there is small chance of taking a leopard unawares as a rule a leopardess with small cubs is loth to leave them, and may be sometimes surprised in her lair. So when the sun was three hours old, "Stoneheart" and his

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mate were awakened by the man-taint. Listening intently, they heard the stealthy advance of the trackers, and “Stoneheart” arose silently and vanished. He did not lack courage. He hated men, and felt less interest in the cubs than “Slim-shape”; that was all.

She hated men too, and longed to elude them; but she glanced at her week-old cubs and hesitated. While she did so a black hand parted the bushes and pointed, and she slid silently away. But she was too late. A rifle crashed, and she spun to earth with a broken shoulder.

Like lightning, she sprang to her feet and—despite her crippled leg—charged home. One native’s stomach she ripped open with her claws, ere a second shot broke her spine, and the blow of a native axe shut the daylight from her eyes for ever. When “Stoneheart” visited the lair that night it was to find it empty, and his mate’s dead form—skinned, and picked clean by vultures—lying fifty yards away in the moonlight. That night he wandered east again.

Whether he felt grief for his loss I do not know, but from that time onward he became the bitter enemy of men, and even when game was plentiful he would enter a hen-roost or goat kraal in preference to seeking it; killing whilst any remained, unless he was disturbed. Often he was hunted, but always unsuccessfully. More than once he watched the hunters from amidst the

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foliage of a tree, and vanished before they reached it.

Two days after his mate's death he reached the railway line, and turning north he came to a ganger's cottage. Behind it was a thatched hut occupied by fowls, and as he had found nothing eatable that night he climbed on the roof, tore away the thatch, and entered. When daylight came, a hole in the roof, twenty dead fowls, and the feet of two he had eaten, told the story of his night's work !

Turning westwards along the Kalomo River he came to thick timber country alive with game, and here he found a second mate. The scent of blood came to him one evening as he prowled through the forest, and following his nose he presently saw a leopard and leopardess crouched upon the body of an eland calf. Simultaneously, the leopard saw "Stoneheart," and sprang to his feet with an angry grunt. There was a sinking to earth of two lithe bodies, a spring, and for three minutes thereafter rapid work with tooth and claw. Then "Stoneheart" secured a deathgrip on his rival's throat, and when he relaxed his hold his opponent lay dead in the starlight.

Torn and breathless, but triumphant, he introduced himself to the lady, and presently she followed him to his selected lair. For three years he hunted, at intervals, in her company, and twice she presented him with litters. While she

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was occupied with the youngsters' training he sought other mates within his range, or hunted alone, and twice in that time other females acclaimed him lord and husband.

But, as elsewhere, hunting increased as time went on, and game moved presently northwards and westwards. One night he had hunted unsuccessfully for some time, when he winded the blood scent, and presently discerned a dead zebra lying close to a great tree. Engaged in tearing at the meat were three hyenas, and judging from their presence that no enemies were about he sprang silently amongst them.

There was a quick scuffle as his unsheathed claws struck savage strokes, and with complaining yelps the scavengers removed to a respectful distance. There they sat on their haunches and made night hideous with lugubrious howls, while “Stoneheart” proceeded to fill his empty stomach.

But those howls had been heard by other ears, and suddenly a great shape materialised from nowhere, in utter silence. Asleep or awake, feeding or hunting, the leopard is always vigilant, and at the sudden silence, and hasty movement of the hyenas, “Stoneheart” bounded in their direction, without pausing to ascertain the cause. It did not need the heavy blow which struck the meat—and which, but for his swift movement, would have broken his back—to tell him that a lion had arrived. He *knew* it; and knowing it he was twenty feet

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up the tree in less time than it takes to write the words.

Then only did he pause to reconnoitre, and from his safe retreat he watched the lion enjoy the meat he had not killed, and which was his by right of might alone. As he watched, he reflected that apparently all the meat-eaters found life difficult, and he decided there and then to seek new hunting grounds. So, because of memories of fowls and goats to be found at intervals along the shining steel track, he headed north and east again next night.

In the Kafue district he killed in one night seven fine Swiss goats belonging to a farmer; sucking the blood from each, but eating nothing. Because the goats were valuable, and because he had no experience of the leopard's elusiveness, the farmer followed next day with two dogs and six natives.

As "Stoneheart" lay sleeping in a thicket the smell of the dogs awoke him, and next moment the enthusiastic terriers yapped their discovery of him to the men, a hundred yards in the rear. Flexing his lithe form, he sprang suddenly at the nearest dog, and at the crushing snap of his jaws the life left the gallant, but imprudent, little body, while its comrade vanished in haste.

"Stoneheart" proceeded to vanish too, but the sunlight caught his spotted hide through a gap in the bushes, and at sixty paces the white man loosed off a charge of buckshot. The heavy shot

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penetrated his skin, and burned the flesh where it embedded itself, like white-hot hailstones. At the stinging pain, a very devil of fury entered “Stoneheart.” All thoughts of flight vanished, and, concealing himself behind a bush, he waited.

When the white man was within twenty paces he charged, and charged home. Fear had vanished. He was out to kill or be killed, and only death could stop the fury of his rush. As he raced beneath the gun a second charge of shot whistled over him, and next instant his teeth met in the white man’s throat, while his front claws dug furiously into arms and breast and shoulders.

As usual, the natives decamped, and for five minutes “Stoneheart” and the white man fought it out alone. But with his gun empty and fallen, his hands and feet were a poor match for tooth and claw, and presently loss of blood told, and his limp form abandoned resistance. Then the innate ferocity of the leopard heart showed itself, and for ten minutes or more “Stoneheart” tore ragefully and spasmodically at the prostrate form; even after instinct told him that it was dead.

But he soon found that he had committed the unpardonable crime, and that life was no longer possible for him in that district. For a week he was hunted by armed parties of avengers, and although he always eluded them he became weary from lack of rest; until at last he bowed to man’s will and started north again.

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Between Broken Hill and Kashitu he ranged an area ten miles west of the line for five years and more ; raiding goats and poultry, also dogs from camps and outposts on the line, in preference to seeking game afar. At first he had been afraid of the noisy, snorting steel monsters, which travelled the track with glaring eyes by night and day ; but when he found that they never left the shining track he became less afraid and soon grew accustomed to them. Moreover, as time went on, he became less and less inclined to hunt, and lived almost solely by theft.

Such a life made him fat and lazy, but as he grew less agile he became more audacious. He would frequently thrust aside the lid of a ganger's water tank and drink there ; returning afterwards to crown his insolence by seizing one of the dogs which had barked a warning of his larceny. Natives on the line called him " The railway leopard," and white railway men called him, jokingly, " The Night Inspector ! "

One of his exploits is remembered to this day. Having eaten nothing for two days, he left his lair in a ravine before sunset one evening, and arrived on the edge of a clearing wherein stood a ganger's cottage ; just as dusk was deepening into dark. From a small hut twenty yards behind the cottage came the scent of fowls, and it so happened that the native whose duty it was to close this had forgotten to do so.

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So that when “Stoneheart” crept up and made a cautious circuit of the hut he found easy ingress. He slipped inside, and was just preparing to attack his first victim when footsteps approached, and he sank to earth and lay motionless in the shadows. Next instant the native slipped a sheet of iron over the entrance, barricaded it firmly and departed, leaving him a prisoner. For the moment this did not concern him, and for the next two hours he amused himself by first satisfying his hunger, and then killing silently all the birds within reach.

Then he attempted to reach several roosters on the top perch, and in doing so brought the perch and its occupants to the ground. The squawking and fluttering which ensued awoke the natives, and, under the impression that a snake was in the roost, two of them came with torches and unbarred the door. The leaping form of “Stoneheart” struck one in the chest and felled him, while a blow of his paw brought the other to the ground. In the uproar he vanished silently, and when the other natives came to investigate they found twenty-five dead fowls, and two slightly clawed and badly scared natives, to tell the tale of his escapade.

After that his fame increased, and most fowl-houses in the district were rendered leopard-proof; while nearly every ganger and pumper increased his canine staff. So he left the steel track for a time, and hunted west through the Kasempa district. For a year or two he contrived to live on

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occasional buck ; but advancing age was beginning to tell, and he grew to depend more and more on rats and squirrels, or an occasional fawn. These did not supply the blood diet habit had rendered essential to him, and at last he turned east again towards the railway.

But, alas, when he at last reached the neighbourhood of a cottage one evening, very gaunt, footsore and weary, and smelt the dog-scent he loved, an unaccountable tremor of fear almost overcame the hunger the scent rendered acute. This was Nature's warning that such prey was no longer within his capacity. But he had never lacked courage, and forcing his weary limbs to steadiness he crept towards the veranda from which the scent came.

Now the two dogs which lay there were bull-mastiffs, with hearts as courageous as his own, and senses as keen. Moreover, at the back of the house slept six nondescript native lurchers which had followed these two on many a hunting foray, and trusted in their leadership. Also, "Stone-heart's" age and weakness had robbed him of some of his old stealth and ease of movement, so that the scrape of his claws as he dragged himself forward on his belly awoke the occupants of the veranda while he was still ten paces distant. For the first and last time in his life he lost the advantage of attack.

As he gathered himself for the spring, the heavy

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body of one dog landed on his back, and powerful jaws pinned him by the neck. Simultaneously, the second dog uttered a savage growl and seized him by the loins. He fought and writhed desperately, and struck fast and hard with his taloned feet, but for three minutes he could not shake off that paralysing grip. Then he tore his head free, leaving skin and flesh in his enemy's jaws.

But the sickening clutch on his loins held fast, and as he locked his fangs on the throat of his first opponent, six hardy, muscular forms, awakened by the sounds of combat, descended in a furious cloud, seizing him by legs and flanks and neck.

When men and lights approached his struggles had already ceased, and six dogs were mangling the skin of the biggest leopard ever seen in that district. One dog lay with stomach ripped open, and the mastiff which had first seized him was gasping his life out through a severed jugular vein.

“Stoneheart” was perhaps sixteen years old when he died thus, and had already lived his allotted span in the wilds. He had travelled as few leopards travel, and exceeded the size of his breed by fully eighteen inches, as his nine-foot skin—measured from nose to tail—proved.

It is possible that had he been content with a meagre diet he might have survived yet a year or two. But the years of his pride and power had fled,

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and since the hyenas and vultures must have accounted for him at last, perhaps the death he met was merciful, as it certainly was just? Since it was one he had many times inflicted we must incline to that view.

CHAPTER VI

"STEELJAW," THE CROCODILE

IF you had been in a certain reedy swamp bordering the Quando River, a hundred years ago, and had persevered through the mud and slime far enough, you might have reached a sandy knoll about thirty yards wide, sheltered by a great, spreading thorn tree. Assuming that you had done this, you might have witnessed a curious scene on the morning on which my story opens. This was the scene as I once witnessed it in recent years.

A long, black, lizard shape, of generous girth, lies stretched in the shadows like a huge log—and as motionless. So has this crocodile mother lain for many nights; to preserve in the sand beneath—where forty-eight of her eggs lie buried—the heat generated by the sun during the day. On other mornings she has sought the river—twenty yards away—as the sun rose; but this morning, although the sun is already three hours old, she does not move. Instinct has led her to expect the phenomenon we are about to witness.

Suddenly there is a small upheaval of the sand on

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each side of her belly, and several tiny, rat-like heads struggle through. A moment later, five little crocodiles little larger than lizards are clambering painfully up her scaly sides and attaching themselves firmly—by embryonic claws and jaws—to the horny bosses of her hide. There they lie motionless. Then she moves slowly aside until she lies lengthwise beside the patch of sand which is deeply imprinted with her belly scales.

Soon other small disturbances occur in the centre of the indented patch, and from each a small crocodile emerges, to clamber on to her body and lie like the others, waiting. At the end of an hour the patch of sand on which she has lain so often is completely broken up, and clinging to her back and sides are forty-two baby crocodiles.

Whether she has miscounted, or considers this harvest sufficient, I do not know. Nor can I tell you whether the other six babies ever struggled through to the sunlight. All I know is that, with those forty-two tiny bodies clinging to her, the mother crocodile turned her great bulk slowly round until her nose pointed to the river; then, with a slow, gliding motion, started to cover the twenty yards between herself and the water.

Arriving at the brink, she slid slowly down the sandy bank and glided into the stream. The forty-two babies must have been waiting for just this, for no sooner did they feel the water than each let go his hold, and as the big mother headed across

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the stream the flock of tiny creatures started down river with the swift current.

The old female took no interest in their departure. It seemed that, having introduced them to the element in which they were destined and equipped to live, she considered her duty well done, and their future careers a matter purely of their own concern.

Let me warn those readers who may commiserate with such a brief experience of the joys of motherhood—or expend sympathy on the unprotected offspring—to wait a little. When they have followed this voracious history of "Steeljaw" to its close they will agree with me that the crocodile deserves little of joy or sympathy. His watery world is instinct with cruelty and ruthlessness, and to cope with such an environment he himself is born cruel and ruthless.

Though blame for that fact must be laid at Nature's door and not his, those of us who love the higher and gentler forms of life cannot feel goodwill towards one which destroys them. It is true that he does so, sometimes, in order to survive, but there is ample evidence also that—like the leopard—he often does so in pure, wanton love of slaughter. The man who kills when hunger driven is hanged as surely as he who kills for profit or revenge, and rightly so. Killers must be outlawed in order that higher types may continue to exist.

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The young crocodiles which were born on the morning I have described were not long in discovering the cruelty lurking in the sunlit waters. Swimming briskly downstream, a long, black snout suddenly divided the hatch like a wedge ; a pair of huge jaws opened and closed with a clash, and six of the small swimmers disappeared forever from the world they had scarcely entered.

To the huge male crocodile, floating motionless in midstream, they were neither crocodiles nor kin, but merely *food*. Cruel as this cannibalistic trait may be, it is but a wise provision of Nature. Such is the fecundity of the breed that if every crocodile born were to survive, the streams would soon be denuded of other forms of life. For as we shall see, a single specimen accounts for many victims in the course of his long life.

The rest of the hatch darted instinctively for the reeds at the side of the stream, and remained motionless with fright in the shelter of the close-growing stems. Amongst these survivors was "Steeljaw." An hour later, the great destroying shape—seeing that the small creatures were unlikely to emerge into the river—moved sluggishly upstream. When he was well away the young reptiles entrusted themselves again to the friendly current.

But the same current which bore them so swiftly bore also dead bodies of fish and other refuse, and to seize such morsels more than one big crocodile had stationed himself in midstream. Here he

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either remained stationary or progressed very slowly against the stream. Twice during the first day of existence they swam unsuspectingly upon lurking giants of their kind, and each time the survivors numbered less. For to the saurians in waiting young crocodiles which were small enough to swallow with ease were as welcome as any other food.

By mid-afternoon only fifteen remained of the hatch. But in these cunning had already developed, and after the third attack they dispensed with the aid of the current, and propelled themselves onwards under the shadow of the reeds, where sanctuary was always close at hand.

As the sun declined towards the west a break suddenly occurred in the reeds, where the Luiana River entered the main stream. With one accord the survivors darted into the mouth of the small river; driven no doubt by the terror the events of the day had inspired. But even here death lurked, and misfortunes were not yet over.

Right in the narrow entrance floated a cunning monster, awaiting the frightened rush of fish and small creatures from the main river. A swift snap of fanged jaws and the hatch was further reduced to ten. Fleeing desperately past the huge bulk of the terror, these rushed up the narrow channel, and within half a mile came to a place where the river overflowed its banks, and extended for miles in a knee-deep swamp.

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Here they were comparatively safe for the first time. Following a current across the swamp, where the water ran in a channel, the ten survivors were presently borne into a grass-covered flat many square miles in extent, and here the current ceased.

Floating in placid water amidst a forest of rank grass "Steeljaw" and his companions were able for the first time on that strenuous day to look about them, and take stock of their surroundings. About the same time hunger first asserted itself, and with the need came the means to satisfy it. As "Steeljaw's" nose touched and shook a grass-stem a fat water beetle fell in front of him, and instinctively he opened his small mouth and engulfed it.

During that night he swallowed many other insects of different species, and in the days that followed small fish about an inch long, tadpoles, insects, and the rotting remains of fish supplied a liberal and varied diet. For from birth the crocodile is a scavenger, and food dead or alive, fresh or decomposed, is to him just food.

Two months later the floods receded, and following the retreating water to the river "Steeljaw" and one other young crocodile pushed up the shallow Luiana. Month by month the water grew less, but always they followed the current until they came to a deep pool of permanent water fringed on each side by reed beds. Beyond these

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grew tall timber, and at each end stretched a dry river-bed for six months in every year.

Now crocodiles can stay under water longer even than the hippo, but seldom visit deep water except to drown a victim. To sleep, they tunnel into the mud and sedge of reed beds, and lie with body covered in the slime and snout above ground ; or else lie on a sandy slope close to water deep enough to hide in. So in the reeds bordering this pool the two young crocodiles found an ideal dormitory, and in the pool itself plenty of food in the shape of fish, crabs and cane rats.

The following rainy season, when the flood filled the river-bed again, they swam downstream, and made for the shallow water of the flats. Here, one day, "Steeljaw" lost his mate. A party of natives setting fish traps espied the two small creatures, and at once two assegais flashed through the water. One transfixed "Steeljaw's" mate and drew him writhing from the water ; to be eventually stuffed with straw and sold to a white official. The other—wielded by a less expert hand—just missed "Steeljaw," and before the thrust could be repeated he had darted beyond reach and escaped.

As the floods receded he made for the friendly pool again, and for twenty years this formed his winter habitat. Although he grew very slowly in the first years, he was at the end of that time nine feet long. His appetite had increased so enor-

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mously that before the rains came the dwindling supply of fish proved insufficient for his needs. For several seasons past, therefore, he had become carnivorous in fact as well as instinct. The first meat meal he enjoyed proved to him the necessity of keeping a well-stocked larder always handy.

He had noted that by several paths small buck, hares, jackals, etc., came to drink in the early morning and at evening. One day, when he was about fifteen years old, he decided to try the new food supply. Lying motionless under six feet of water he waited patiently near one of the paths, and towards sundown a small duiker stepped daintily down to drink.

As the small head lowered to the water "Steeljaw" made a lightning rush, seized the nose in his sharp teeth, and at the same instant whirled his heavy tail round and swept the little creature off its feet. Without pausing he backed into deep water, and in a few minutes the struggles of his drowned victim ceased.

But, although hungry, "Steeljaw" discovered that he could by no means proceed to dine. His teeth were better adapted for holding than dismembering a carcass, and his small gullet would not allow the passage of any large pieces of solid food. So dragging the body amongst the reeds, he left it until decomposition should make it easy to pull to pieces and swallow.

During the three days he waited for this to

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happen he killed two other small buck, and thereafter he always kept a reserve supply of “gamey” meat on hand to augment his failing fish diet. But by the time he had reached twenty years of age his appetite exceeded all supplies, while buck had grown very wary. Most of them avoided the pool, and before the rains came in this twentieth year of his age “Steeljaw” was actually hungry, and faced a serious problem.

Driven by necessity he one night left the pool and started down river to find a more plentiful food supply. But on the dry sand his progress was slow. The three miles he covered occupied two hours ; for he was unused to land travel and rested often. Then the sandy waste that still stretched ahead discouraged him, so that he turned and made for the pool again.

Faced with the prospect of continued hunger he adopted desperate measures. In addition to small buck, flocks of goats and calves were driven by natives from a kraal three miles away, to drink at the pool. “Steeljaw” had often seen them, but as they were always accompanied by a number of chattering youths he had always hidden himself at their approach and refrained from attack.

For the crocodile—like all other creatures of the wild—instinctively fears men-folk, until experience proves to him that fear is needless. Now hunger outweighed all other considerations, and two days after his unsuccessful effort to escape

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the "piccanins" in charge were startled to see his ugly head flash from the water amongst the drinking goats, and a slow old ram dragged under by the deadly jaws.

When the news was brought to the kraal it was decided that six full-grown and armed natives should superintend the drinking in future. These beat the water with branches, and made so much uproar that "Steeljaw" remained hidden in fear, and allowed the goats to drink unmolested. After a week of such immunity the natives grew lazy, and, "the wish being father to the thought," decided that he had left the pool. Thereafter, the herds drank again with only youths of tender age in charge.

Being natives, they should have known—as they very probably did—that though crocodiles sometimes travel a mile or two overland from one pool to another, when driven by need, such a distance as the ten miles separating this pool from the next was out of the question. "Steeljaw" was anxious to leave the pool, as we know, but until the rains came again he was a prisoner.

He soon took advantage of their laziness, and two days after their vigilance was withdrawn he stole a fine fat ewe. When this signal proof of his presence was brought to the kraal the owners decided that the easiest solution of the problem—for themselves—was to send the goats seven miles downstream to the next pool. Thereafter

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the herds came to their old drinking place no more.

With this source of supply closed to him, "Steeljaw's" position became desperate. He ought really to have sought a better stocked and less isolated retreat five years earlier, when his appetite first demanded meat supplies. Now he was paying the penalty of laziness and lack of forethought.

The rains had just commenced, but it was still a good two months before he might expect the rising waters to bring release. During the first month he made shift to exist on what fish there were, plus an occasional buck or hare—or even sand grouse and guinea fowl—but he was always hungry.

Then he took desperate counsel with himself. The native women came regularly to the pool for domestic water supplies, and now that the ploughing had commenced they came at all hours. "Steeljaw" had noted that they sometimes came even when darkness was falling, and that their singing voices always announced their approach. So one evening at sundown he took up his position in silence at the spot where they usually filled their calabashes.

Presently came the musical sounds he knew, interspersed with bursts of laughter. For with such sounds the native seeks to allay his fears of the evil spirits which roam after sunset. Down

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the forest path came a line of girls and women in single file. The leader deposited her calabashes and stooped to wash her hands in the cool water, before using them as drinking vessels. As she did so "Steeljaw's" long shape flashed upwards, his jaws opened and closed on the black woolly head, his great tail swept her legs from under her, and with a single wild shriek she disappeared in the dark water.

Ten minutes later he deposited the dead, dripping form in the remote ooze on the far side of the pool. He had stored many victims here, and none had ever interfered with his larder. Next day the natives dug a water-hole some forty yards from the pool, and in future never approached the pool itself.

It was well for them that they did so, for after this first taste of human flesh "Steeljaw" hungered for it always. For one thing he found the body became decomposed, and easy to dissect and assimilate, much sooner than those of the animals he had seized. Barely thirty-six hours after her death he was able to devour the body of the girl; whereas he had often been obliged to wait three days and more before he could enjoy the bodies of buck and goats.

But if the natives' belated caution proved beneficial to themselves it rendered "Steeljaw's" problems again acute. A week later, also, he partly paid for his attack on human kind. Two

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white sportsmen camped one night at the kraal, and being told of the recent tragedy decided to attempt retribution. With this in view they walked down to the pool next morning, driving two goats before them as bait.

"Steeljaw" was not prepared for the visit, and incautiously floated to the surface to estimate possibilities of seizing one of the goats. At once two rifles rang out. One bullet struck the water beside him; but the other penetrated an inch deep into the tough scales of his back, making a nasty and painful wound. He promptly dived and vanished, leaving the white men with the impression that he was dead.

One result of this was that one of the white men wrote to the papers in his home town to describe the hunt, and asserted that crocodiles travel at least ten miles overland, since his adventure with the man-killer had occurred where the nearest other water was that distance away. The fact that "Steeljaw" might have lived there throughout the year did not occur to him! So are hasty and erroneous judgments formed and perpetuated.

A mistake more beneficial to "Steeljaw" was made by the natives. Sharing the white men's assumption of his death they brought their herds again to water, though still using the water-hole themselves. So that when "Steeljaw" emerged, after three days' painful seclusion, he was able to seize a fat goat to demonstrate his continued

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existence! But when the rising water at last permitted his escape, his spare rations and painful wound had left him gaunt and ravenous.

Fortune was kinder to him than he deserved. Swimming with the current down to the main Quando River, with an inward resolve never to leave it again, he ran into two separate hatches of young crocodiles seeking sanctuary as he himself had once done. Did memories of his own defenceless babyhood inspire compassion and restraint? Did he remember his own terrifying first day of life? The answer to the first is a sad negative, and to the second, that memory is practically non-existent in the lower forms of life, except in matters which concern food.

As food "Steeljaw" may have remembered his own part in the scheme of things, on that first day long ago. At all events, if he had any memories of a panic-stricken small creature, appalled at the cruelty of his world, he certainly had no compassion. His capacious jaws engulfed four of the first and six of the second hatch, and the enjoyment of his empty stomach was unimpaired by either remorse or shame.

Arriving in the Quando he turned downstream. A week later plentiful food supplies had restored his failing strength, and his wound was practically healed. He lay at sundown on a sandbank, watching a mob of native cattle coming down the opposite bank to drink. In and out of his open jaws hopped

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a dozen of those small birds which exist chiefly on the putrid fragments of meat they pick from the interstices in the crocodile's array of teeth.

Perhaps the reptiles recognise the benefits conferred on their dental equipment, for they seldom, if ever, harm these feathered "toothpicks." But as "Steeljaw" watched the cattle the fancy seized him to try for bigger game than he had yet attempted. His jaws closed so suddenly that one feathered body was trapped between the fangs he had helped to clean, and as "Steeljaw" slid silently into the stream.

Arriving at the further bank he darted at the nose of a young ox, which drank unsuspectingly from the shelving bank. His grip closed remorselessly, but his strength was still unequal to quarry of such weight. The pull of the frightened beast prevented him bringing his flailing tail into play, and as the ox sprang backwards he found himself lifted half clear of the water. Came an agonised bellow, and he fell backwards with the torn cartilage of the nose in his fast-locked teeth as sole reward for his audacious attempt.

A month later he tackled a reedbuck in similar fashion. But although he was successful he received further proof that life in the big river still held difficulties for him. This time he was again unable to use his tail, but he was able by sheer strength to drag the buck into the river, and contrived to maintain an iron grip on the nose. For ten minutes

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the reedbuck fought desperately, but although he managed to tear his head free "Steeljaw" seized him instantly by the leg, and at last death by drowning supervened.

He was joyously conveying his prize to a suitable larder when a great shape twice his own length loomed suddenly ahead. Next instant a heavy blow from a massive tail nearly knocked the breath from his body. Dropping his prize he turned to defend himself, when the aggressor promptly seized the carcase and decamped downstream. For a mile or two "Steeljaw" sought to regain it, but in vain, and at last he gave up the struggle. Furious against his kind and all the world—and hungry to boot—he turned again upstream.

His recent experiences in the pool had decided him to stay this year in the main river. This last adventure made him alter that decision. It convinced him that against eighteen and twenty foot specimens of his breed he was still unfitted to hold his own, and he resolved to seek a sanctuary where these giants of a hundred years and more of age were unlikely to foregather.

So he headed across the swamps a month later, and came at last to a large reed-fringed pool on the edge of a forest belt. The extent of this, and the number of game paths leading to it, seemed a guarantee against hunger, and here he took up his quarters when the swamp dried up again.

But although game was plentiful "Steeljaw's"

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appetite was so enormous that the smaller antelopes with which he was alone able to deal soon grew wary. Before the rains came again food grew less plentiful than he liked, although he was never actually hungry. Fish were abundant; but he had now reached an age when he constantly desired meat. Fish he considered merely an emergency diet. So when he again gained access to the river he wandered down its course, and each season when the floods dried he sought a fresh pool where the game was still plentiful and unsuspecting. So passed another twenty years.

At the end of that time he was nearly fifteen feet long, and the desire for a mate—added to confidence in his greater strength—led him to stay in the main river. One cold morning he came across a great male three feet longer than himself, making love in crocodile fashion to a large and desirable female. As he approached the low sandbank on which the pair lay he decided to attack for the first time an adult of his own breed.

Launching himself upwards from the water he attempted to seize his rival by the nose, but the old saurian was wise in fighting strategy. Whirling quickly aside, his great tail took "Steeljaw" in the side and knocked him backwards into the river. As he made a second rush from the water his opponent slid quickly past him into the stream, and next instant he felt the end of his tail seized in a most painful grip.

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Whirling rapidly he attempted to re-enter the water and seize his enemy there ; but at the strain caused by his quick turn a foot of his tail broke off, and remained in his rival's jaws. The pain was agonising, and turned his thoughts from love-making to self-preservation.

Heading rapidly upstream he soon effaced himself from the scene, and for a week sulked in a small swamp, without attempting to kill anything but the small fish that came his way. During the next ten years he had many similar battles, but always his rivals proved too strong for him. Torn patches of hide and broken fangs were added to his broken tail as sign of these reverses. But he did not again leave the river, and each year he gained both in strength and strategy.

At last he won decisively against an old monster nearly twenty feet long, and wandered for a month in company with the female he had won. Then he lost interest in her, and resumed his bachelor existence of murder and rapine. But never again was he defeated, and very seldom even challenged. Each of the next ten years brought several mates, and for those years he stayed in the lower Quando.

Then, during the flood time one season, he became restless, and wandered still further south and east until he arrived at last in the Linyanti River. It was here the river denizens named him "Steel-jaw," and for this reason.

One evening he lay at sunset on a sandbank,

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with two other crocodiles, watching a herd of buffalo drinking near at hand. He had never attacked so large a beast, but much slaughter had only stimulated his lust for meat, and in the confidence of his great strength he feared nothing. So slipping into the water he glided silently under the surface towards the drinking animals.

When he rose cautiously to within an inch or two of the surface, a big bull stood just opposite him, in the act of drinking. With a torpedo-like rush he hurled himself forward and seized the great beast by the muzzle. Then began the most strenuous struggle he had ever engaged in. The bull stood on a bank sloping towards the stream, and this handicapped him. Nevertheless, he planted his forefeet firmly, and resisted "Steeljaw's" efforts to pull him in with all his great strength. The necessity of maintaining traction on the nose prevented "Steeljaw's" usual sideways swing and swift blow from his tail, so that for several minutes he could gain no advantage.

Then, suddenly, the bull slipped forward on the shifting sand, and releasing his hold on the nose "Steeljaw" shot forward, and seized the foreleg before the doomed beast could recover balance. The unexpected attack, and "Steeljaw's" great weight, brought the bull in a tumbling heap into the water, and immediately "Steeljaw" seized him again by the nose.

Foot by foot he dragged his victim into the deeper

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stream, and for nearly twenty minutes the desperate battle continued. But "Steeljaw" never relaxed his paralysing hold, and at last his frequent immersions, and difficult breathing, wore the great bull down. In less than half an hour the big body was lifeless, and "Steeljaw" had made a kill such as only giants of his kind can ever make, and they but seldom. This happened when he was nearly seventy years old, and some nineteen feet in length.

During the next twenty years he pursued his career of murder and scavenging, with but little of adventure. On one occasion, however, he rose suddenly beneath a canoe from which some natives were fishing. As the occupants fell into the water he seized the nearest by the middle, and dealt with the corpse in his usual fashion. After that he twice upset canoes deliberately, killing a native each time.

At the end of his ninetieth year a curious distemper seized him, which robbed him of the agility necessary to catch the larger animals. He therefore took up his quarters adjacent to two native villages, and for a month lived on the dog-flesh he liked best of all after human flesh. At the end of that time he was fit and strong again, but his easy kills had made him lazy, and disinclined for effort. So he remained where he was, and to the failing supply of dogs he added two more human victims.

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This made the natives angry, and stirred them to action which led to his death. They were unable to follow him, since water leaves no spoor, and crocodiles are many, also hard to distinguish individually. To set a trap for the man-killer with a human victim as bait was repulsive even to the native mind, so one of the remaining dogs was pressed into service.

The dog was tied to a stake close to the bathing and watering-place where he had secured his human victims, and two natives possessed of rifles ambushed themselves close by. That evening, as he nosed around for fresh victims he heard the mongrel yelping, and perceived that for some reason it could not leave the bank. So without hesitation he crawled cautiously from the water and advanced on the dog with quick little rushes.

His jaws had no sooner closed on his yelping quarry than two shots rang out. One tore a deep furrow through his neck, while the other smashed his off shoulder. Releasing his hold on the dog he whirled like a flash and made for the river. So quick was the movement with which he slid into the water that two further shots whizzed harmlessly overhead as he sank.

He had escaped the extreme penalty, but he was nevertheless doomed. With one front leg useless he could not swim against the current and was obliged to drift downstream. Neither could he seize animal victims of any size or agility, and

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for a week lived frugally on fish. Then a dead crocodile drifted down, and this he seized and devoured also ; the meal lasting him several days and tiding him over the period of greatest need.

Soon afterwards he entered a backwater on the banks of which stood several native villages. He at once resolved, in spite of his lesson, to live luxuriously on dogs and men in future ; realising, perhaps, that his old activity was gone for ever. During the next month he killed three women, and many dogs, and the natives became thoroughly alarmed.

Hearing from the scene of his last exploits the manner of his injury two of them borrowed guns, and endeavoured to entice him again from the water. But "Steeljaw" was cunning, and only during the night, when the natives had gone, did he venture forth. So stimulated to mental ingenuity by the increasing toll the great reptile was taking the incensed natives took counsel together and evolved a plan for his destruction.

For a week their goats and dogs were kept away from the backwater, in order that "Steeljaw" should become thoroughly hungry. It is probable that but for his crippled condition he would have left the backwater then ; but being now dependent on more or less easy catches he became hungry and endured.

Then, one day, a deep pit was dug in the sand beside the backwater, and long, lateral wings of



"A BAND OF YELLING NATIVES JEERED DELIGHTEDLY AT THE HUDDLED BODY OF THE
TWENTY-FOOT CROCODILE."

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thorn brush extended from either side. The ends were left open, and over the end facing the water some stout poles were placed. About the middle of the pit these grew thinner and thinner till they were mere sticks. On top of these transversely laid poles and sticks was placed lengthwise a layer of long, coarse grass, which concealed the pit entirely. About sundown a dog was tied to a stake at the further end of the pit, so that to reach him "Steeljaw" must crawl over the covered-in pit, and entrust his weight to the thin poles.

When he saw himself deserted by his owners, and night approaching, the mongrel promptly set up a pitiful howling and yelping. This reached "Steeljaw" where he lay, hungry and wrathful, in the shadow of a reed bed opposite. But he restrained his appetite until darkness had fallen. Then he emerged cautiously, and crawled slowly and painfully towards the dog.

At sight of the enclosed pathway he hesitated, but hunger spurred him forward, and at last he crawled upon the sticks covering the pit. The first three feet were covered in safety. Then his weight came upon the treacherous thin sticks, and they at once collapsed beneath him. Clawing desperately at the air, he shot head foremost into what proved both trap and grave. Even a sound crocodile could never have escaped from such a snare; and all his efforts to do so were fruitless.

When morning came a band of yelling natives

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jeered delightedly at the huddled body of the twenty-foot crocodile which glowered up at them with eyes of impotent fury. Down crashed a score of keen-bladed spears, hurled by stalwart arms ; and in ten minutes the huge reptile body shuddered for the last time and lay still.

So died "Steeljaw," the biggest crocodile ever killed on the Quando, at the age of ninety-one years ; after a life of murder and beastliness. Though Nature must bear the blame of his evil deeds, we cannot commiserate his death, or his loss of the additional fifty years or so he might have enjoyed in the ordinary course.

One single item only may be placed on the credit side of his account with life ; that is, his removal from the waters of much filth in the shape of dead and rotting bodies. Had he been content with that function only we might have pitied though we could never like him. But since he converted many beautiful forms of life into corruption, the fact that he afterwards removed them seems of small value in extenuation.

CHAPTER VII

“CAVE-MOUTH,” THE HIPPOPOTAMUS

“CAVE-MOUTH” was born one night in the cold month of June, on the banks of a deep pool about ten miles from the Quando River. The pool was fringed with reeds, and was one of a chain which extended at intervals to the Quando itself. I have called him “Cave-Mouth,” because, like all his breed, he had a mouth so enormous that when he opened it wide it resembled nothing so much as the entrance to a cavern ; although the cavity it revealed was a bright pink, and not black.

He was a modern representative of one of the oldest families in the world, and in that respect may be considered an aristocrat. But because the environment in which hippo live their lives to-day is almost the same as that in which their prehistoric ancestors lived they have altered but little, and have preserved a mental and physical uniformity presented by few other species.

The name “Cave-Mouth” might have been bestowed just as appropriately on any other hippo I ever met ; just as “Croppy”—the name I have given to his mother—might have been

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borne by any other cow hippo. For her ridiculous little ears—looking exactly as though clipped off short by a pair of garden shears—were the same shape and size as those of all her ancestors and contemporaries.

A point worth noting is that she could close those ears at will, just as she could her nostrils, and this enabled her to stay under water longer than any other denizen of the river, save, perhaps, the crocodile. If married hippo ever say unpleasant things to each other this may have another advantage! At all events, "Cave-Mouth" could not do this when he was born, and for that reason "Croppy" left him in a narrow passage in the reeds when she went to sleep in the deeper waters of the pool; which she did every day when the sun grew hot. In the reed-sheltered passage she had herself made he could lie in about two feet of water, which was sufficient to cool his small body while keeping his ears and nose exposed.

For the first few days of his life he never went far from this secluded bed; although he accompanied his mother when she grazed on the swampy flat, near by, at night-time. Because "Croppy" had known this would be the case she had conscientiously driven every lurking crocodile from the pool for several days before her son was born. For herself, she felt nothing but contempt for the horny-hided reptiles, but for her helpless baby it was another matter. Wherefore, she left nothing

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to chance, and in addition to these advance precautions she remained always at hand and vigilant when during the hot hours she submerged in the deeper waters.

It was well that she did so, for on the second night after his birth a twelve-foot crocodile crept through the swamps from a pool two miles away, and when dawn came he lay hidden in the shadow of the reeds in "Croppy's" pool. Returning to the pool at sunrise, she lay for some hours beside her son in the reeds, and when he slept she slid quietly into the deep water. The crocodile, hidden fifty yards away, noted her quiet entrance, and when she submerged about thirty yards out he crept cautiously through the reeds towards "Cave-Mouth."

But if he imagined that "Croppy" would remain invisible for five to ten minutes, as usual at other times, and so afford him time for his fell work of destruction, he made a sad miscalculation. He had only moved a few yards in "Cave-Mouth's" direction when her eyes and nostrils rose quietly above the surface, and those efficient organs of sight and smell at once revealed the destroyer's presence.

Sinking like a stone she ran rapidly along the bottom towards the bank where her baby slept, and as the crocodile made his final soft rush, and opened his great jaws, there came a sudden crashing upheaval amidst the reeds. Before he could

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turn to attack or flee a great foot drove his body with a three-ton pressure into the slime and mud, an enormous mouth opened and closed, and next instant he was seized and lifted with four huge tusks driven through his tough hide.

Turning with the writhing reptile body in her mouth, "Croppy" dived into the pool, and for five minutes there ensued a violent agitation of the water's placid surface. When she emerged again there was no sign of the crocodile, but the next evening a wandering native saw a torn and crushed reptile body floating belly uppermost on the surface. When he made his discovery "Croppy" was no longer there.

On the evening of that third day of his life, which had nearly proved "Cave-Mouth's" last, she fed slowly towards a pool four miles away, accompanied by her son. At dawn she explored that pool very thoroughly for crocodiles, driving three of the enemy from it into the swamps. Throughout the day she remained on guard there, and on the evening the victim of her vengeance was discovered she moved on again towards the big river.

It is probable that she would have done this in any case within a few days, for several reasons. For one thing her three-ton bulk demanded a huge supply of grass and water plants, and no one spot could supply these in sufficient quantity for very long. For another, she was—like all her tribe—of a sociable nature, and pined for the society of her

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kind. Her few days' retirement from the agreeable companionship of the river had been solely for "Cave-Mouth's" benefit.

He had first to gain strength to walk a little, and then to be taught diving and swimming, and accustomed to the life of the deep waters. But at four days old he was already becoming a sturdy little fellow, and on the river were many pleasant islets she knew of—where they both could rest by day—as well as an abundance of food. So the crocodile's audacious attack had only hastened her change of a nursery by perhaps a day or two.

Wherefore, on the morning of his fifth day in this new and wonderful world of light and colour and sound, "Cave-Mouth" experienced his first little thrill of fear. Entering a passage in the reeds such as he had grown accustomed to, just ahead of his mother, he saw ahead of him a moving expanse of water instead of the muddy shallows he expected. He hesitated, and would have drawn back, but his mother's great square snout gave him a little push, and he found himself struggling in deep water.

He could, of course, swim by instinct, but he had yet to learn to submerge and lie inert on the river bottom, and even to float beneath the surface in comfort, with only his nostrils exposed. Before he could do this the muscles which should close his nostrils and ears firmly in deep water had first to be strengthened by daily practice in gradually

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increasing depths. "Croppy," of course, knew this, and so his fears were really needless.

As his head rose splutteringly above the surface, her great body sank beside, and rose again beneath him ; so that next moment he was clinging firmly to her back, with only his tiny nostrils showing above the surface, as she swam rapidly down river.

Every now and then she exposed her own nostrils and eyes, and she was doing this for about the twentieth time when, after they had progressed about a mile, another great head rose facing her about fifty yards in front. This head blew a great blast through lips and nostrils, with a sound very similar to that made by a tired horse, and "Croppy" at once gave answer in like fashion.

The cows seemed pleased at the meeting, and at once swam towards each other, while behind the stranger's head "Cave-Mouth" discerned the small body of a baby hippo a little older than himself. At about ten yards' distance the cows ceased swimming, and again blew a giant blast of greeting. On the heels of the sound came another, like a great rock being lifted bodily from a marshy bed, and an enormous head and body broke water behind the strange cow. A huge mouth opened, and a sonorous Ha-ha-ha, like the deep laugh of a fabled giant, shattered the silence, as the big bull gave greeting to his lady friends.

This was the first time "Cave-Mouth" had heard the masculine tones he would himself employ in

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later life, and their depth and volume rather frightened him ; so that he clung more firmly to the solid form which supported him. But his mother and the other cow swam boldly downstream towards the bull, and as they approached he sank from view, to rise a moment later ahead of them again. So, with the cows and calves partly submerged, and the old bull walking at times on the bottom, and at others swimming ahead, the party continued downstream.

After a mile or two the reeds fringing the left bank gave place to a sandy beach about ten yards long, and heading for this the old bull suddenly rose half clear of the water as he entered the shallows. The strange cow and “Croppy” followed, and as each touched ground her offspring instinctively slid from her back, and splashed through the water beside her.

As “Cave-Mouth” did so the old bull was already half-way up the steep bank, and despite his bulk he climbed with most surprising agility. The others followed, and on top of the bank they found a level, sandy patch, surrounded on all sides but one with reeds. The exception was the side furthest from the river, and here grew two great thorn trees, underneath which was a mass of drifted brushwood and low bushes. The beaten sand, and fumets, showed it to be a favourite retreat of the hippo folk, and the bull led the way towards it.

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Then he halted, and as the cows came up he lifted his upper lip and scratched each gently with his long lower tusks. His civility was reciprocated with sundry friendly grunts, and after a time the cows lay down close together in the shade, while the bull stood gazing towards the river, listening attentively for sign or sound of danger. At last he seemed satisfied, and then he too lay down near by. But young "Cave-Mouth" noted that all three of his elders slept with nose to the stream, ready for an instant plunge.

Meanwhile, "Cave-Mouth" had become interested in the other young hippo—a female—and for some time the two young creatures engaged in uncouth but friendly gambols with the first playmate either had yet met. At last fatigue claimed them also, and they too lay down close to their dams and slept.

"Yellow-Tusk," the old bull, remained with them, for he had recently been driven from his own herd by a younger rival, and although it was not yet mating time he had all his breed's love of companionship. In his chance-met companions he saw the nucleus of another "school" which should acclaim him leader. Food was plentiful and all were fat; "Yellow-Tusk" himself carrying nearly two hundred pounds between his hide and body. Hence numbers presented no economic difficulties.

Later in the year, in the mating season—about September—food would be less plentiful, and the

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average amount of adipose tissue might fall as low as fifty pounds or less ; but by that time the cold water would have turned warm, and the young calves of June be nearly able to feed themselves. The vengeful passions aroused by love affairs, too, would have temporarily overcome the gregarious instinct, and the scantier supplies of succulent green grass, and consequent poorer condition, would be of less consequence ; as wise old Mother Nature had arranged.

Meanwhile, this was the season of peace, plenty, and goodwill, and in the school he had that day joined "Cave-Mouth" had found both a play-mate and ample protection. About midday, when the sun grew hot, the three hippo arose and entered the stream again. When his mother took the water and waited beside the bank "Cave-Mouth" hesitated ; but seeing his small companion—with fifteen days' educational advantage—plunge boldly in he followed suit, and was at once supported from beneath by his mother.

Swimming downstream, they came presently to a fringe of great trees overhanging the water, and turning with her nose against the stream his mother took up her position under one of these and resumed her sleep. From time to time she exposed her nostrils quietly above the water, but apparently without awakening, and spread-eagled comfortably upon her shoulders "Cave-Mouth" slept the untroubled sleep of the innocent.

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It was four o'clock that afternoon when "Yellow-Tusk" broke water noisily, and opened his great mouth in his sonorous, chuckling grunt. The cows heaved their heads clear of the water and watched him with twitching ears; and seeing that his actions were awaited by them with interest he led the way lazily up-river. About four or five miles up a large sand-bank came into view, and as they approached "Cave-Mouth" saw two large and one small black shape lying close to the water's edge. As these stood up to stare at the new-comers they were revealed as a bull, cow, and calf; the latter about a month old.

"Yellow-Tusk" headed at once for the bank and clambered ashore, and at once a chorus of grunts arose; while the new arrivals and those in possession charged playfully at each other. Tumbles and rolls on the sand ensued, and despite the clashing of tusks the two bulls indulged in, it was soon evident that a spirit of complete amity prevailed. Later that year, he was to witness a meeting of another kind.

For half an hour the eight hippo held a carnival of good-fellowship, and just before sunset the whole school took to the river again, and headed slowly upstream. After a mile they halted, and "Cave-Mouth's" mother deposited him in shallow water amongst the reeds. Here the two other youngsters joined him, while their parents sought mid-stream.

For another half-hour great blasts from the

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cows and bellowing grunts from the bulls, made an impressive concert, as they submerged and rose repeatedly in the deeper water. Then came an answering chorus from up-river, and presently four great forms appeared near at hand. For another hour—until it was quite dark—the rival schools indulged in diving exhibitions, the display of enormous tusks in wide-open mouths, and good-natured bellows at each other—but without actually mixing—until at last a sudden silence fell as each huge head disappeared beneath the water.

Presently that silence was broken by a crash in the reeds near where the youngsters were lying, as “Yellow-Tusk” heaved his dripping form ashore. Just behind him came the two cows and the strangers, and “Cave-Mouth” emerged at last behind his mother on a wide plain, covered with succulent grass. Other crashes in the reeds upstream told that the rival school had also sought this favoured feeding ground, and as he tramped beside his mother, or rested with her, “Cave-Mouth” heard throughout the night the noisy champing of giant feeders engaged in a “re-filling” process.

As dawn was breaking the school of eight took to the steaming waters of the river, and swam gently downstream. Just below the bank where our friends of yesterday had joined forces with the three strangers the latter grunted a farewell and entered a small backwater; evidently heading for a

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favoured retreat. "Yellow-Tusk" with the two cows and calves continued onwards to their bivouac of yesterday, and about ten o'clock left the water for a few hours' slumber on terra firma.

During the next few months the party wandered up and down river as successive feeding grounds thinned out; sleeping on sandbanks, under trees near the bank, in reedy passages, or in the stream. During those months "Cave-Mouth" learned many lessons.

His mother took him on her back, day by day, into deeper water, submerging for longer and longer periods, until at the end of three months he could stay under shallow water for five minutes without rising, and for two minutes even in midstream. Then, too, she taught him to sleep beneath the surface in shallow backwaters, floating inert under overhanging trees with only his small nose exposed, so that gradually he came to regard the water as his true home. When sleeping ashore he soon learned to lie with his nose always pointed to the stream, in readiness for swift action, and when he was four months old the reason for this was brought home to him.

The five hippos were sleeping under thorn bushes on the banks of a deep backwater when "Yellow-Tusk's" acute nose told him that danger was approaching from the bush behind. He listened, and next instant a twig snapped faintly in the direction whence came the evil scent. Like

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a flash the three great forms hurtled down the sloping bank and into the stream, with the calves only a second behind. As they took the water "Yellow-Tusk" and "Croppy" noted a long, black canoe stealing silently under the reeds a few yards away, propelled by three black, upright figures.

"Yellow-Tusk" would have rushed along the bottom and out to the main river, and at any other time the cows would have followed. To-day, however, the hint of danger to their calves sent them crazy with rage, and instinctively they turned to attack as the best means of defending their beloved offspring.

As "Cave-Mouth" and his young companion would have risen to the surface they found themselves gripped between their respective mothers' short forelegs, and held beneath the rising bodies. "Croppy" rose rapidly, right beneath the canoe, overturning it and discharging its occupants into the water. One fell right in front of the other cow, and with a single bite she severed both legs from the body. "Croppy" attacked the canoe itself, and in blind fury she bit the hard ironwood side clean out, so that it sank immediately. Then, as the other two panic-stricken natives clambered into the reeds, she submerged again and raced after "Yellow-Tusk," with a gasping and terrified "Cave-Mouth" clinging to her back.

The natives' encircling attack had ended

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disastrously for *them*, but it nearly brought disaster to "Cave-Mouth" also. It was fully five minutes before "Croppy" allowed him to seek the surface, and by that time his still undeveloped lung capacity was strained to bursting point. However, he soon recovered, and from that time onwards the impression of those strange, upright figures registered itself in his brain as a portent of danger.

Soon after this the first rains began to fall, and with this new experience for "Cave-Mouth" came another. Although they constantly met other schools in the river, "Yellow-Tusk" no longer welcomed such meetings. When bulls were present his booming note became a harsh, roaring grunt, and the chuckling note of goodwill was absent. Although the strangers replied in like fashion none attacked, and "Yellow-Tusk" sought always an unoccupied feeding ground.

But one night, about a fortnight after the attack in the backwater, they had only been feeding about an hour when a great bull emerged from the river and came straight towards them. It was at once apparent that he came with no peaceful intention. With a strident bellow that could be heard a mile away, he rushed at "Yellow-Tusk," and that warrior answered both bellow and rush.

Swerving slightly as they met, the great mouths opened, and each bit savagely at the neck or body of the other as he passed. Curiously enough, there was no attempt to rip with the tusks in true

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pig fashion, though the long lower tusks seemed so adapted for such warfare. But at each meeting the combatants bit rapidly and savagely, and that the bites were sufficiently punishing was soon evident from the blood which began to flow freely.

Now and then one or the other went down, and before he could rise his assailant would inflict as many bites as possible on the softer skin of the stomach. For about ten minutes the attacks continued, to the accompaniment of constant grunts and bellows. Then the laboured breathing of the antagonists showed that the pace was beginning to tell on each. Presently, after a particularly savage rush, they stood apart by mutual consent, and before they could resume hostilities "Croppy" walked over to "Yellow-Tusk" and nuzzled him sympathetically.

The other bull promptly began paying attentions to the second cow, and after a few minutes she turned towards the river. The strange bull bellowed angrily, and "Yellow-Tusk" answered with a roar of equal volume. For an instant each hesitated, and then it seemed that an agreement to halve the spoils of combat had been reached. The stranger followed "Croppy's" companion of several months to the river, a couple of loud "plops" announced their entrance to the water, and "Yellow-Tusk" remained in possession of "Croppy," and his selected feeding ground. Really, he might be accounted fortunate. He had passed the days

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when he might control a herd, and was approaching the time when he would have had to live utterly alone—in the breeding season at any rate.

For a month he fed with "Cave-Mouth" and his mother by night, and slept with them by day—twice evicting intrusive bulls—when disaster overtook him. Sleeping on the river bank one day the sound of paddles and the man-scent awoke them, and with a rush they took the water. "Yellow-Tusk's" curiosity led him to rise with his head clear of the water to survey the intruders, and on the instant came the roar of an express rifle at twenty yards' distance. The solid bullet crashed straight to "Yellow-Tusk's" brain, and he sank like a stone, almost crushing "Cave-Mouth" beneath his sinking form.

Gripping her son with her forelegs, "Croppy" swam swiftly downstream, rising only to take a cautious breath at long intervals. Once before she had heard the dreaded rifle sound, but never in these waters. Now it had come, and she decided promptly to seek a safer habitat. So for two weeks afterwards she fed and travelled further and further down river, until she reached the swamp area close to the deep Linyanti River.

"Cave-Mouth" was about six months old when "Croppy" began to repel his advances. Up to that time she had been the most affectionate and solicitous of mothers; but now she seemed to turn sour and morose, and met attempts at

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intimacy with intensely painful digs of her long tusks.

So "Cave-Mouth" gradually grew self-reliant; contenting himself with her company, and the opportunities it gave of learning the lore of life from her example. They usually slept alone, but the evening and night found them disporting themselves with various chance-met schools and individuals; so that "Cave-Mouth" was never lonely.

One evening as they played with four other hippos on a sandbank his mother suddenly took the water and left them. "Cave-Mouth" would have followed, but she turned and rushed at him with open mouth; therefore, after several attempts he desisted, and returned to the more friendly company on the sandspit. A week later, as he was playing watery hide-and-seek with three companions at sunset, "Croppy" very suddenly appeared with a small daughter clinging to her back. She seemed equally pleased to see him, as he made affectionate demonstrations of delight, but she would not allow him near her latest offspring.

Six months afterwards, he conceived an increasing affection for the company of three young hippos about his own age, and when the friendly meetings by land and water changed once again to the savage combats of the breeding season, and his elders grew sour and morose, this group of youngsters forsook adult companionship and formed a small school of their own.

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Gradually, they drifted down the Linyanti and came to the broader waters of the Zambesi. So here on the pleasant, wooded islands and well-grassed flats "Cave-Mouth" and his friends found an ideal habitat. Their strength already guaranteed immunity from crocodiles, and they had few other enemies. Thus, for about two years life passed pleasantly enough, with little incident.

Then, when he was about four years old, a strange thing happened. In his little band was another young bull about his own age, and hitherto the pair had preserved the friendliest relations. But now, as the rains approached, he often felt strong resentment towards his fellow, and more than once quarrels occurred. One night his ill-humour intensified, and he felt an insane desire to drive his former companion away, and be rid of him for good. The result was a great fight, and in the end he succeeded in driving this friend of two peaceful years away, at the expense of many painful wounds.

"Cave-Mouth" did not know why he had done this, but he began to understand dimly those fits of truculence in the hippo folk which had always puzzled him; chiefly by their sharp contrast with a generally mild and inoffensive disposition. His victory, however, profited him little; for a month later he was himself driven away from his two female companions by an older bull.

Wandering disconsolately north, he came to

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the N'joko River, where well-grassed flats, shallow water, and reedy swamps formed a hippo paradise. As a result, he found comradeship again, and in the following year he defeated an old bull and took charge of his school of six. He clinched his victory by two others against successive challengers, and three cows bore him offspring that season.

For ten years he spent his winters in the broad Zambesi, with its well-wooded islands and delightful flats, enjoying the society of great schools of from twenty to forty of his kind. In the rains, accompanied by several cows and youngsters, he would push up the N'joko, or some other of the small tributaries, to recover condition by the autumn, and to rest in peace after the fierce fighting of the breeding season. In the last of those ten years a strange adventure befell him.

He had delayed his return to the river until after daylight, and was grazing slowly through timber country towards it when two lions—old and gaunt with hunger—saw his approach, and desperately decided to try their luck with him. As he passed the dark bush, which they had made their ambush, they sprang, and the astonished "Cave-Mouth" felt the impact of two great forms alighting on his back.

But he felt nothing more serious or painful. Strive as they might they could not penetrate his tough hide deeply enough with their claws to injure him, or even to draw blood, and with a

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snort of indignation and contempt he raced for the river. He carried the clinging shapes with him, and if those lions felt no surprise at the speed of his progress, or the strength in his ungainly form, the cold shock of the water as he plunged into the river must have been an unpleasant one. A moment later, two sad, wet, and disillusioned lions crawled disappointedly ashore, registering a silent resolve to leave hippo alone in future.

A year afterwards a considerable number of hunting parties visited the N'joko, and after two of his mates had been shot, and he himself disturbed and driven from many a good feeding ground, he at last moved higher up the Zambesi.

He had long since found that at certain seasons he might be compelled to go as far as ten miles away from the river to find food ; but up to the age of thirty this troubled him but little. He was a quick traveller and an agile climber, in spite of his great weight and ponderous girth, and was afraid of no enemy but man. Yet, when he found such land journeys necessary and more frequent on the upper river, he felt dissatisfaction, and a desire to avoid them.

Perhaps his age was to blame. Or it may be that memories of more plentiful districts made him lazy. At any rate one of the measures he took to avoid long journeys after food was unlawful raids on native gardens, and this at last brought him into trouble.

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The amount he could eat in one night would make a deep impression on any five-acre plot. The amount he could trample underfoot in the same time would make an even deeper one. So that two such visits left very little for the native owners. Thus, when on two successive nights he visited a plot a mile from the river, which had cost much labour to clear, the natives became angry, and on the third night laid an ambush for him.

Luckily for him they had no guns, but, *unluckily*, it was also a moonlight night, with no wind to betray to his efficient nostrils the plans made for his destruction. As he passed a dense bush beside a tall mealie patch two assagais flashed out and stuck quivering in his sides. Like lightning he wheeled and made for the river, while a yelling horde of natives raced with him, hurling assagais unceasingly.

But his tough hide turned most of them, and he easily outstripped all but one native. That one, with a tremendous spurt, raced alongside, and drove his spear deeply behind "Cave-Mouth's" shoulder. Instantly he wheeled; his great mouth opened; yellow tusks clashed, and the bleeding man dropped from his jaws, bitten almost in half.

The yelling at once ceased, and the awe-stricken natives halted by their dying comrade. Thereafter, he was named on the river, "The Hippo with the Lion Heart"; for never had they known a hippo attack on land before. Yet it was in no

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spirit of revenge that he had done so. A "sour" old bull does the same occasionally out of pure vindictiveness; but "Cave-Mouth" acted purely in panic-stricken terror when he turned at bay.

Entering the water with three assagai heads buried in his flesh, he endured much suffering for some months afterwards, and grew thin and gaunt with hunger. But afterwards his wounds healed; and with peace came forgetfulness, so that, in the following year, he again sought cultivated lands for an easy meal. But the natives did *not* forget, and suffered in silence rather than again challenge him.

This immunity, allied to his innate curiosity, proved at last his undoing. As the years went on he lost to some extent his fear of man. His raids increased, and he would often charge right up to a smouldering camp fire, putting the sleeping natives to flight and scattering the embers. Then came on the scene a white hunter who lived by killing hippo, and who knew everything there was to know about them. To him the bereaved owners of the destroyed gardens came in desperation, begging his assistance.

One night "Cave-Mouth" climbed ashore to a thickly planted mealie patch he had marked down for destruction the previous night, and in the very centre stood a motionless and mysterious white figure, from which fluttered several gaudy rags. On a platform thirty yards away, well above the tell-tale breeze, lay the white man, with rifle ready,

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and eyes that noted "Cave-Mouth's" entrance to the garden. He had counted on the hippo's curiosity to bring him in close proximity to the figure—so within close range—and not without reason.

For an hour "Cave-Mouth" fed noisily at a distance, but raising his head at intervals to stare at the strange object. Being assured at last that it was lifeless he approached it in narrowing circles, and at last stood ten paces from it, sniffing curiously for any taint that should explain it.

He had already taken a step nearer to it, and in doing so unconsciously presented his side to the elevated marksman, when the '400 express spoke, and a giant blow struck him on the shoulder. He collapsed to earth, and as the moonlight darkened before his eyes, another blow struck him, and a sharp pain pierced his heart. So died "Cave-Mouth," at the age of forty-one, a victim to greed, indiscretion, and curiosity; but innocent of malice towards mankind.

It is possible that but for those faults he might have lived fifteen or twenty years longer. For his sustenance he required only grass and water plants, and since these are plentiful it is improbable that he would ever have died of hunger, as the meat-eaters one day must.

But it is also possible that in another decade he might have developed the soured temper of the "rogue," which afflicts hippo as well as

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elephant, when mating days are over. In that case, frequent attacks on boats, and human kind, might still have brought death by way of the bullet. As it was, he was unfortunate enough to pay the extreme penalty for minor offences, and so may, perhaps, deserve our sympathy.

CHAPTER VIII

“SNEAKY,” THE HYENA

HE was the son of two, big, spotted hyenas. I have called him “Sneaky” because no other word seems to describe so surely the furtiveness displayed in his every action, almost from his birth.

The stealth of the leopard, and others of the cat tribe—wary, yet ever ready to attack if discovered—was very different to that of “Sneaky” and his family. His soft movements expressed indecision, and fear of discovery, instead of merely the caution of well-laid plans. Indeed, it is doubtful whether he ever moved on a definite plan. The two dominant impulses of his life were greed and fear. A voracious appetite, made for ever keen by a cowardice which hindered its satisfaction, was Nature’s method of forcing him to play his part as the scavenger of the forest.

With two brothers and a sister he was born, one morning, in the Lomba forest, between the Quito and Okavango Rivers, in Portuguese Angola. When he opened pale, watery blue eyes, about five days later, the gloom of the thicket his mother had chosen for his birthplace enabled him to see better.

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For, although more akin to the dog than the cat tribe, his eyes—like those of the felines—were designed chiefly for use in the dark. It was nearly a month before he could use them with comfort in sunlight.

He justified his name very early. There was soon a heap of discarded bones and pieces of hide in the den, and "Sneaky" and his brothers would creep towards this, looking everywhere but at their object, and watching especially the sleeping forms of their parents. If no notice was taken of them they would seize a mouthful of the carrion with a quick, sly movement, and depart with it to the darkest corner.

But should either parent raise its head and glance towards them they would drop the booty and slink away with an unconvincing air of innocence. Yet they had never been punished for helping themselves to this garbage—which had indeed been brought there for them. Such furtive evidence of a guilty conscience was merely the expression of the born thief's instinct.

Despite this uncomfortable handicap, "Sneaky's" first six months of life were not unhappy. For one thing, he did not, in those early days, feel the full weight of the Ishmaelite's curse he was to bear throughout life. To hate, and be hated, by all the forest folk was bad enough, but to fear all, while feared by few, was worse.

That fear did not obsess his consciousness in

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fullest measure while under his parents' protection. For although they might not defend him very efficiently if pressed, they almost invariably avoided danger, and assumed the toilsome responsibility of providers. Also, there was between the members of the family a good deal of affection. The good-fellowship, and liberty of expression, he enjoyed in those early days became an extreme rarity in later life.

The food they brought to the den was very varied in quality and amount. Sometimes plentiful, fresh and good ; at others, meagre, filthy, and either nauseating or flavourless. But whatever the fortune it was generously shared. Afterwards, he remembered with regret those days when he might eat in times of scarcity without fighting for his meal.

Most of his first three months were spent in eating, sleeping, and in joyous gambols with his brothers and sister ; and in spite of his ugly and ungainly shape he developed surprising strength and agility. High and powerful at the shoulders, with a disproportionately thick neck, and broad head, his form sloped sharply downwards to lean hindquarters ; comically typical of the slinking nature he was endowed with.

His body looked as though a sculptor had started to fashion a lion's form from the front, and then, growing short of material, had ended weakly with the posterior anatomy of a medium-sized dog.

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And this ludicrous shape Nature had equipped with a heart as cowardly as that of a rabbit allied to the appetite of a wolf.

On the night he first accompanied his parents to hunt they experienced what he afterwards learned was rare good fortune. Stepping softly and slowly behind his parents through the forest depths they suddenly halted and sniffed the air suspiciously. Then, while one remained motionless with the puppies, the other stepped mincingly towards a dark bush some yards distant. A moment later a small brown form rushed forth, and fell headlong in the first few strides.

The big hyena stood for a moment in trembling indecision, then, gathering what courage he had, rushed at the fallen animal. A clash of iron fangs, a cry of pain, and his mate and the puppies rushed towards him, to find an emaciated duiker fast in his jaws.

The little creature had been sick for a week, and was at the point of death. It is doubtful if lion or leopard would have eaten such diseased meat. But "Sneaky" and his kind were designed to destroy much more poisonous matter than this, and to that end Nature had equipped them with a digestive apparatus that neither shrank nor suffered from such loathsome meals. So on that first night the puppies fed largely and amicably.

Not always were they so fortunate. In the days that followed, old dry bones, pieces of hide, dead

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carcasses, putrid and poisonous to all save hyenas, often appeased hunger. Sometimes it was not appeased at all. Several times they came upon swarms of locusts roosting for the night on bushes, and on those occasions "Sneaky" learned how satisfying a feed these could be. Often, too, rats formed their only fare, and these being difficult to catch, quantity seldom equalled the quality of such meals.

Gradually "Sneaky" learned with pained surprise with what horror and hatred he and his kind were regarded by the other forest folk. At their approach the smaller antelope, wild cats, squirrels, cane rats, and mice fled in haste; while from the eland, zebra, roan and sable his family were as often forced to flee owing to a decidedly aggressive attitude.

One night his parents, hunger driven, stole silently towards a troop of eland, hoping to seize an unsuspecting calf. At their approach two great bulls trotted swiftly towards them with lowered head. Watching from a distance, the astonished "Sneaky" saw his great parents promptly turn and flee with howls of disappointment. Yet, had their courage been equal to their strength, they might have ripped out the stomachs from their great adversaries with a single slashing bite.

On another occasion, they crept upon an unwary zebra foal which rested at a distance from the troop. His sister, with more daring than discretion,

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followed. As their evil stench reached the troop, a great stallion thundered down with open mouth, and, on the instant, his parents dashed for safety. His sister, tailing behind, yelped in agony as the powerful teeth crushed her spine, but the yelp was stilled by a blow of mighty hoofs which struck the life from her. Yet regret for his lost playmate did not prevent him sharing the meal his parents made of her later.

Always it was the same. At the first hint of truculence or opposition from even the least offensive of the forest folk, his parents fled ignominiously. At their flight panic seized him also ; so that contempt never weakened his regard for them.

Though he did not know it, his unpopularity was the poor reward of his service to Nature. Instinctively, the forest folk knew that when sickness or death seized them they would become the prey of his kind ; and they resented his existence with a resentment never felt for either lion or leopard. The presence of the latter spelt danger only. That of " Sneaky " and his breed was associated with *death*.

One night, when he was nearly a year old, he sat on his haunches with his parents, watching a herd of zebra moving out on the plain, and wondering miserably whether the emptiness of his stomach would find relief. Suddenly the silence was broken by the long, mournful howl, of a distant kinsman.

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It was echoed immediately by a deep, reverberating roar, which seemed to shake the very earth, and brought them to their feet with a jerk.

Hitherto, his parents had departed silently in other directions when this sound reached them, with only a lingering glance in its direction. This may have been out of regard for the puppies' safety. But to-night his father pointed his nose towards the stars, and answered the howl with one as mournful, which was again echoed by others in various directions. Then he moved purposefully in the direction the sound came from, and in fear and wonderment "Sneaky" and his brother followed.

They were within two hundred yards of a small, open vlei, when a succession of surprising sounds halted them again. The cracking of bones, and noisy champing of jaws, was broken by a hyena chorus of great volume. Then came a vicious snarl, a yelp, and, immediately afterwards, the tremendous voice of an angry lion.

The hyena family turned to flee, but stood for a moment tense and vigilant. Then, as nothing happened, and the sounds of feasting were resumed, they stole gingerly forward again.

Peering from the bush beside his parents, "Sneaky" saw a ring of yellowish-white, spotted forms, like his own, seated in a respectful circle. Behind them prowled restlessly several smaller forms of jackals, and the dark striped members of his own species.

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In the centre of the circle a great, shaggy lion, his mate, and two smaller lions feasted busily on the dead form of a zebra, pausing occasionally to snarl a menace at the circle of watchers. Midway between the circle and the lions the dead form of a big hyena revealed the cause of the recent disturbance. Bolder than his fellows, he had become impatient, and encroaching too closely upon the lions had lost his life to one stroke of a swift and mighty paw.

Mindful of his youth, "Sneaky's" parents lay down on the edge of the bush and waited, while he and his brother watched in frightened fascination the scene before them. He did not realise the effort of self-control it cost his parents to remain so far from that delicious meat ; but the wisdom of their effort was soon apparent.

As though drawn by a magnet, the circle edged nearer inch by inch, freezing into immobility, with looks of innocent unconcern, however, whenever a leonine head was raised, and open jaws snarled a warning. Suddenly, a young hyena darted at a hanging piece of flesh on the shoulders ; but quick as he was the lioness was quicker. He had seized the meat, wrenched it loose and turned, when a yellow paw descended as she sprang, and the thief rolled over howling with a broken back.

Hoping to profit by the confusion, two others rushed at a hindquarter, and whirled aside only just in time to escape the punishing paws of the



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lion. Like a flash the watchers sprang back, and seated themselves thirty feet nearer to the bush, there to howl afresh their hunger and woes to the stars. Hungry as he was, "Sneaky" perceived that the vicinity of the meat was a far too dangerous one for his tender years, so he wisely settled himself to await the great beasts' pleasure with what patience he might.

Soon after sunrise the lions arose, looked regretfully at the meat they could not eat, and then with admonishing snarls at the eager circle, and many hesitations, they retired at last.

Caution was preserved until they were a hundred yards away, and then pandemonium broke loose. With a rush in which his family joined, the hungry watchers fell upon the carcase. Snapping, snarling, and fighting, each seized whatever morsel came first. "Sneaky" kept behind his father, and seized a strip lying on the ground. It was lucky he did so, for at once a great, hulking beast endeavoured to tear it from him, and was only induced to desist by his father's determined attack. By good luck, and parental assistance, each of the puppies got a share of the spoil, and retired with it to a safe distance.

Eating ravenously, "Sneaky" reflected that such banquets could have held no interest for him at an earlier date, and might well have proved dangerous. It was borne in upon him that at such public feasts strength for defence against his own

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kinsfolk was as necessary as agility to evade the wrath of the lawful owners.

This was further emphasised when he noted that several of the swarming beasts which had failed to secure a place at the carcase were already feasting busily on the dead hyenas. It was shown to him in no uncertain fashion that in the fight for meat the weakest must fall, and, having fallen, become but meat themselves. It may be, however, that the satisfaction induced by a full stomach robbed these reflections of their poignancy. It is at any rate certain that they produced no feelings of horror in his hyena soul. It was near to noon when, gorged to satiety, the crowd gave way one by one to the vultures, which had gathered in their hundreds to remove the last remnants of the kill.

A month later "Sneaky's" brother died a violent death. Attracted by the smell of a dead cane rat, and temporarily unobserved by his elders, he entered the cunningly contrived native trap from which the smell came. When the others rushed to ascertain the cause of his strangled yelps they found him lying crushed beneath a great log, from which only his feebly kicking legs protruded. The log saved them from a further act of cannibalism. They were so badly scared that they loped away without attempting to drag the carcase from beneath the log.

About this time "Sneaky's" parents became

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surly and hostile. They were, in fact, expecting another litter of puppies, and soon showed "Sneaky" that no further assistance might be hoped for from them. Not only was the method adopted often painful and peremptory, but when he found food first—alive or dead—they promptly robbed him of it. Affection had given place to natural instinct, and the exigencies of appetite. So finding that their company increased his chances of starvation he took to hunting alone.

Soon afterwards he met and joined company with two males and a female of about his own age, and in this company some semblance of affection again found expression. It was by instinct alone that he knew the sex of his companions. In build and strength, as in all external organs and appearance, male resembled female so closely as to defy recognition by ordinary observation. But "Sneaky" knew with certainty possible rivals from possible mate.

Remembrance of the feast prepared by the lions induced him to follow promptly the voices of the great killers, whenever heard, and to lead his companions thither. Sometimes they improved on this method by howling their discovery of game they dared not challenge in the hope that the lions would hear, and arrive in time to make a kill for them to share.

Frequently this happened, until he began to feel almost an affection for the great beasts he also

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feared. But, although they often profited by his signals, the Great Ones neither felt nor showed affection for him or his breed. This was made painfully apparent to him one night.

Hungrily scenting a troop of wildebeeste, he raised his voice in mournful howls, while his friends joined in the chorus. Within ten minutes an old lion the forest knew as "Deathgrip"—because he never sprang in vain—arrived silently on the scene, and two minutes later a young cow lay dead beneath him.

The old lion had, in fact, for some time past marked the group of youngsters, and whenever his path crossed theirs he would keep one eye and ear open for their signals. He had several times been led to a kill by this means, and was well known to them. Perhaps this familiarity had bred a certain recklessness in "Sneaky," or it may be that he was arrogant enough to consider old "Deathgrip" his ally.

At all events, on the night in question he had not sat for long, watching the great killer at his meal, before he arose and paced cautiously up and down, drawing nearer to the carcase at each turn. A male companion followed, and when "Sneaky" timidly made a furtive snatch at a piece of the entrails the lion had dragged out, he made a similar dart for a piece a foot nearer to the lion.

With a roar of outraged majesty the lion and struck with alternate paws. One

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ripped out the side of “Sneaky’s” companion, letting his life out too. The other—landing a fraction of a second later—scored “Sneaky’s” quarters with its claw points as he fled for dear life. Then he realised once and for all that no friendship could ever exist between him and the lion breed. Though he followed “Deathgrip” many times after that he never again approached too closely, until—but of that you shall hear.

When the old monarch departed the three hyenas ate their fill, and while they ate the swarming vultures dealt faithfully with their late companion. At this age “Sneaky” had been almost handsome; the black spots showed clearly on a white fur as yet only faintly showing the dirty yellow tinge of later life. But when they left there was little left either of beauty or value. Some months later, when he was nearly two years old, “Sneaky” had reason to congratulate himself on the events of that night. This was when, after a desperate battle, he took to himself the female.

Nearly equal in size and strength, as in cowardice, the fight was a fierce one. When the terrible fangs and molars—more powerful than even the lion’s—had done their work, “Sneaky” remained on the field, a sad and sorry spectacle of a victor. Bathed in blood, with torn coat and lacerated neck, he could never have faced a second rival, and it needed all the assistance his consort gave him during the next month to enable him to recover.

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Their first litter was a month old, and hunting had been very bad, when he one night induced his mate to assist in a desperate attack on a young sable. Only hunger could have nerved him to the exploit, and even then he did not reap the reward of valour.

As the year-old bull turned to face him he retreated as usual, while his mate attacked from behind. As the bull whirled to meet her he rushed in again and snapped at the animal's flank. A backward sweep of the long horns, and two sharp points penetrated his ribs as he sprang away; a mouthful of skin his only reward. These wounds handicapped him still further, and two of the puppies had already died from starvation when fortune smiled upon him once more.

Prowling hungrily through a far section of his district, with his mate and the surviving puppy, he suddenly scented putrefaction on the night air. Following his nose he discovered at last the great form of a buffalo which had died of disease, and was already loathsome with decay.

Of that he recked nothing. His stomach was equal to the germs of any disease on earth, and his hunger would have regarded even liquid filth as treasure trove. The vultures had been at work, but apparently none of his kinsmen had located the find, so for nearly a week the trio fed luxuriously. Only when the last strip of sun-dried hide had been chewed, and the last clean-picked bone crushed and

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digested, did they commence again the eternal hunt for food.

Returning to familiar haunts, he again fell in with and attached himself to old “Deathgrip,” the lion. The combination of leonine strength, and hyena instinct for prey was fairly successful; though “Deathgrip” was now feeling the weight of years, and often lacked the speed to kill. On the remnants he provided, however, the next litter of three was brought safely through its first year of growth. Just before his mate drove them adrift the family endured a lean period, and urged by hunger performed an unusual exploit.

Finding a small troop of eland one night, with several yearlings forming a detached group, he decided to try and kill one of the latter. His mate followed, and he crept carefully between the group and the individual furthest down-wind. As the taint reached this young heifer she tried to dash past the pair and rejoin her companions. “Sneaky” and his mate hurled themselves at her stomach on either side, and with terrible, slashing strokes bit clean into the intestines.

For some two hundred yards she raced ahead, with much of her stomach protruding, and then stood in agonised helplessness. Assault after assault brought her down at last, and for the first time the family fed royally on a clean and plentiful kill. Such gentle quarry really presented little difficulty, and no risk. But to the hyenas it was an

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achievement, although only attempted under the urge of hunger, and in unison. Often thereafter "Sneaky" made shift with the most loathsome refuse, rather than make such an attack single-handed.

One night towards the end of that season the family came again upon the tracks of old "Deathgrip," whom for some time past they had not seen. Following for a mile or two, they found the old lion lying in thick cover, with his head on his outstretched paws. Apparently he had no thought of hunting, though his gaunt frame proclaimed hunger and weariness. His eyes blazed as he saw the scavengers, and he growled fiercely as he attempted unsuccessfully to rise.

Across "Sneaky's" brain shot the conviction that the old lion was very sick, and near his end—as indeed he was. Promptly he settled himself to await the moment when, for the first and last time, he might approach the great form without risk.

"Deathgrip" knew too that his time had come, and with the knowledge his hatred of the hyena breed intensified. Realising their purpose, he determined to revenge himself, in part at least, before he died. Letting his head sink lower and lower he closed his eyes, and feigned death with fair success. An hour longer the watching hyenas waited, and then approached inch by inch to make sure. Standing tense and undecided, a yard from the quiet form, they waited fearfully for the usual

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outbreak of wrath. None came, and at last "Sneaky's" mate and one puppy stole warily nearer.

She was on the point of a quick, surreptitious bite when the great head jerked round and seized her ; while one mighty paw hurled the puppy yards away with a broken neck. A crunch, a scream, and as "Sneaky" retreated swiftly he saw his mate's body drop from the terrible jaws and lie quivering.

But the old monarch had made his last effort. Before dawn he was dead. Not until the sun rose, however, did "Sneaky" and the remaining two puppies dare to approach that still figure, and eat for the last time at its expense. In two days the carcase was a writhing mass of corruption but it was nearly a week later—when the vultures with whom he had disputed possession had long renounced all claims—that "Sneaky" and his sons disposed of the last remnants of his old ally.

He was now six years old, and was experiencing one of the leanest periods of his existence when he first tasted human flesh. The Lomba district had long been uninhabited owing to the former depredations of man-eating lions ; but about this time a road was cut through it to the Portuguese post of Quito-Quanavale. "Sneaky" had often seen the fires of native carrier bivouacs, and reconnoitred stealthily ; to return after their departure in search of remnants.

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One night, during the winter of which I write, he was wandering, lonely and very hungry, along this route, when the dull glow of fires revealed a camp. Creeping cautiously closer, he discerned the sleeping forms of natives lying in long rows, a small fire between each pair. Scouting cautiously round, and being assured at last that no dogs were present, he crept to within five yards of the end figure in a row.

With slavering jaws he watched, while gnawing hunger battled with fear in his coward heart. Hunger prevailing at last, he crawled, flat on his stomach, closer and closer. Rising to his feet beside the end "boy" he bent his head swiftly, and an instant later sprang away, with practically all the flesh from one side of the boy's face in his jaws. As he fled from the uproar which ensued he gulped down the gruesome morsel in haste, and halted not until he was a good two miles away.

The following year an ox-wagon travelled the route, and coming upon it outspanned one night, he crept cautiously towards the front oxen. The gentle-eyed beasts regarded him with silent contempt, and seeing them eyeing him steadily he at once discarded any thought of attack.

But creeping forward, and fawning ingratiatingly, he bit off the reims which attached their heads to the yokes, and then disposed of the strops and trences likewise. The fat on these had rendered

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them soft, and the saline flavour of dried perspiration lent them savour. In and out amongst the big, dignified beasts he went, and when the angry transport riders awoke next morning it was to find half the oxen loose, and most of the gear eaten !

A year afterwards, when he was feeling the weight of his nine years in impaired activity, he committed the ultimate crime of attacking a white man. A hunting party entered their district, and for several nights he visited their camp unsuccessfully. He soon found that the meat which had attracted him had been placed well beyond his reach. Once, also, two ferocious little terriers rushed at him when he came too near, and although he could with ease have bitten them in half his coward heart drove him to headlong flight.

Then came a night when, attracted by the smell of fresh blood, he found the two white hunters asleep under the stars without their dogs ; while six natives only slept some distance away. On that day they had hunted buffalo at a distance from their main camp, leaving most of the " boys " behind.

The natives seemed restless, and as he watched first one and then another would raise himself to replenish the fire at intervals. But the white men's fire had died down, and they slept the dreamless sleep of tired men. Observing these things " Sneaky " crept towards what seemed the easiest prey.

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The nearest of the white men lay on his back, with chest and throat exposed, and the great hyena fangs closed with a snap on throat and chin. As he sprang away in terror-stricken haste he carried jaw and windpipe with him, leaving behind a dying man whose life-blood poured from a severed jugular vein. Pandemonium, and a rattle of aimless shots, lent "Sneaky" the wings of fear, and soon after sunrise he sought refuge in a great ant-bear hole. In the meantime, the surviving hunter had sent for his dogs, and with a heart filled with grief and revenge had taken the murderer's trail.

It was close upon noon when "Sneaky's" dreams were shot through with the excited yapping of the terriers, and the sound of men's voices. Then the blows of native hoes on the ground above him told him that retribution was very near. Trembling with terror, with slavering jaws and glaring eyes, he watched the gloom give way to daylight, as the earth at the entrance to his hole was hurled aside. The original owner might have dug even faster than the pursuers and escaped. But for "Sneaky" escape was impossible.

At last a hoe broke ground above him, and descended in front of his nose. Like a flash he hurled himself out in a last despairing effort to avoid his doom, snapping viciously at a mass of moving black legs. A shot rang out as the terriers seized him, and the bullet which shattered his brain was

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scarcely quicker than the dozen assagais which transfixed his gaunt frame.

For his filthy life, contemptible cowardice and cannibal traits, we cannot blame him. He was so fashioned by Nature for a service by no means inconsiderable. His affection for his family reveals a possibility that under happier circumstances he might have developed even likeable qualities.

But when age robbed him of his usefulness the purpose of his existence ceased to be. His attempt to prolong life by a slaughter he was never intended for brought disaster as final as the starvation resulting from incapacity. If there is a moral in his history it is this: though man may detest and punish as crime actions solely due to natural instinct—Nature punishes only those due to a violation of it. Live naturally or die is her command.

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