

IN CLOSED TERRITORY

IX. A Hideous Old Hunter

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The Okapi.

TO avoid the terrific heat that then, the rains stopped in the lower valleys, began blazing down on the Engabi plains shortly after dawn, we broke camp at three a. m., February 3, reaching the summit of Isuria at eight a. m. and finding our donkeys safely arrived there with the posho we had bought in Kavirondo. Then we marched on to permanent camp at one of Jordan's old bomas, where he had spent a year alone with his Wanderobo and Lumbwa, his cows, sheep, and fowl, trading a bit, shooting a bit, idling and musing a lot, chief of the local chiefs, happy as a king, until down upon him descended a collector and party of askaris on a raiding search for ivory they fancied he had but never found, when, in disgust, he slipped away to another forest nook and lodged himself anew.

Dawn found us out after eland or roan; but by noon we were back empty handed. Apparently the game had shifted; for there was little sign about to the west of us.

In camp we found Mataia, chief of the Manga Lumbwa, the stoutest vassal chief of Jordan's Overlordship, with Arab Tumo, his foremost warrior, and two young *el morani*, all come at Jordan's summons from their country, a full day's journey north.

Mataia seemed to worship Jordan,—no other could bear his gun or do him service,—while with his own kind I soon learned that no ruler was ever more despotic or cruel. Obedience to Mataia's command was instant, or some ghastly punishment was administered.

In Mataia's domestic relations, discipline was carried to a highly effective if not a refined art. If one of his wives brought him a great *sufuria* (cooking pot) heaped with food that did not suit him, he made her sit down and gorge the lot, followed by water in quarts until she was sufficiently near bursting to give him some confidence that she might remember the next day how he liked his victuals cooked. If another stitched his new monkey skin cloak badly, the least hint of her carelessness she could expect would be a warm application on the naked stomach in the form of Mataia's heated sword blade; while if one was suspected of too deep interest in any predatory swain of the tribe, a slash from Mataia's razor-edged sword blade, landed wherever his large experience and fertile fancy taught him it was likely to hurt most, usually served to protect the imperiled family honor—at least temporarily.

At two p. m. we went out again after game, led by Mataia, with Arab Tumo, Arab Barta, and Mosoni as scouts and trackers. At five p. m., having seen nothing but topi and oribi, we were headed back toward camp, when Mosoni sighted a lone roan antelope.

Bagging His Roan

INSTANTLY all of us dropped out of sight in the grass, and Mosoni and I began circling for the wind. What with the grass and thickly scattered bunches of bush, stalking was easy, so that we were soon well up within seventy-five yards of the roan. With its head down and back to us, I could not tell whether it was cow or bull, and therefore I crouched awaiting a better view, well under cover from it. But just then out of the tail of my eye I caught sight of two splendid roan bulls off on our right which, not having

previously seen, we were uncovered to. They were trotting up to their mate, which at the instant caught the alarm and with them bounded behind bush, all out of sight before I even got gun to shoulder.

Then, while I was engaged in invoking back-handed blessings on this my second failure at a good chance of a roan trophy, out from behind a bush bounded a great roan beauty bigger than a water-buck, and stopped broadside, for a second's glimpse of us, on a little anthill one hundred and seventy-five yards away, nose up, and head turned to us, graceful horns sweeping back almost to its long sorrel mane, its red roan body glistening in the evening sun like burnished copper. Scarcely was he stopped before I had a bead on his shoulder this time, and at the shot he went off at the buck-jump that usually spells a safe hit. A dozen bounds and he was out of sight; but, taking his trail, we found him down and stone dead one hundred and fifty yards from where he was hit.

Our camp near the old Jordan boma was one of the loveliest on the entire trip. Wanderobo-colored a bit in thought or habit, Jordan camped us in dense forest, near a cold mountain brook,—forest so thick one might have passed within a few yards without seeing us, so heavy of foliage that it shut out the heavy night dews and the burning midday sun, where it was warm of nights and delightfully cool by day, the bush about us alive with monkeys and forest guinea fowl, darker blue of plumage and better eating by far than the sort found on the plains.

After the experience of that camp, I never again pitched our tents outside a forest when one was at hand to shelter us.

Jordan's Bongo

NIGHTS about the campfire with Jordan were never dull. Some incident of the day or turn of the talk always served to start him on some stirring tale of weird bush happenings. That night he was particularly interesting, notwithstanding a heavy electrical storm was on and we were tightly shut in my tent, with no light but the dull flicker of our pipes.

"Wonder how long it will be before the last of all the strange animal and reptilian types native to Africa have been taken and classified?" he mused.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Are there many types left that have been seen but remain untaken?"

"God only knows how many!" he replied. "Why, it was only four years ago that I killed my bongo and got the first perfect bongo skin ever taken. Before that Deputy Commissioner Isaac had got a piece of a bongo hide from the Wanderobo and had sent it to the British Museum; but mine was the first whole skin ever seen by a white man, and not so very many have been shot since."

"My word! but they are beauties,—bright red as an impala, white of jaw, with nine white stripes over sides, back, and quarters, short of leg, but heavier of body than a roan, with horns curved and shaped like a bushbuck's, but tipped white as ivory! Mine was a corker, nine feet six inches from nose to tail tip, with twenty-nine and a half-inch horns. And it's hard to get the beggars are! Never see them outside the heaviest forest or afoot except at nights or at dawn or in the dusk. Indeed, I got mine only after putting out a lot of Wanderobo for days and days to beat up the forest."

"What did I do with him?"

"Nothing, just nothing! Helpful Government did it all for me. A new species included in the game license, when I got to the Eldama Ravine Boma, Collector Foaker seized skin and head under instructions from Provincial Commissioner Hobley, and they were sold at public auction at Mombasa for fifty pounds, a little later reselling at two hundred and fifty."

"Odd ones! Why there's the okapi, sort of cross between a giraffe and a—I don't know what—perhaps a 'what is it.' Hyde Baker killed two in the

Kongo country less than three years ago, and one or two Germans have taken them, that's all.

A Reptilian Horror

THEN there's that infernal horror of a reptilian bouncer that comes up the Maggori River out of the lake, which the Lumbwa have christened *Dingonek*. And it's real prize money that beauty would fetch, five or ten thousand quid at least, and you bet I've got my Wanderobo and Lumbwa always on the lookout for one when the Maggori is in flood!

"Ever see one? Did I? Rather! Mataia, the boy there, and Mosoni were with me. It was only about a year ago. Mataia vows he has seen two since. Can't tell whether he really saw them or dreamed he did,—like as not the latter; for I know *Dingonek* were trying to crawl into my blankets for weeks after we saw that bouncer."

"How was it? Well, we were on the march approaching the Maggori, and I had stayed back with the porters and sheep and had sent the Lumbwa ahead to look for a drift we could cross—river was up and booming and chances poor. Presently I heard the bush smashing, and up raced my Lumbwa, wide eyed and gray as their black skins could get, with the yarn that they had seen a frightful strange beast on the river bank, which at sight of them had plunged into the water; as they described it some sort of cross between a sea serpent, a leopard, and a whale. Thinking they had gone crazy or were pulling my leg, I told them I'd believe them if they could show me, but not before. After a long palaver among themselves, back they finally ventured, returning in half an hour to say that it lay full length exposed on the water in midstream."

"Down to the Maggori I hurried, and there their bouncer lay, right-oh!"

An Unclassed Beast-Fish

HOLY saints! but he was a sight,—fourteen or fifteen feet long, head big as that of a lioness but shaped and marked like a leopard, two long white fangs sticking down straight out of his upper jaw, back broad as a hippo, scaled like an armadillo but colored and marked like a leopard, and a broad fin tail, with slow, lazy swishes of which he was easily



A Group of Natives Building the Hotel Regal. Camp on Rongana River.

holding himself level in the swift current, headed up stream!

"Gad! but he was a hideous old hunter of a nightmare, was that beast-fish, which made you want an aeroplane to feel safe of him; for while he lay up stream of me, I had been brought down to the river bank precisely where he had taken water, and there all about me in the soft mud and loam were the imprints of feet wide of diameter as a hippo's but clawed like a reptile's, feet you knew could carry him ashore and claws you could be bally well sure no man