

# A TALE OF THREE LIONS.

H. Rider Haggard

## III.

“WE never bathed in that pool again; indeed for my part I could never look at its peaceful purity fringed round with waving ferns without thinking of that ghastly head that slipped and bobbed and rolled itself off through the water when we tried to catch it.

“Poor Jim-Jim! We buried what was left of him, which was not very much, in an old bread-bag, and though whilst he lived his virtues were not great, now that he was gone we could have wept over him. Indeed, Harry did weep outright; while Pharaoh used very bad language in Zulu, and I registered a quiet little vow on my own account that I would let daylight into that lioness before I was forty-eight hours older, if by any means it could be done.

“Well, we buried him, and there he lies in the bread-bag (which I rather grudged him, as it was the only one we had), where lions will not trouble him any more—though perhaps the hyænas will, if they consider that there is enough of him there to make it worth their while to dig him up. However, he won't mind that; so there is an end of the book of Jim-Jim.

“The question that now remained was, how to circumvent his murderess. I knew that she would be sure to return as soon as she was hungry again, but I did not know when she would be hungry. She had left so little of Jim-Jim behind her that I should scarcely expect to see her the next night, unless indeed she had cubs. Still, I felt that it would not be wise to miss the chance of her coming, so we set about to make preparations for her reception. The first thing that we did was to strengthen the bush wall of the skerm by dragging a large quantity of the tops of thorn-trees together and laying them one on the other in

such a fashion that the thorns pointed outwards. This, after our experience of the fate of Jim-Jim, seemed a very necessary precaution, since if where one goat can jump another can follow, as the Kafirs say, how much more is this the case where an animal so active and so vigorous as the lion is concerned! And now came the further question, how were we to beguile the lioness to return? Lions are animals that have a strange knack of appearing when they are not wanted and keeping studiously out of the way when their presence is required. Of course it was possible that if she had found Jim-Jim to her liking she would come back to see if there were any more of his kidney about, but still it was not to be relied on.

“Harry, who as I have said was an eminently practical boy, suggested to Pharaoh that he should go and sit outside the skerm in the moonlight as a sort of bait, assuring him that he would have nothing to fear, as we should certainly kill the lioness before she killed him. Pharaoh however, strangely enough, did not seem to take to this suggestion. Indeed, he walked away, much put out with Harry for having made it.

“It gave me an idea, however.

“‘By Jove!’ I said, ‘there is the sick ox. He must die sooner or later, so we may as well utilise him.’

“Now, about thirty yards to the left of our skerm, if one stood facing down the hill towards the river, was the stump of a tree that had been destroyed by lightning many years before, standing equidistant between, but a little in front of, two clumps of bush, which were severally some fifteen paces from it.

“Here was the very place to tie the ox; and accordingly a little before sunset the poor sick animal was led forth by Pharaoh and made fast



there, little knowing, poor brute, for what purpose ; and we commenced our long vigil, this time without a fire, for our object was to attract the lioness and not to scare her.

"For hour after hour we waited, keeping ourselves awake by pinching each other—it is, by the way, remarkable what a difference of opinion as to the force of pinches requisite to the occasion exists in the mind of pincher and pinchee, but no lioness came. The moon waxed and the moon waned, and then at last the moon went down, and darkness swallowed up the world, but no lion came to swallow us up. We waited till dawn, because we did not dare to go to sleep, and then at last with many bad thoughts in our hearts we took such rest as we could get, and that was not much.

"That morning we went out shooting, not because we wanted to, for we were too depressed and tired, but because we had no more meat. For three hours or more we wandered about in a broiling sun looking for something to kill, but with absolutely no results. For some unknown reason the game had grown very scarce about the spot, though when I was there two years before every sort of large game except rhinoceros and elephant was particularly abundant. The lions, of whom there were many, alone remained, and I fancy that it was the fact of the game they live on having temporarily migrated that made them so daring and ferocious. As a general rule a lion is an amiable animal enough if he is left alone, but a hungry lion is almost as dangerous as a hungry man. One hears a great many different opinions expressed as to whether or no the lion is remarkable for his courage, but the result of my experience is that very much depends upon the state of his stomach. A hungry lion will not stick at a trifle, whereas a full one will flee at a very small rebuke.

"Well, we hunted all about, and nothing could we see, not even a duiker or a bush buck ; and at last thoroughly tired and out of temper we started on our way back to camp, passing over the brow of a steepish hill to do so. Just as we got over the ridge I came to a stand, for there about six hundred yards to my left, his beautiful curved horns outlined against the soft blue of the sky, I saw a noble koodoo bull (*Strepsiceros kudû*). Even at that distance, for as you know my eyes are very keen, I could distinctly see the white stripes upon

its side when the light fell upon it, and its large and pointed ears twitch as the flies worried it.

"So far so good ; but how were we to get at it ? It was ridiculous to risk a shot at that great distance, and yet both the ground and the wind lay very ill for stalking. It seemed to me that the only chance would be to make a detour of at least a mile or more, and come up on the other side of the koodoo. I called Harry to my side, and explained to him what I thought would be our best course, when suddenly, without any delay, the koodoo saved us further trouble by suddenly starting off down the hill like a leaping rocket. I do not know what had frightened it, certainly we had not. Perhaps a hyæna or a leopard—a tiger as we call it there—had suddenly appeared ; at any rate, off it went, running slightly towards us, and I never saw a buck go faster. I am afraid that forgetting Harry's presence I used strong language, and really there was some excuse. As for Harry, he stood watching the beautiful animal's course. Presently it vanished behind a patch of bush, to emerge a few seconds later about five hundred paces from us, on a stretch of comparatively level ground that was strewn with boulders. On it went, taking the boulders in its path in a succession of great bounds that were beautiful to behold. As it did so, I happened to look round at Harry, and perceived to my astonishment that he had got his rifle to his shoulder.

" 'You young donkey !' I exclaimed, 'surely you are not going to'—and just at that moment the rifle went off.

"And then I think I saw what was in its way one of the most wonderful things I ever remember in my hunting experience. The koodoo was at the moment in the air, clearing a pile of stones with its fore-legs tucked up underneath it. All of an instant the legs stretched themselves out in a spasmodic fashion, and it lit on them and they doubled up beneath it. Down went the noble buck, down on to his head. For a moment it seemed to be standing on its horns, its hind-legs high in the air, and then over it went and lay still.

" 'Great Heavens !' I said, 'why, you've hit him ! He's dead.'

"As for Harry, he said nothing, but merely looked scared, as well he might, for such a marvellous, I may say such an appalling and ghastly fluke it has never been my lot to witness. A man, let alone a boy, might have fired a thousand such



shots without ever touching the object; which, mind you was springing and bounding over rocks quite five hundred yards away; and here this lad—taking a snap shot, and merely allowing for elevation by instinct, for he did not put up his sights—had knocked the bull over as dead as a door-nail. Well, I made no further remark, the occasion was too solemn for talking, but merely led the way to where the koodoo lay. There he was, beautiful and quite still; and there, high up, about half-way down his neck, was a neat round hole. The bullet had severed the spinal marrow, passing right through the vertebræ and away on the other side.

"It was already evening when, having cut as much of the best meat as we could carry from the bull, and tied a red handkerchief and some tufts of grass to his spiral horns, which, by the way, must have been nearly five feet in length, in the hope of keeping the jackals and aasvögels (vultures) from him, we finally got back to camp, to find Pharaoh, who was getting rather anxious at our absence, ready to greet us with the pleasing intelligence that another ox was sick. But even this dreadful bit of intelligence could not dash Harry's spirits; the fact of the matter being that, incredible as it may appear, I do verily believe that in his heart of hearts he set down the death of that koodoo to the credit of his own skill. Now, though the lad was a pretty shot enough, this of course was ridiculous, and I told him so very plainly.

"By the time that we had finished our supper of koodoo steaks (which would have been better if the koodoo had been a little younger), it was time to get ready for Jim-Jim's murderess again. Accordingly we determined to again expose the unfortunate sick ox, that was now absolutely on its last legs, being indeed scarcely able to stand. All the afternoon Pharaoh told us it had been walking round and round in a circle as cattle in the last stage of redwater generally do. Now it had come to a standstill, and was swaying to and fro with its head hanging down. So we tied him up to the stump of the tree as on the previous night, knowing that if the lioness did not kill him he would be dead by morning. Indeed I was afraid that he would die at once, in which case he would be of but little use as a bait, for the lion is a sportsmanlike animal, and unless he is very hungry generally prefers to kill his own dinner, though

when once killed he will come back to it again and again.

"Then we again went through our experience of the previous night, sitting there hour after hour, till at last Harry fell fast asleep, and even I, though I am accustomed to this sort of thing, could scarcely keep my eyes open. Indeed I was just dropping off, when suddenly Pharaoh gave me a push.

"*'Listen!'* he whispered.

"I was awake in a second, and listening with all my ears. From the clump of bush to the right of the lightning-shattered stump to which the sick ox was tied came a faint crackling noise. Presently it was repeated. Something was moving there, faintly and quietly enough, but still moving perceptibly, for in the intense stillness of the night any sound seemed loud.

"I woke up Harry, who instantly said, 'Where is she? where is she?' and began to point his rifle about in a fashion that was more dangerous to us and the oxen than to any possible lioness.

"*'Be quiet!'* I whispered savagely; and as I did so, with a low and hideous growl a flash of yellow light sped out of the clump of bush, past the ox, and into the corresponding clump upon the other side. The poor sick brute gave a sort of groan, and staggered round and then began to tremble; I could see it do so clearly in the moonlight, which was now very bright, and I felt a brute for having exposed the unfortunate animal to such agony as he must undoubtedly be undergoing. The lioness, for it was she, passed so quickly that we could not even distinguish her movements, much less fire. Indeed at night it is absolutely useless to attempt to shoot unless the object is very close and standing perfectly still, and then the light is so deceptive and it is so difficult to see the foresight that the best shot will miss more often than he hits.

"*'She will be back again presently,'* I said; 'look out, but for Heaven's sake don't fire unless I tell you to.'

"Hardly were the words out of my mouth when back she came, and again passed the ox without striking him.

"*'What on earth is she doing?'* whispered Harry.

"*'Playing with it as a cat does a mouse, I suppose. She will kill it presently.'*

"As I spoke, the lioness once more flashed out of the bush, and this time sprang right over the





Goupil, sc.

Heywood Hardy, pinx.

*"With his forefeet resting on the carcass, he sent up his chant of victory."*



doomed and trembling ox. It was a beautiful sight to see her clear him in the bright moonlight, as though it were a trick that she had been taught.

"I believe that she has escaped from a circus," whispered Harry; 'it's jolly to see her jump.'

"I said nothing, but I thought to myself that if it was, Master Harry did not quite appreciate the performance, and small blame to him. At any rate, his teeth were chattering a little.

"Then came a longish pause, and I began to think that she must have gone away, when suddenly she appeared again, and with one mighty bound landed right on to the ox, and struck it a frightful blow with her paw.

"Down it went, and lay on the ground kicking feebly. She put down her wicked-looking head, and, with a fierce growl of contentment, buried her long white teeth in the throat of the dying animal. When she lifted her muzzle again it was all stained with blood. She stood facing us obliquely, licking her bloody chops and making a sort of purring noise.

"Now's our time," I whispered, 'fire when I do.'

"I got on to her as well as I could, but Harry, instead of waiting for me as I told him, fired before I did, and that of course hurried me. When the smoke cleared, however, I was delighted to see that the lioness was rolling about on the ground behind the body of the ox, which covered her in such a fashion, however, that we could not shoot again to make an end of her.

"She's done for! she's dead, the yellow devil!" yelled Pharaoh in exultation; and at that very moment the lioness, with a sort of convulsive rush, half rolled, half sprang, into the patch of thick bush to the right. I fired after her as she went, but so far as I could see without result; indeed the probability is that I missed her clean. At any rate she got to the bush in safety, and once there, began to make such a diabolical noise as I never heard before. She would whine and shriek with pain, and then burst out into perfect volleys of roaring that shook the whole place.

"Well," I said, 'we must just let her roar; to go into that bush after her at night would be madness.'

"At that moment, to my astonishment and alarm, there came an answering roar from the direction of the river, and then another from behind the swell of bush. Evidently there were more lions about. The wounded lioness redoubled her efforts, with the

object I suppose, of summoning the others to her assistance. At any rate they came, and quickly too, for within five minutes, peeping through the bushes of our skerm fence, we saw a magnificent lion bounding along towards us, through the tall tambouki grass, that in the moonlight looked for all the world like ripening corn. On he came in great leaps, and a glorious sight it was to see him. When within fifty yards or so, he stood still in an open space and roared, and the lioness roared too, and then there came a third roar, and another great black-maned lion stalked majestically up, and joined number two, and really I began to realise what the ox must have undergone.

"Now, Harry," I whispered, 'whatever you do don't fire, it's too risky. If they let us be, let them be.'

"Well, the pair of them marched off to the bush, where the wounded lioness was now roaring double tides, and the whole three of them began to snarl and grumble away together there. Presently, however, the lioness ceased roaring, and the two lions came out again, the black-maned one first—to prospect, I suppose—and walked to where the carcass of the ox lay, and sniffed at it.

"Oh, what a shot!" whispered Harry, who was trembling with excitement.

"Yes," I said; 'but don't fire; they might all of them come for us.'

"Harry said nothing, but whether it was from the natural impetuosity of youth, or because he was thrown off his balance by excitement, or from sheer recklessness and devilment, I am sure I cannot tell you, never having been able to get a satisfactory explanation from him; but at any rate the fact remains, he, without word or warning, entirely disregarding my exhortations, lifted up his Westley Richards, and fired at the black-maned lion, and, what is more, hit it slightly on the flank.

"Next second there was a most awful roar from the injured lion. He glared around him and roared with pain, for he was sadly stung; and then, before I could make up my mind what to do, the great black-maned brute, clearly ignorant of the cause of his pain, sprang right at the throat of his companion, to whom he evidently attributed his misfortune. It was a curious sight to see the evident astonishment of the other lion at this most unprovoked assault. Over he rolled with an angry snarl, and on to him sprang the black-maned



demon, and commenced to worry him. This finally awoke the yellow-maned lion to a sense of the situation, and I am bound to say that he rose to the occasion in a most effective manner. Somehow or other he got to his feet, and, roaring and snarling frighfully, closed with his mighty foe. And then ensued a most tremendous scene. You know what a shocking thing it is to see two large dogs fighting with abandonment. Well, a whole hundred of dogs could not have looked half so terrible as those two great brutes as they rolled and roared and rent in their horrid rage. They gripped each other, they tore at each other's throat, till their manes came out in handfuls and the red blood streamed down their yellow hides. It was an awful and a wonderful thing to see the great cats tearing at each other with all the fierce energy of their savage strength, and making the night hideous with their heart-shaking noise. And the fight was a grand one too. For some minutes it was impossible to say which was getting the best of it, but at last I saw that the black-maned lion, though he was slightly the bigger, was failing. I am inclined to think that the wound in his flank crippled him. Anyway he began to get the worst of it, which served him right, as he was the aggressor. Still I could not help feeling sorry for him, for he had fought a gallant fight, when his antagonist finally got him by the throat, and, struggle and strike out as he would, began to shake the life out of him. Over and over they rolled together, a hideous and awe-inspiring spectacle, but the yellow one would not loose his hold, and at length poor black-mane grew faint, his breath came in great snores and seemed to rattle in his nostrils, then he opened his huge mouth, gave the ghost of a roar, quivered, and was dead.

"When he was quite sure that the victory was his own, the yellow-maned lion loosed his grip and sniffed at his fallen foe. Then he licked the dead lion's eye, and next, with his fore-feet resting on the carcass, sent up his own chant of victory, that went rolling and pealing down the dark paths of the night in all the gathered majesty of sound. And at this point I interfered. Taking a careful sight at the centre of his body, in order to give the largest possible margin for error, I fired, and sent a 570 express bullet right through him, and down he dropped dead upon the carcass of his mighty foe. "After that, fairly satisfied with our performances,

we slept peaceably till dawn, leaving Pharaoh to keep watch in case any more lions should take it into their heads to come our way.

"When the sun was fairly up we arose, and went very cautiously—at least Pharaoh and I did, for I would not allow Harry to come—to see if we could find any trace of the wounded lioness. She had ceased roaring immediately on the arrival of the two lions, and had not made a sound since, from which we concluded that she was probably dead. I was armed with my express, while Pharaoh, in whose hands a rifle was indeed a dangerous weapon—to his companions, had an axe. On our way we stopped to look at the two dead lions. They were magnificent animals, both of them, but their pelts were entirely spoiled by the terrible mauling they had given to each other, which was a sad pity.

"In another minute we were following the blood spoor of the wounded lioness into the bush, where she had taken refuge. This, I need hardly say, we did with the utmost caution; indeed, I for one did not at all like the job, and was only consoled by the reflection that it was necessary and that the bush was not thick. Well, we stood there, keeping as far from the trees as possible, searching and looking about, but no lioness could we see, though we saw plenty of blood.

"‘She must have gone away somewhere to die, Pharaoh,’ I said in Zulu.

"‘Yes, Inkoos’ (chief), he answered, ‘she has certainly gone away.’

"Hardly were the words out of his mouth, when I heard a most awful roar, and starting round saw the lioness emerge from the very centre of a bush, just behind Pharaoh, in which she had been curled up. Up she went on to her hind-legs, and as she did so I saw that one of her fore-paws was broken near the shoulder, for it hung limply down. Up she went, towering right over Pharaoh's head, as she did so lifting her uninjured paw to strike him down. And then, before I could get my rifle round or do anything to avert the coming catastrophe, the Zulu did a very brave and clever thing. Realising his own imminent danger, he bounded to one side, and then, swinging the heavy axe round his head, brought it down right on to her back, severing the vertebræ and killing her instantaneously. It was wonderful to see her collapse all in a heap like an empty sack.



"My word, Pharaoh," I said, "that was well done, and none too soon."

"Yes," he answered, with a little laugh, "it was a good stroke, Inkoos. Jim-Jim will sleep better now."

"Then, calling Harry to us, we examined the lioness. She was old, if one might judge from her worn teeth, and not very large, but thickly made, and must have possessed extraordinary vitality to have lived so long, shot as she was; for, in addition to her broken shoulder, my express bullet had blown a great hole in her middle that one might have put one's fist into."

"Well, that is the story of the death of poor Jim-Jim and how we avenged it, and it is rather interesting in its way, because of the fight between the two lions, of which I never saw the like in all my experience, and I know something of lions and their ways."

"And how did you get back to Pilgrims' Rest?" I asked Hunter Quatermain when he had finished his yarn.

"Ah, we had a nice job with that," he answered. "The second sick ox died and so did another, and we had to get on as best we could with three harnessed unicorn fashion, while we pushed behind. We did about four miles a day, and it took us nearly a month, during the last week of which we pretty well starved."

"I notice," I said, "that most of your trips ended in disaster of some sort or another, and yet you went on making them, which strikes one as a little strange."

"Yes, I dare say: but then, remember I got my living for many years out of hunting. Besides, half the charm of the thing lay in the dangers and disasters, though they were terrible enough at the time. Another thing is, they were not all disastrous. Some time, if you like, I will tell you a story of one which was very much the reverse, for I made four thousand pounds out of it, and saw one of the most extraordinary sights a hunter ever came across; but it's too late now, and besides, I'm tired of talking about myself. Good-night."

