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CALL OF THE JUNGLE

by
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Illustrated by the Author



This pagan woman was on her way to her marriage. A key is the sign of wealth even if the owner has never even seen a lock. Nigerian plateau.

London
Robert Hale Limited
63 Old Brompton Road S.W.7

1957 11-253

inconvenience to the beast. This the women congeal and mix with curdled milk to form their staple diet."

"Amazing! They look perfectly fit on it."

"Yes. They have just this and a few herbs from time to time. Only rarely, when celebrating, do the men eat meat; the women never."

They certainly were most intriguing people.

"How clean and handsome the warriors look," I remarked.

"And yet they only have a bath twice in their lives—once when they are born and once at the circumcision or, in the case of the females, their declitorisation ceremony."

"Do you know much about nesting habits of the kingfisher?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Yes," I said. "They live in a hole under a stream bank in a disgusting state, cluttered with bits of old fish bone."

"Yet they are beautiful," he said. "Come and look at this."

He led me to the entrance of the *manyatta*, or village, inside the thorny hedge. It was disgusting, and stank. The cows had been brought in at night after watering and had trampled the urine-covered ground into a quagmire. In all this muck, lining the inside of the hedge, were the low mud huts of the Masai. They were about five feet high, and long, with an entrance at the end. We slithered over and looked in a dark tunnel.

"The first part is where they keep the young calves at night," explained our friend. "The people sleep further along at the end."

"What, altogether?"

"No. Just the family. The unmarried live in that larger hut, all together on a hide-covered bed."

"What a life!" I said.

"It was a very happy one," he remarked.

"Was?"

"Yes," he said. "Now we have upset the balance of Nature by forbidding these people to fight. They refuse to change their ways and the warriors have nothing to do but have sex orgies. They have now so weakened their stock that the women are ceasing to breed. So the men are having to take Kikuyu women."

"Furthermore," he added, "venereal disease has now come among them. As they wander very much from village to village, they carry it with them. Fortunately, penicillin is having some

effect when we can get hold of them, but the situation is most serious."

While we were talking some women wandered by carrying long calabashes full of milk. "Try some," said my friend. He passed me a small calabash basin and I sipped. It was rich and rather sharp in taste.

"That is perhaps due to the way they sterilise their calabashes," said the vet.

"How?" I asked.

"They piddle in them. It kills all the germs."

He gave one look at my face and roared with laughter.

"You are joking," I said.

"I assure you I am not. But don't worry. You will live—and probably drink it again some time."

I did.

We wandered into the bush and there saw some beautiful impala, the males with magnificent horns. For some time we stopped to watch them. There must have been fifteen or twenty animals, and four were posted at look-outs. I wondered how they changed the guard, and finally saw them switch quite casually—almost unconsciously, in fact. Nibbling away at the grass, one impala would incidentally find itself near a sentry. It would look up. The sentry would start nibbling and wander away.

Returning towards the *manyatta*, we came across rhinoceros tracks. "There are plenty round here," said the vet. "They are irritable beasts and charge without warning. Usually they're easy to avoid, as they haven't much manoeuvrability and their charge carries them off in a straight line. Now and then, however, they will charge again and again. The power of their charge is tremendous. Some time ago, a rhinoceros charged the Nairobi train and knocked it off the rails—incidentally, killing itself in the process."

"Last time I was here the elders told me how one rhino had chased a boy right to the entrance of the *manyatta*. They seemed to think it a great joke."

"Aren't they worried by the rhinos?"

"No. Only by lions. These are plentiful on the plains and the Masai organise great lion hunts to exterminate them. It is the only sport left to them. They dress up in war-paint with lion

manes and ostrich feathers and hold a ceremonial dance. Then the warriors go out to hunt. Warriors are of two kinds—junior and senior *morans*. A junior *moran* must kill a man or lion before he can be promoted to the senior class. Finding a lion, the warriors surround it and drive it by shouting and banging into a circle. Then one *moran* will kneel down, stick his spear at an angle in the ground pointing towards the lion, protecting himself only with a silly little hide shield. The lion, trapped and maddened, will charge, and, alone, the *moran*—if lucky—will impale it on his spear.”

“If unlucky?” I asked.

“They are one *moran* short,” he replied.

Over our drinks that evening I mentioned the sad case of a Masai who had just been executed for the murder of a District Commissioner. Briefly, the tale was this.

The Masai love cattle. The more they have the richer they are, for to them cattle are money and are the currency of all transactions within the tribe. Quality does not matter to them any more than the condition of a pound note matters to us—the value remains the same.

In the days before the coming of the white man, disease and wars kept the quantity of cattle down. Now the herds were growing out of all proportion and the authorities were worried about soil erosion.

At first, Government officers tried to buy the surplus cattle to keep down the numbers, but it was hopeless. “I want no shillingi,” said the Masai chiefs. “I have plenty shillingi. All my people have blanket and our women plenty beads. You cannot buy wife with shillingi.”

“You want shillingi?” said one chief to a discomforted D.O. He moved a skin in his hut and showed a pit full of money. “Look, you want shillingi, you take shillingi.”

The only course was to commandeer cattle and hold a public auction, giving the proceeds to the Masai.

This District Commissioner seized cattle and held an auction according to law. As the auction was proceeding, a Masai *moran* came up to the D.C. and demanded a palaver with him. He demanded the return of his black bull, which he said was a sacred bull. The D.C. knew that there was no sacred bull, and

told him that its return was impossible, as it had been lawfully sold.

The Masai lifted his seven-foot spear and with a flick of his delicate wrist flung it with such force that it passed through the officer's body—killing him—and on through a thorn hedge some yards behind him and into a *manyatta*.

The *moran* leapt over the thorn hedge—a prodigious effort—retrieved his spear, and with this in his hand calmly awaited arrest. At his trial, the judge said in effect before sentence: “A man is more valuable than a bull?”

“Yes,” said the *moran*.

“Then you have killed a man for a bull.”

He donned the black cap and gave the supreme sentence.

The Masai warrior looked at the court and the judge without emotion.

“I am a *moran*. I am not afraid to die.” Then, throwing his blanket around him, he followed his guard, his hauteur lasting to the end.

This was the story which had impressed me. “Why was the bull so sacred?” I asked the vet.

“It was not sacred,” he answered. “It was his pet bull, and as such he loved it and valued it more than his life.”

“Why?” I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. “I wish I could tell you. It is just one of the strange ways of these people.”

The story fascinated me. It was a murder mystery of the most intriguing sort—not a simple “whodunit”, but a more subtle “Why did he do it?” I determined to find the answer. In Africa—and back in London—I pursued the subject and at last solved the mystery. The solution was involved, but so fascinating I will attempt to explain it. I will call it in the true modern style—

THE BLACK BULL MURDER CASE

For the reason why the black bull was so wrapped up in the emotions of the Masai warrior we must first go back to the time before the coming of white man—to the time when the Masai tribe came down from the north and took over the plains. The plains were rich, but most difficult to hold. For this reason the tribe began to build up its strange code of behaviour, which differs so much from our own.

At the bar that day one met the personalities of Arusha.

I noticed a European in strange attire on a step-ladder, painting and embellishing the inside of the hotel in a most artistic way. He wore evening dress trousers, a blue lock-knit open shirt and a pair of white plimsolls. I naturally enquired who he was.

"Oh, he is our remittance man," replied my informant. "He lives out here and receives some sort of remittance every month. When this arrives he quickly spends it until it is all finished and then even sells his clothes to the Indians to buy more. When things are difficult we come to his rescue, provide him with odd clothes we can spare, and the proprietor gives him some job to do. He is most artistic. You should see him next month," he added. "It will probably be the coat of those trousers and white ducks."

"Quite natty," I replied. It was the first remittance man I had ever come across.

I saw two pairs of fairly well-filled feminine riding breeches sitting at the counter on little bar stools, and a smaller pair between. The centre pair proved to contain Cramer's wife, Geraldine. She was by no means a match for the two other ladies, who not only towered over her in size, but in strength too: they were a Mrs. Ryden and a Mrs. Holland Smith.

The former, Mrs. Ryden, proved to be a veritable giant of enterprise. She ran several large paw-paw estates, including one on the edge of Lake Laguti, and was feared by the natives and Europeans alike for her tough, masculine characteristics and fearlessness. She spoke with the strength of tongue and purpose of a company sergeant-major, and was so strong she could have put Samson over her knee and spanked him.

She asked us to take dinner with her at her house. We found it to be a charming residence on the very lip of a water-filled volcano. She came out on the balcony to greet us, and to our surprise we found she had shed her vehemence with her breeches. She wore a charming, very feminine dress, spoke in a quiet voice, and showed a cultural intelligence that was surprising for a woman who lived such a rough life all day. Her table was a picture with candles over spotless linen, her food was beautifully cooked and served, her wines just the right temperature.

"How foolish people are to live in Europe when there is all this, and good money too," I said.

"They are ignorant," she answered. "You can't imagine, Mr. Engert, how difficult it is for me to find good fellows to run my estates. I pay them well—very well—they can enjoy life and save money, yet they don't come out. Why?"

"They haven't the guts," she said, answering her own question. "Poor devils, they just haven't the guts."

I turned to a planter's wife who sat on my other side. She and her husband had come out after the war and chose to live on one of Mrs. Ryden's estates right out in the wilds. They had been living with their two small children in a tent while their house was being built.

"It must be terrible living in a tent with two children," I sympathised. "You certainly have guts."

"I love every moment of it," said the young housewife. "There is plenty to do and plenty of labour to do it. I like it better here than in England, where I'd be chained to a kitchen sink."

Africa is reputed to be a man's country, where men come out for a bit, long for home and return as soon as possible. But times are changing. Now that the main diseases have been controlled and the refrigerator has made the life bearable, more and more women are going out and enjoying the freedom not found at home.

I wandered out on the balcony again with my hostess. The moon was over Mount Meru, the water below us was as black as ink.

"What a place to write in," I said.

"Negley Farson wrote here. He stayed here. Why don't you?"

"You liked him?" I said.

"Yes," she replied. "He was an artist."

Then she added: "He had guts."

Mrs. Ryden was very fond of "guts".

Mrs. Holland Smith was another extremely forceful character. She drove her own lorry, ruled her natives with a rod of iron, and chased Government officials back to the security of their innermost offices.

She had a beautiful estate high up on Meru, where she bred horses and puff adders. She kept these most dangerous snakes

for their venom, which is useful for medical purposes. She herself tended them and "bled" them, sending their terrible poison by plane to Europe. When she had too many she would release them on the mountain near her property.

"Why not kill them?" I once asked her.

"You do not understand how important they are," she replied. "They are part of the balance of nature and help to keep down rodents and other small animals that would infest our estates."

No rhinoceros, lion or elephant dare come out of the forest and play havoc on her estate. They tried it only once. One night, hearing her little dog barking, she entered the lounge, clad only in pyjamas and quite alone in the house. She saw a fully grown lion looking through the veranda window. She seized her loaded rifle and, throwing open the veranda windows, went out on to the lawn. Finding a whole pride of fierce lions, this fearless woman scattered them with shots and words of abuse so vehement that they never returned again. Later a small herd of jolly, rollicking elephants raided her estate bent on mischief, but soon retreated before her powerful personality. Yet, like Mrs. Ryden, once she was relaxed she was as feminine as any other woman and was a charming gentle hostess.

I found in Arusha, as indeed had the natives and the wild beasts before me, that of the whites the female was the more forceful of the species.

Another character in Arusha was a tall Danish vet. with whom I talked about cannibalism. When he was travelling by foot from the Sudan, through the northern part of the Congo, he told me, he ran dry of food. He and his boys were in a sorry state and villagers had little to offer, as they themselves lived from hand to mouth. However, one day the boys were able to buy meat from a village and cooked him a tasty stew. The flesh was soft and tender.

"What meat is this?" the Dane asked his boy.

The boy looked embarrassed. "It be woman that belong village," he said. "Master must have meat." So strange is the human imagination that one minute the Dane was smacking his lips and in the next he was being violently sick.

Cannibalism is far from being dead in Africa, for it is almost impossible to control the natives in the bush. I remember one

District Officer standing at his door one night, listening to the drums, saying to me: "They are chopping someone."

"Why don't you do anything about it?"

"How can I?" he said. "If I try to send my native policeman, he will only pretend that he has been; he would be much too frightened to go. If I go myself, there would be no evidence when I arrive. My slightest movement is known to them. We take action if we have proof or if we find bones. But proof is very rare, for no native dare speak against his people and bones are carefully hidden."

I myself once lived in a cannibal village for a time and found their bones. The natives were most worried about this, but I am no policeman. They were pleasant enough people and I enjoyed their society, drinking and chatting with them. It was just an old custom which dies hard.

In another village I came once upon a great tomtom celebration. My boy was scared to death. He hung on to me and said, "Come away, Master. They be chopping someone." Not until I locked him in my car for safety was I able to go to the natives, but, try as I might, I was unable to penetrate into their midst. They politely and firmly danced around me and crowded me out.

So thousands of natives—and I think this is no exaggeration—are still eaten in Africa every year, for it is so difficult to break old habits. Although Africans get excited with drink, white people need have no fears. For the native likes to keep out of trouble. You are all right if, in the words of Mrs. Ryden, you have "guts".

I was told there was a tribe up on the far side of Kilimanjaro which used to kill off and eat the old people when they were too useless for work. Many of the more enlightened members of the tribe were ceasing this old custom, but found it difficult.

"My son," some ancient would say. "It is time you killed and ate me. People are saying things. People are saying that I have a sissy for a son, a son that shuns the customs of the tribe. I am so ashamed I dare not put my face among them." So the son would have to perform the ceremony of bumping his own father on the head and the family would sit down to the first square meal since Aunt Mary died.

The head miner had a very pretty wife, who next day fell foul of the chief storekeeper, an Indian, the only other non-native in the place. The Indians are unfortunate inasmuch as their temper can rise as quickly as the waters of the Grummetti River. The miner's wife wanted her chopper which had been lent to the Indian. The Indian claimed it was not her chopper, but the mine chopper, and this led to words and a struggle. The Indian, grabbing it, dealt the poor girl a blow on the head, luckily with the blunt end, making a horrid gash about four inches long. Fortunately, we had a first-aid kit and Cramer had some experience of medicine. The girl looked little the worse for the encounter and sat quite calmly in a chair while Cramer bathed the wound and stitched it. Her husband wished the matter to be reported to the authorities, and we arranged for her to come with us to Musoma when we left.

On the following day we made an expedition to Nyabogati, some miles across the light, bush-covered plain, where there was an old mine which Cramer wanted to inspect. The position was uninhabited and only distinguishable by an old rest-house, which we found had been taken over by great baboons. These animals can be very dangerous, for the baboon is the only higher animal that can organise itself. We fired at them when they came out in the open, but found that the chief sat down at some distance and organised the others to attack us. We killed the leader, but another took over, and it was only after we had killed him that they retreated. They were loathsome creatures with great, dog-like jaws, and they can do incredible damage to crops.

This accomplished, we made for the main shaft, which had no machinery, and erected over it a tripod and pulley. The pulley hawser was attached to the windlass of Cramer's lorry, a bucket was placed on the hook, and all was ready. Then everyone looked at everyone else. Who would go down first?

I, like a chump, volunteered.

With one foot in the bucket and the other fending off the sides, I was gently lowered. Suddenly I left the bucket and leapt halfway up the rope in fright for around me pandemonium had broken out. What happened was, I discovered afterwards, that down the mine was a great owl peacefully sleeping. When I arrived it beat its wings in an endeavour to escape and,

squeezing past the bucket, flew into my face before it cleared the shaft and was away. Fortunately, I landed back safely in the bucket, but only for a moment, for hundreds of bats started to whirl around me and made me again feel my last hour had come.

Gingerly, they let out more rope until, after about 120 feet, I landed safely on the muddy bottom. I inspected the ground carefully for snakes, then stepped out, shielding myself as best I could from the rocks which fell about me as the bucket dislodged them on its return. Soon Valter and then a boy joined me, and we proceeded to take samples of the quartz strata.

We returned in reverse order, I coming up last.

When we removed the tripod it fell to pieces. We found that the spindle holding the whole contraption, including the pulley, had snapped, and that it had held together only by virtue of the pull. Had it moved an inch, the whole thing would have collapsed, taking me with it. Valter roared with laughter at my discomfort now the danger was over. He was a jolly fellow and soon I was laughing with him.

Whilst the others continued with their work I took my rifle and taking a boy with me climbed some rocks hoping to find lion—for it was good lion country. What I would have done if I had found lion can only be surmised. All I did was to scare a couple of fine hartebeest, a large species of buck, which took themselves off for a couple of hundred yards, from where they watched me suspiciously. I did not track them, as it was too open and they had the advantage of me, but sat amongst the rocks and admired the view. Round me was wild plain covered here and there with light bush where buck and zebra were grazing, but I saw no big game, although there was much rhino about. It was most satisfactory sitting there alone and I was lost in meditation until a shot from below summoned me to return. We bagged a fine topi on the way back to Kilima-feze.

That evening Valter entertained us in his native hut, where a suitable table had been set up. His wife did not join us, but sat behind a curtain playing Swahili music on an ancient gramophone. The Indian joined us and provided the main course of curry, whilst we contributed a bottle of Johnnie Walker.

Many American missions are medical, and I cannot emphasise enough how much good work they do. Here their great refrigerators are put to good use storing drugs. I had a cut in my leg at one time which festered and would be not cured. This grew worse and worse, in spite of a doctor's attention. It was only when an American lady missionary attended to it that it started to heal. She spinkled some sulfa drug powder on it and in less than forty-eight hours it was but a scar.

However, even the medical missionaries present a potential danger. "You are a menace to the country," I once said to an educated African doctor, partly in jest. He looked shocked. "Africa is comfortably inhabited," I added. "What will happen now with all your curing? It will soon become overcrowded and suffer all the ills that have befallen China and India."

We proceeded on our way and passed through great tea estates as we reached the Kenya Highlands. Here we passed through the Great Rift Valley again and on to Nairobi. Outside the hotel where we stopped overnight the boys slept under the lorry as if they were still in the bush.

Passing through Masai country again, I bought a spear. Beside a store I noticed a senior *morán*, a particularly fine fellow with a spear. I learned that he had killed many lions and I suggested to the storekeeper that he should negotiate for the spear. The *morán* obstinately refused to part with it, saying, "Let him buy a trade store spear."

I pressed the matter and the storekeeper piled on his counter numerous delectable items—wire and beads, knives, blankets, etc., until the Masai was overwhelmed and could resist no longer. He never once gave me a glance, but said to the storekeeper in a haughty voice: "All right. Let the white man have it."

He leant his spear against the wall and stalked out, leaving the goods to be collected by some minor fry. I paid the storekeeper, took the spear and approached Cramer's lorry. Here I found the cook comfortably sleeping. Feeling playful, I dug him in the ribs with the spear. He woke up, saw the weapon in his ribs and positively blanched with fright.

On passing Longido Hill again Cramer said: "Fish wants to bag a rhinoceros. Here is an ideal place."

So we deviated off the track, leaving my car behind, and in

the lorry made for the bush which surrounded the mountain. After several hours going we arrived round the other side of the hill, where there were many signs of the great pachyderm. Here we decided to encamp for the night. We erected our tents and slept well. In the morning we found marks of rhino all over our camping ground and the boys had even vacated their sleeping-place under the lorry and clambered up trees for the night. While taking our breakfast, we sent one of our boys, who claimed that he knew all about rhino, together with a native we had picked up as a guide, to find one of the beasts. In an hour they were back.

They had not found a rhino as quickly as a rhino had found them. Coming round a large anthill they walked slap bang into one. He charged. The guide escape scot-free, but our boy had fallen back in a "come-and-go" thorn bush. The "come-and-go" thorn bush is no pleasant bush to fall into: its great thorns face both ways, inwards and outwards. The boy's clothes were torn to pieces and his skin bleeding from 100 different wounds.

We left him to the ministrations of the cook and we gave chase. Followed by the guide, who refused to go in front, we soon picked up tracks in the soft ground and cautiously moved forward. Suddenly there was a yell. From our right, just where we least expected it, came the rhino, charging us at full pelt. There was no time to shoot either with gun or camera. We fled, the huge beast almost touching me as I ran, several tons of the most solid mass of animal I had yet seen.

Recovering, we gave chase but the rhino had charged on through the bush and away. It had been an extraordinary manœuvre for the beast. We discovered from its tracks that it had made a complete circle and had been lying in wait for us until it charged. This was quite unlike normal rhinoceros behaviour, but was actually a characteristic of the buffalo. It is animals like this rhino, not conforming to a type and by some freak of circumstances behaving out of character, who cause the death of many a white hunter.