

The Luck of the Game

by J. A. JORDAN

The man who goes out shooting with strangers takes a certain amount of risk ;

when you are after big game in the wilds the danger becomes still more acute. In this

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story Mr. Jordan narrates what happened when he rashly undertook to initiate

a young Dutchman into the ways of elephants, lions, and rhinos.

IN 1916 I was camped at the Eddama Ravine, East Africa, near a house belonging to a Dutchman who was engaged in surveying for the Government. Generally he would come along to my tent for a drink and a smoke before turning in for the night, and one morning, after the mail was in, he came across and told me that his brother had just arrived from South Africa, and asked me to keep an eye on his place while he went to Londiana Station, about twenty-five miles away, to meet him. He returned later, accompanied by a burly Boer, whom he introduced to me as his brother.

I recognized the newcomer as a man we had taken prisoner during the Boer War, and found that he had not forgotten the incident, and we were soon laughing and joking over old times. The young man, I discovered, was frightfully keen to go on a big-game shoot, having killed nothing bigger than a springbok down south.

The brother was also anxious for me to go out with him, offering to pay all expenses and share half of any ivory we might obtain. Having very little to do at the time I agreed, and in the course of a week we were on the trail. If I had been a clairvoyant, however,

I should have stayed at the Ravine and left the tutelage of a greenhorn hunter to the tender mercies of someone else.

The first day out we camped at a Masai kraal, where my companion nearly got a spear into him through annoying a young girl of the tribe. I found him surrounded by a crowd of angry warriors, but luckily for him I managed to get them to believe that he had been drinking and was not responsible for his actions. When we were alone I gave him to understand that if anything of the sort happened again I should go straight back and leave him to face the music. This rankled in his mind all through the fortnight's trip, but I only discovered the fact later on.

On the third day out we struck fresh elephant spoor, but too late to follow it up. Early next morning we were on the trail, though we got no sight of elephant until late in the afternoon. We were then in the Kidon Valley, and it looked as if the animals were making for the Soli, a fair-sized lake about ten miles from where we had first sighted them. There was just one decent-sized tree in the valley, so we camped alongside it. The Kidon in those days was infested with all kinds of animals ; there

were a number of rhinoceros, noted for their bad-tempered ways, and lions were everywhere, so that it was not exactly a desirable resting-place. That night, just as it became dark, the lions started from the four points of the compass, their terrible roars pealing out in volumes and dying away in short grunts. My young companion soon got a fit of nerves, and before I could stop him had seized his rifle and began to fire at random in all directions. I had my suspicions then that the man was not quite right in his mind, but it took me a long time to explain to him that there was no danger of the lions coming our way while we kept up good camp-fires.

I fell asleep to the sound of a zebra being chased by a lion, and was then awakened again by a rhino. Grabbing my rifle, I hurried out of my tent just in time to see one of the sights of a lifetime—a huge figure of most peculiar shape plunging about in a most extraordinary manner. The fire had died down, so I threw a handful of dry bushwood on, and when it blazed up I saw what had happened. The Dutchman's tent had disappeared and now encased the astonished rhino, who was busily engaged in tearing it to shreds. Not knowing whether my companion was underneath or inside it, I was afraid to fire, in case I might kill him. I stood watching, therefore, until I heard a shout from the lower branches of the tree: "Shoot, confound you, shoot!"

I needed no urging, because the maddened brute had by this time got rid of most of the tent, so I gave him both barrels of my gun. I heard the "slap, slap" of the impact of the bullets, and when the smoke cleared saw that I had brought down the intruder. Shouting the glad news to the man in the tree, I told him to come down, but he informed me very emphatically that he meant to stay where he was until it was light. I therefore hailed the boys, who gradually appeared in ones and twos, and I was able to get their story.

It appeared that the Boer could not sleep, and took care they also got no sleep; in fact, he worried them so much that they finally left the camp and built another fire about a hundred yards away, behind a clump of bushes. Their desertion scared my fellow-sportsman so much that he clambered up the tree to be out of danger. A passing rhinoceros, noticing the fire and being of an inquisitive turn of mind, came up to investigate. Scenting the Dutchman's tent, which was in a line with the fire, he promptly charged it, pulling the pegs out and becoming entangled himself. We discovered that he had smashed the camp bed and other odds and ends, and that the tent was a wreck and quite useless.

It was now about 4 a.m., so I told the

cook to make some coffee and my personal boy to get my bath ready, and it was not long before I was dressed. The fragrant smell of the coffee and the sight of breakfast being prepared brought my companion down to earth from his tree-top, and he promptly started to "slang" me for not having saved his tent!

What with having my night's rest spoilt and his insults, I began to feel bad-tempered, and presently I let myself go, so that the Boer heard more home-truths in a few minutes than he had ever heard before in his life. I ended up by telling him we would return to the Ravine at once; but fate decreed otherwise.

One of the boys, who had gone to collect firewood, reported a large mob of elephants a few hundred yards away, so, thinking we might get a decent tusk or two, I suggested going after them. The Dutchman told me to go on first and he would catch us up. I therefore went on, accompanied by the gun-bearers, and we presently located the elephants near a range of hills which stood up about a hundred feet from the plain. I worked my way there, and soon had them facing me. We then sat down and waited for my companion to come up. We sat there for about an hour, but there was no sign of my fellow-sportsman. Just as I made up my mind to start shooting "on my own," one of the boys pointed out a moving figure about six hundred yards away. At first I thought it was an animal, but after watching carefully found it to be a man—my friend the Boer. Knowing the elephants could not see our movements, we waved our hats and at last drew his attention so that he came directly towards us. When he got within three hundred yards he caught sight of the elephants and, to my astonishment, at once opened fire. The first bullet came whizzing right over us, speedily followed by a second and third, so that we had to lie flat on the ground to save ourselves from being hit.

The elephants, alarmed by the firing, had started off, and I knew we had lost a fine chance of getting some big tuskers. Cursing softly, I raised myself from the ground—only to draw more fire! Thinking the Dutchman must have gone raving mad, I told one of the boys to creep towards him and—if he looked sane—to tell him he was shooting at us, but if he was mad to return to me.

We had not long to wait before they both appeared. The Dutchman was profuse in his expressions of sorrow, saying that he had taken us for lions! I told him a few more home-truths, and then we started for camp. When within a few hundred yards of the camp we ran into another very large

mob of elephant—quite two hundred, I should say. Not wishing to have another fiasco, I told the Dutchman to keep close to me and gave him my gun to carry. We got within about seventy yards of the beasts and then, noticing they were on the move, I fired at a big bull. No sooner had the shot rung out than a young bull came rushing towards us, ears stretched out and trunk upraised, uttering savage squeals of rage. I asked the Boer for the .500 gun, feeling fairly confident of knocking the charging brute down before he got us. The sight had been too much for my gallant comrade, however; he turned tail and ran, throwing my rifle away in the bush!

I flung myself on the ground, burying my face in the grass with the awful thought that I should soon have the monster's trunk encircling me. I could hear the brute pulling up bushes to reach me, and one's sensations while expecting to be ground to pulp by a sixty-inch foot, or thrown into the air like a ball by a tremendous trunk, are indescribable.

The time during which I waited for the tragedy seemed to me hours, but in reality it was only a few minutes. Failing to hear the animal approaching, I screwed my neck round and cautiously investigated the position. Raising myself up, I saw the beast about thirty yards away, offering a most tempting shot. I still had my empty rifle in my hand, so, reloading, I aimed for the heart and pulled the trigger. I could see by the plunge forward that I had vitally wounded the elephant, but I failed to bring him down. He made for some thick grass and bush and I got in another two bullets. I then cautiously followed up, but did not fancy the look of the grass, so, noticing a mimosa tree near I clambered on it, but unfortunately disturbed some bees. Before I knew what was happening I was severely stung on the neck, face, and arms.

Scrambling down as fast as I could, I spied the wounded elephant to the right of me, only a few yards away. I think the pain of the stings made me do what, in ordinary circumstances, I should not have thought of. I put my rifle nearly alongside the elephant and pulled the trigger. We both came down together, the bull stone dead, and myself in a sorry plight. Luckily my boys came up and drew out the stings before the infected parts began to swell, otherwise I should have become a raving lunatic.

The Dutchman came up as soon as he heard the elephant was dead, but the sight of him only made my stings ache more, so I left him to attend to the cutting-out of the ivory, while I returned to camp and was soon in a feverish sleep.

The pain lasted all the next day, but my companion left me in peace, wandering out with the boys and shooting some zebra. This meant another day's delay to dry the skins, so next morning I proposed that we should go out and try to bag a lion, as our boys had twice seen some.

On leaving camp we crossed a swamp, making towards some hills where we had heard lions every night. We had just got through the reeds when my partner spotted a lioness with a young pig in her mouth. He shouted the news to me, and the sound of his voice so scared the lioness that she dropped the pig, which, being still alive, came careering over towards me. Before I could fire I was tripped up by the pig running into my legs. Meanwhile the Dutchman had taken a snap shot at the lioness as she bounded away and was certain he had wounded her. As we could find no blood-spoor, however, it remained doubtful in my mind, but certainly not in his.

Whilst we were searching in different directions, I heard him fire again, so I made my way to where he was, and found him looking across a stream towards some rocks. Seeing nothing there, I asked what he had shot at. "The lioness," he replied.

We crossed the stream, worked round the rocks, and there found a dead leopard, a very fine male. How the Dutchman could have mistaken it for a lioness I do not know; or, if it was a leopard he saw in the first place, how was it the beast only had one wound, and that right through the chest?

I congratulated him on his luck, and then said I would return to camp and send out some boys to carry in the dead beast. I started away, and had just reached the thick reeds when I heard a shot, and at the same time my helmet was swept off my head. When I picked it up I saw a bullet-hole right through the top! Feeling sure I had been fired at deliberately, I skirted along inside the reeds till I had my companion in line, and then fired three shots about two feet above his head. I dared not try to copy his fancy shooting stunt, because I was shaking with rage, and feared there might be a tragedy. The shots hissing over him, however, had the desired effect, for he shouted for all he was worth. I waited a little time and then moved to another position and again fired his way. This brought more screams of fright, and then I strolled out towards him. He asked me what I meant by shooting at him, and I replied by showing him my helmet. Thereupon he swore that he had fired at a reed-buck, which I knew was a lie, because he was a remarkably good shot when not scared. Having told him my opinion of him, I made him return to camp for the

boys while I stayed by the leopard. I said some very bitter things to my companion that afternoon—so bitter that he fairly got the sulks. After tea I thought I would take the shot-gun and try for some marabou storks. I misjudged the distance, and did not arrive until it was getting dark. I shot all the birds I wanted, plucked out the feathers, and then started on my return journey, but it was too dark to find the way. I blundered along for about ten minutes, but ran into so many bushes that I saw it was impossible to get along, so I determined to light a fire and stay where I was until morning.

To my annoyance, however, I found I had no matches with me, and as there was no



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night if the sound of a rhino had not scared me. The great brute was somewhere at the back of me, giving off sounds like an engine shunting. I knew that if he once got my wind it would be a case of "good-bye," for no shot-gun would stop a rhino. I forgot all about scratches and stumbling; my one idea was to get out of that bush as quickly as possible. Eventually I succeeded, and saw the camp-fire in the distance. I reached camp in record time, arriving with my clothes torn and bleeding from innumerable scratches.

Next morning we started back, and on arrival at the Ravine sold the ivory and



decent tree to climb for safety, I decided to struggle on as best I could.

The lions had just started their nightly hunt for food, and there seemed to be all kinds of beasts in my way. First I came on some water-buck—which stampeded with a terrifying racket—and then I caught the gleam of eyes, which quickly disappeared as I brought the shot-gun to my shoulder. Fortunately I knew my direction and felt certain of finding the camp once I could get out of the bush and scrub.

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duly shared the proceeds. I then parted company with my companion, whom I never saw again, for I heard a short time afterwards that he had been killed by the natives.