

## 6 In Cold Sweat

LIONS ARE THE MOST HANDSOME CREATURES in nature — and the most unpredictable. I will never forget the day in the Samburu Game Reserve, in Kenya, when I was alone in an open jeep, driving through the dry bush country. I heard something move behind a thorn bush, and I stopped the jeep and stood up. I did not have to wait too long. A beautiful, tawny, sleek lioness moved out of the bush and walked up to the car. She rubbed her back and rump against the bumper, then scratched her side against the fender. She never noticed my presence. I must confess I was somewhat perturbed by this. What was I to her? A rodent? A baboon? I wasn't even worthy enough to kill or eat. She was a queen and, to her, I was nothing.

In Africa, lions often moved into our campsite. They chewed up our camp chairs, turned over small tables, and at the same time refused to find us worth noticing. However, when they are feeding on a zebra or a wildebeest, it is not advisable to approach them. They chase away the hyenas, jackals, and vultures. They insist on privacy while eating, so I try to keep far away from them during their mealtime.

I learned a long time ago that actually we are not on the menu of the average lion. Lions prefer larger animals like antelopes. Sometimes they will even take on buffalo and giraffes,

but in these fights, the lions are often the losers. One night, in the Tsavo National Park, I heard the bloodcurdling sounds of a terrible fight. The next morning, not far from the camp, I found the gored carcass of a full-maned lion and the body of a bull buffalo, both predator and prey dead from the loss of blood. Why would a lion challenge such a formidable adversary when the savanna is full of easy kills like the wildebeest, zebra, impala, and hartebeest? It must be a question of pride — or stupidity.

Lions will sometimes attack men gratuitously, but not often. Just as a cat will pounce on a rolling ball, a lion may jump on anything that runs away from him. His instinct to attack a run-away target is imprinted in him and does not follow logic. My soundman Jimmy Chapman, for example, was killed by a semi-tame lion when Jimmy ran from him. On the other hand, when Dr. Livingstone was attacked by a lion, he did the proper thing and did not move. He was seriously injured but he was not killed. A lion is quite harmless when he is taking a siesta because he does not want to be bothered. While driving in the Serengeti Plain, I once passed two beautiful black-maned lions resting in the short grass, and I wanted to photograph them. My sons and my assistant made all kinds of noises — slamming car doors, honking horns — anything to make them react, short of throwing stones at them. Neither of the lions paid any attention to us. Even when I got out of the car and approached them, they disregarded us totally, shut their eyes, and dozed off.

There was one time, however, when things were different, when I was followed all day by a large female, when in a cold sweat I anticipated an attack, when I learned more about lions than I ever hoped to learn.

It started in the Serengeti Plain. Dr. Murray Watson, an ecologist, allowed me to go along with him in his Piper Super Cub when he went out to take an animal census. It was an unforgettable day and an unforgettable sight.

Millions of animals were migrating from the bone-dry

Serengeti Plain to Lake Victoria and the Masai Mara Game Reserve in search of water and green grass. The vision took me back millions of years to when animals ruled the world, and our ancestors, the apelike humanoids, were hiding in caves and coves or dense forests in hope of being less visible, just as gorillas behave today on the slopes of the Virunga volcano or the Ruwenzori Mountains. I felt elated to observe nature in this primal form, the parade of each species, the wildebeests moving in single file by the tens of thousands, followed by zebras, buffaloes, a herd of elephants. Elsewhere, a troupe of giraffes advanced, flanked by lions, predators following the prey. Some people call this migration the eighth wonder of the world. To me it is the greatest wonder.

Different animals evolve to take advantage of different opportunities in nature. The browsers, the bush eaters, the grazers, the grass eaters, animals with long necks, animals with short necks, animals with stripes, animals in camouflage suits, animals with horns of different shapes and designs, all are endowed with an instinct that will guide them to the right place at the right time to assure the survival of their newborn.

The next morning, at first light, I left our camp to intercept this incredible migration and study their behavior during such mass movement. Lions were visible everywhere. From the plane, we counted 104 lions, moving along in peaceful coexistence with the antelopes, zebras, and giraffes. Lions feed in the night, and the grass eaters are aware that their enemies are not hungry during the day, so they accept their presence.

Later, studying a behavioral phenomenon among the plains animals, I drove among the wild herds in my Land-Rover and noticed that while a hundred gazelles would break into a fast gallop as my car approached, a few would stand still, undisturbed and unafraid. The same held true with the hartebeests, zebras, and others. My interest was in the different temperaments and degrees of excitability of the individual animals.

While I watched the migrating herds, I paid no attention to

my thermostat. Suddenly my radiator began to steam and my car was in serious trouble. I stopped and opened the hood while four pairs of lion eyes watched me from the bush as I diagnosed the fact that my water pump had committed suicide. It was an unpleasant discovery in ninety-degree heat, at least twenty-two miles from our camp. I was not on a road where I could count on other cars coming along. I had no weapon, no food, no radio. My only choice was to walk back to the camp, crossing through the migrating herds with lions on the flanks, not to mention elephants, rhinos, and hyenas. There was also the danger of sunstroke. I had no hat, and most of the land was open to the sky. A sunstroke can be as fatal as an attack by a lion if not treated immediately. And I had still another problem. I had recently fractured some of my vertebrae, and so I was not in my best physical condition. Was I scared? Yes! But I had to start at once to reach help before nightfall. Most of the predators, especially the hyenas, like to eat people at night, and I didn't cherish the idea of being eaten by a hyena.

As soon as I began my long walk, I heard the yellow grass rustling behind me. I turned and looked. There was an enormous female lion following me, just sauntering behind me. I knew that I must not run or I might provoke an attack. When a 500-pound body pounces on a human back, something is bound to give. I knew what I had to do. I must disregard her and do nothing that would excite her, but I could not help thinking about my friend who was killed by a lion, and this did not do much for my morale.

I tried to think positively, persuading myself that to be killed by a lion is not the worst thing that could happen to me. I have witnessed many lion kills, and most of them are immediate. I thought that, since I am a zoologist, it would be quite stylish to end that way — both stylish and swift. It would come at the peak of my career. No hospitals. No senility. No suffering. It would be a distinguished end to my life as an explorer: "Ivan Tors, died at age fifty-seven in Masai territory, killed by a lion."

I liked the way it sounded. I was less scared than before. It was settled in my mind: today I will be eaten by a lion and I will die in style.

Suddenly I noticed a nine-foot-long python slithering in front of my feet. Impulsively I jumped over the snake. The python struck because I had frightened her. But she missed my leg. Then I realized my own stupidity. My quick move could have startled the lion and she could have jumped on me. I looked behind me, but I did not see the lion. Either the grass was too high or she had decided on a detour.

I continued my journey through the high grass. A herd of hartebeests blocked my path. It would be quite easy for one of these giant antelopes to run a man down, but in their genetic memory, they still retain the print of the great fangs of the saber-toothed tiger from a time when fighting was useless and flight was the only escape. Their enemies, including the lions and the leopards, developed fangs and claws, and the antelopes themselves developed powerful legs and split toes to carry them over soft grounds with considerable speed. But antelopes have also come to understand lions better than any scholar has, and so have found another way to save their hides.

Lions have formed the habit, during the many millions of years of successful existence, of surprising their prey. This means stalking them from behind against the wind and jumping on their backs when an attack is least suspected — usually breaking the back of the prey. Antelopes, for their part, have learned that frontal attack is unlikely and that spotting a lion and not running is the safest tactic. If an antelope herd sees a lion, they usually turn toward the lion and stare him down. The lion, thus discovered, becomes confused, and then disappears to try his luck on another herd of antelopes that perhaps will remain unaware of his presence.

When the hartebeests in front of me did not run away, but stood staring past me, I knew that the lioness, my faithful if unnerving companion, was still behind me — it was she who was holding their attention. I continued on until I reached a

riverine forest. I could no longer see my pursuer, but giraffes were staring at me from their high vantage point, and suddenly I heard something that I didn't like. I looked to my left, where the strange sound originated, and there he was, a huge red-maned lion, taking his noontime nap and snoring like mad. He looked like a stuffed toy, but I knew he was packed with dynamite. As I watched him with some degree of anxiety, a tsetse fly landed on my nose and bit me. My sharp slap scared the giraffes away, but luckily it did not awaken the dreaming lion.

Since it was too hot for me in the open savanna, I entered the wooded area — and there awaiting me was another surprise. A herd of Cape buffaloes with the same idea had sought shelter in the shaded area that I was headed for.

The buffalo is considered man's most dangerous adversary on the African continent. More hunters have been killed by buffaloes than by lions, leopards, and elephants combined. I moved very slowly, parallel with their column, never toward them. They stopped browsing and eyed me with their bloodshot, villainous eyes. Suddenly they broke into a gallop, not toward me but away from me. I followed them cautiously, relying on the thought that they had decided that I was no menace. But then they abruptly stopped and all stared in my direction again, as though they had changed their minds. I looked behind me. As with the hartebeests it was not I who was the target of their gaze; my lioness was still behind me after all, accompanying me back to the river.

I had walked too many hours and I was dehydrated. I was almost at the point of being indifferent to the danger. I picked up a twig and took a bearing with my watch. By halving the arc made by the shadow of the twig on my watch, I confirmed that I was headed in the right direction, and so I continued through the grass, avoiding the more unpredictable wooded area.

I walked about fifteen minutes and reached a tree. I felt weak and I wanted to rest for a few minutes in the shade. Suddenly, an ominous growl sent a rush of adrenalin through my veins. I turned around. There were two lions behind me.

They seemed to be behaving strangely, as if they were in a fighting mood. Looking for escape, I climbed up the tree in front of me but the branch I reached for snapped, and I fell ten feet — onto a sharp rock. I didn't feel the pain at first because I was too scared, thinking that the lions would be on top of me any second. I was wrong. The lions were tangling limbs, the male on top of the female. There they were, just two feet away from me, mating. Lion lovemaking, as I then observed from close up, is accompanied by biting, growling, and a lot of macho behavior. I had been snubbed again. They did not give a damn about the human baboon.

In my fall, I had reinjured my broken vertebrae and smashed my watch. I was in pain, and from here on, I could only follow my nose. But none of this stopped me from getting away from the amorous pair and continuing toward the camp. I had only one motivation, and that was to get back and relieve my thirst.

As I kept walking in the late afternoon hour, the lioness passed me unexpectedly on my right and took a position on a high mound. I soon realized what she was interested in. At that moment, a pack of wild dogs appeared from a clump of trees. The African hunting dog is as ugly as the lion is beautiful. He is not big, not strong, and he has ragged spotted fur of many colors. Lone dogs could not survive in the African savanna because hyenas and leopards would eat them for breakfast, but a hunting pack is a dangerous force and cannot be challenged by hyenas, leopards, or lions. In fact, as a pack, they are the best-organized hunters of the veldt.

That afternoon I had a graphic demonstration of this. The target of the pack was a five-hundred-pound wildebeest, which has deadly hooves and deadly horns. The lead dog, who could not have weighed more than forty-five pounds, rushed the antelope, attacking it head-on, and bit through its nostrils. With a mighty jerk, he pulled the wildebeest's head down and threw the animal off balance. With the dog's fangs firmly embedded in the beast's nose, it could neither kick nor gore, and no mat-

ter how hard it shook its head, it could not dislodge the lead dog. At the same moment, three other dogs attacked the antelope, tearing at its flanks, hamstringing it, immobilizing it. Within seconds, the huge wildebeest was lying on its side, being eaten alive, for the rest of the pack had joined the attackers and were gorging themselves on the hot bloody meat. I was quite positive that the animal did not feel any pain. The unexpected attack, the struggle, and the resulting rush of adrenalin paralyzed and anesthetized it.

With all this excitement I realized I had not paid attention to the lioness. But when I looked at the mound, it was deserted, nor could I spot her anywhere else. She, too, had seen the terrifying and impressive skill with which the wild dogs had made their kill, and she had decided to move on to less precarious ground. I, however, stayed awhile longer to observe the dogs' behavior, and I was rewarded with another example of their cooperation.

When they had eaten their fill, they returned to the nearby hyena hole that was their temporary residence. About fifteen tiny pups, under the watchful eye of a full-grown female, were waiting for them. The lead dog regurgitated his food so that the babysitter dog could eat, and the others regurgitated their food for the pups. It was the most unselfish society I have ever encountered. Nature had taught them that they could survive in competition with other large predators only by full cooperation with one another. The care for their young overshadowed their own hunger. They would then go on another hunt to fill up their own stomachs. I could no longer despise this "despicable" breed. I found something appealing in their lifestyle, even if the antelopes would disagree.

Night would fall any minute, but I was near the river and close to our campsite. The Mara River was surrounded by herds of elephants, buffaloes, waterbucks, hippos, and a few basking crocodiles. I had become a different person since I

began my walk in the morning; I was no longer scared. After all, the creatures of the wild had left me alone and allowed me to survive. I was part of the ecosystem.

I was almost at the end of my journey, but I was so dehydrated that I could wait no longer to drink. The Mara River is probably infested with blood flukes, flatworms that carry the disease bilharziasis, which destroys the human kidney. Nevertheless, I dropped onto the ground at a place where the flow of the river was swift, remembering that germs usually cannot survive in fast-flowing water. I washed my face and drank and drank, not caring that it might mean my death. A hippo and a crocodile watched me, but I felt that I was one of them and needn't be afraid. They had had plenty of food that day from the migration crossing the river, and I was not on their menu. Ten minutes later I was back at camp.

It had been the most horrifying and the most beautiful day of my life. I arrived home with new feelings, new understandings, a new outlook. From then on, I belonged among the natural creatures. I was fit to survive!

## 7 Monsters of the Nile

AS A CHILD I used to dream about the Nile. I had read all the books on the exploration of the headwaters, such as the travels of Sir Richard Burton, Sir Samuel Baker, John Speke, and other pioneers, and now, many years later, I was there. I hired a fifty-five-foot powerboat from the Ugandan game department and set off to cover the Victoria Nile. Accompanying me were my ten-year-old son David; my cameraman, John Pearson; his wife and assistant, Jennie; and three Acholi tribesmen, who were our guides. The weather was perfect, the vistas magnificent — Murchison Falls (now Kabarega Falls) in the background and forests bordering the great river, from which elephants, buffaloes, and waterbucks drank. There were giant hippos everywhere, and I counted 650 large crocodiles between Para Lodge and the falls, a distance of ten miles.

As our boat passed a herd of elephants drinking, I told my son how, according to Rudyard Kipling, the elephant got his trunk. The fairy tale related that elephants used to have ordinary noses, but once when an elephant was drinking, a giant crocodile grabbed his nose and pulled and pulled until it became a trunk. As I was telling the story, one of the Acholi boatmen interrupted me, saying that the fairy tale was a lie. He had once seen a crocodile grab the trunk of an elephant and the elephant heave the croc against a tree, breaking its body in two.