

R. M. BALLANTYNE



**THE GORILLA
HUNTERS**

MUSAICUM ADVENTURE CLASSICS

R. M. Ballantyne

The Gorilla Hunters (Musaicum Adventure Classics)

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CHAPTER ONE.

In which the hunters are introduced.

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It was five o'clock in the afternoon. There can be no doubt whatever as to that. Old Agnes may say what she pleases—she has a habit of doing so—but I know for certain (because I looked at my watch not ten minutes before it happened) that it was exactly five o'clock in the afternoon when I received a most singular and every way remarkable visit—a visit which has left an indelible impression on my memory, as well it might; for, independent of its singularity and unexpectedness, one of its results was the series of strange adventures which are faithfully detailed in this volume.

It happened thus:—

I was seated in an armchair in my private study in a small town on the west coast of England. It was a splendid afternoon, and it was exactly five o'clock. Mark that. Not that there is anything singular about the mere fact, neither is it in any way mixed up with the thread of this tale; but old Agnes is very obstinate—singularly positive—and I have a special desire that she should see it in print, that I have not given in on that point. Yes, it was five precisely, and a beautiful evening. I was ruminating, as I frequently do, on the pleasant memories of bygone days, especially the happy days that I spent long ago among the coral islands of the Pacific, when a tap at the door aroused me.

“Come in.”

“A veesiter, sir,” said old Agnes (my landlady), “an’ he’ll no gie his name.”

Old Agnes, I may remark, is a Scotchwoman.

“Show him in,” said I.

“Maybe he’s a pickpocket,” suggested Agnes.

“I’ll take my chance of that.”

“Ay! that’s like ‘ee. Cares for naethin’. Losh, man, what if he cuts yer throat?”

“I’ll take my chance of that too; only *do* show him in, my good woman,” said I, with a gesture of impatience that caused the excellent (though obstinate) old creature to depart, grumbling.

In another moment a quick step was heard on the stair, and a stranger burst into the room, shut the door in my landlady’s face as she followed him, and locked it.

I was naturally surprised, though not alarmed, by the abrupt and eccentric conduct of my visitor, who did not condescend to take off his hat, but stood with his arms folded on his breast, gazing at me and breathing hard.

“You are agitated, sir; pray be seated,” said I, pointing to a chair.

The stranger, who was a little man and evidently a gentleman, made no reply, but, seizing a chair, placed it exactly before me, sat down on it as he would have seated himself on a horse, rested his arms on the back, and stared me in the face.

“You are disposed to be facetious,” said I, smiling (for I never take offence without excessively good reason).

“Not at all, by no means,” said he, taking off his hat and throwing it recklessly on the floor. “You are Mr Rover, I presume?”

“The same, sir, at your service.”

“Are you? oh, that’s yet to be seen! Pray, is your Christian name Ralph?”

“It is,” said I, in some surprise at the coolness of my visitor.

“Ah! just so. Christian name Ralph, t’other name Rover—Ralph Rover. Very good. Age twenty-two yesterday, eh?”

“My birthday *was* yesterday, and my age *is* twenty-two. You appear to know more of my private history than I have the pleasure of knowing of yours. Pray, sir, may I—but, bless me! are you unwell?”

I asked this in some alarm, because the little man was rolling about in his seat, holding his sides, and growing very red in the face.

“Oh no! not at all; perfectly well—never was better in my life,” he said, becoming all at once preternaturally grave. “You were once in the Pacific—lived on a coral island—”

“I did.”

“Oh, don’t trouble yourself to answer. Just shut up for a minute or two. You were rather a soft green youth then, and you don’t seem to be much harder or less verdant now.”

“Sir!” I exclaimed, getting angry.

“Just so,” continued he, “and you knew a young rascal there—”

“I know a rascal *here*,” I exclaimed, starting up, “whom I’ll kick—”

“What!” cried the little stranger, also starting up and capsizing the chair; “Ralph Rover, has time and sunburning and war so changed my visage that you cannot recognise Peterkin?”

I almost gasped for breath.

“Peterkin—Peterkin Gay!” I exclaimed.

I am not prone to indulge in effeminate demonstration, but I am not ashamed to confess that when I gazed on the

weather-beaten though ruddy countenance of my old companion, and observed the eager glance of his bright blue eyes, I was quite overcome, and rushed violently into his arms. I may also add that until that day I had had no idea of Peterkin's physical strength; for during the next five minutes he twisted me about and spun me round and round my own room until my brain began to reel, and I was fain to cry him mercy.

"So, you're all right—the same jolly, young old wiseacre in whiskers and long coat," cried Peterkin. "Come now, Ralph, sit down if you can. I mean to stay with you all evening, and all night, and all to-morrow, and all next day, so we'll have lots of time to fight our battles o'er again. Meanwhile compose yourself, and I'll tell you what I've come about. Of course, my first and chief reason was to see your face, old boy; but I have another reason too—a very peculiar reason. I've a proposal to make and a plan to unfold, both of 'em stunners; they'll shut you up and screw you down, and altogether flabbergast you when you hear 'em, so sit down and keep quiet—do."

I sat down accordingly, and tried to compose myself; but, to say truth, I was so much overjoyed and excited by the sight of my old friend and companion that I had some difficulty at first in fixing my attention on what he said, the more especially that he spoke with extreme volubility, and interrupted his discourse very frequently, in order to ask questions or to explain.

"Now, old fellow," he began, "here goes, and mind you don't interrupt me. Well, I mean to go, and I mean you to go with me, to—but, I forgot, perhaps you won't be able to go. What are you?"

"What am I?"

“Ay, your profession, your calling; lawyer, M.D., scrivener—
—which?”

“I am a naturalist.”

“A what?”

“A naturalist.”

“Ralph,” said Peterkin slowly, “have you been long troubled with that complaint?”

“Yes,” I replied, laughing; “I have suffered from it from my earliest infancy, more or less.”

“I thought so,” rejoined my companion, shaking his head gravely. “I fancied that I observed the development of that disease when we lived together on the coral island. It don’t bring you in many thousands a year, does it?”

“No,” said I, “it does not. I am only an amateur, having a sufficiency of this world’s goods to live on without working for my bread. But although my dear father at his death left me a small fortune, which yields me three hundred a year, I do not feel entitled to lead the life of an idler in this busy world, where so many are obliged to toil night and day for the bare necessaries of life. I have therefore taken to my favourite studies as a sort of business, and flatter myself that I have made one or two not unimportant discoveries, and added a few mites to the sum of human knowledge. A good deal of my time is spent in scientific roving expeditions throughout the country, and in contributing papers to several magazines.”

While I was thus speaking I observed that Peterkin’s face was undergoing the most remarkable series of changes of expression, which, as I concluded, merged into a smile of beaming delight, as he said,—“Ralph, you’re a trump!”

“Possibly,” said I, “you are right; but, setting that question aside for the present, let me remind you that you have not yet told me where you mean to go to.”

“I mean,” said Peterkin slowly, placing both hands on his knees and looking me steadily in the face—“I mean to go a-hunting in—but I forgot. You don’t know that I’m a hunter, a somewhat famous hunter?”

“Of course I don’t. You are so full of your plans and proposals that you have not yet told me where you have been or what doing these six years. And you ye never written to me once all that time, shabby fellow. I thought you were dead.”

“Did you go into mourning for me, Ralph?”

“No, of course not.”

“A pretty fellow you are to find fault. You thought that I, your oldest and best friend, was dead, and you did not go into mourning. How could I write to you when you parted from me without giving me your address? It was a mere chance my finding you out even now. I was taking a quiet cup of coffee in the commercial room of a hotel not far distant, when I overheard a stranger speaking of his friend ‘Ralph Rover, the philosopher,’ so I plunged at him promiscuously, and made him give me your address. But I’ve corresponded with Jack ever since we parted on the pier at Dover.”

“What! Jack—Jack Martin?” I exclaimed, as a warm gush of feeling filled my heart at the sound of his well-remembered name. “Is Jack alive?”

“Alive! I should think so. If possible, he’s more alive than ever; for I should suppose he must be full-grown now, which he was not when we last met. He and I have corresponded regularly. He lives in the north of England, and by good luck happens to be just now within thirty miles of this town. You don’t mean to say, Ralph, that you have never met!”

“Never. The very same mistake that happened with you occurred between him and me. We parted vowing to

correspond as long as we should live, and three hours after I remembered that we had neglected to exchange our addresses, so that we could not correspond. I have often, often made inquiries both for you and him, but have always failed. I never heard of Jack from the time we parted at Dover till to-day."

"Then no doubt you thought us both dead, and yet you did not go into mourning for either of us! O Ralph, Ralph, I had entertained too good an opinion of you."

"But tell me about Jack," said I, impatient to hear more concerning my dear old comrade.

"Not just now, my boy; more of him in a few minutes. First let us return to the point. What was it? Oh! a—about my being a celebrated hunter. A very Nimrod—at least a miniature copy. Well, Ralph, since we last met I have been all over the world, right round and round it. I'm a lieutenant in the navy now—at least I was a week ago. I've been fighting with the Kaffirs and the Chinamen, and been punishing the rascally sepoy in India, and been hunting elephants in Ceylon and tiger-shooting in the jungles, and harpooning whales in the polar seas, and shooting lions at the Cape; oh, you've no notion where all I've been. It's a perfect marvel I've turned up here alive. But there's one beast I've not yet seen, and I'm resolved to see him and shoot him too—"

"But," said I, interrupting, "what mean you by saying that you were a lieutenant in the navy a week ago?"

"I mean that I've given it up. I'm tired of the sea. I only value it as a means of getting from one country to another. The land, the land for me! You must know that an old uncle, a rich old uncle of mine, whom I never saw, died lately and left me his whole fortune. Of course he died in India. All old uncles who die suddenly and leave unexpected fortunes to

unsuspecting nephews are old Indian uncles, and mine was no exception to the general rule. So I'm independent, like you, Ralph, only I've got three or four thousand a year instead of hundreds, I believe; but I'm not sure and don't care—and I'm determined now to go on a long hunting expedition. What think ye of all that, my boy?"

"In truth," said I, "it would puzzle me to say what I think, I am so filled with surprise by all you tell me. But you forget that you have not yet told me to which part of the world you mean to go, and what sort of beast it is you are so determined to see and shoot if you can."

"If I can!" echoed Peterkin, with a contemptuous curl of the lip. "Did not I tell you that I was a *celebrated* hunter? Without meaning to boast, I may tell you that there is no peradventure in my shooting. If I only get there and see the brute within long range, I'll—ha! won't I!"

"Get *where*, and see *what*?"

"Get to Africa and see the gorilla!" cried Peterkin, while a glow of enthusiasm lighted up his eyes. "You've heard of the gorilla, Ralph, of course—the great ape—the enormous puggy—the huge baboon—the man monkey, that we've been hearing so much of for some years back, and that the niggers on the African coast used to dilate about till they caused the very hair of my head to stand upon end? I'm determined to shoot a gorilla, or prove him to be a myth. And I mean you to come and help me, Ralph; he's quite in your way. A bit of natural history, I suppose, although he seems by all accounts to be a very unnatural monster. And Jack shall go too—I'm resolved on that; and we three shall roam the wild woods again, as we did in days of yore, and —"

"Hold, Peterkin," said I, interrupting. "How do you know that Jack will go?"

“How do I know? Intuitively, of course. I shall write to him to-night; the post does not leave till ten. He’ll get it to-morrow at breakfast, and will catch the forenoon coach, which will bring him down here by two o’clock, and then we’ll begin our preparations at once, and talk the matter over at dinner. So you see it’s all cut and dry. Give me a sheet of paper and I’ll write at once. Ah! here’s a bit; now a pen. Bless me, Ralph, haven’t you got a quill? Who ever heard of a philosophical naturalist writing with steel. Now, then, here goes:— ‘B’luv’d Jack,’—will that do to begin with, eh? I’m afraid it’s too affectionate; he’ll think it’s from a lady friend. But it can’t be altered,—‘Here I am, and here’s Ralph—Ralph Rover!!!!!! think of that,’ (I say, Ralph, I’ve put six marks of admiration there); ‘I’ve found him out. Do come to see us. Excruciatingly important business. Ever thine—Peterkin Gay.’ Will that bring him, d’ye think?”

“I think it will,” said I, laughing.

“Then off with it, Ralph,” cried my volatile friend, jumping up and looking hastily round for the bell-rope. Not being able to find it, my bell-pull being an unobtrusive knob and not a rope, he rushed to the door, unlocked it, darted out, and uttered a tremendous roar, which was followed by a clatter and a scream from old Agnes, whom he had upset and tumbled over.

It was curious to note the sudden change that took place in Peterkin’s face, voice, and manner, as he lifted the poor old woman, who was very thin and light, in his arms, and carrying her into the room, placed her in my easy-chair. Real anxiety was depicted in his countenance, and he set her down with a degree of care and tenderness that quite amazed me. I was myself very much alarmed at first.

“My poor dear old *woman*,” said Peterkin, supporting my landlady’s head; “my stupid haste I fear you are hurt.”

“Hech! it’s nae hurt—it’s deed I am, fair deed; killed be a whaumlskamerin’ young blagyird. Oh, ma puir heed!”

The manner and tone in which this was said convinced me that old Agnes was more frightened than injured. In a few minutes the soothing tones and kind manner of my friend had such an effect upon her that she declared she was better, and believed after all that she was only a “wee bit frichtened.” Nay, so completely was she conciliated, that she insisted on conveying the note to the post-office, despite Peterkin’s assurance that he would not hear of it. Finally she hobbled out of the room with the letter in her hand.

It is interesting to note how that, in most of the affairs of humanity, things turn out very different, often totally different, from what we had expected or imagined. During the remainder of that evening Peterkin and I talked frequently and much of our old friend Jack Martin. We recalled his manly yet youthful countenance, his bold, lion-like courage, his broad shoulders and winning gentle smile, and although we knew that six years must have made an immense difference in his personal appearance—for he was not much more than eighteen when we last parted—we could not think of him except as a hearty, strapping sailor-boy. We planned, too, how we would meet him at the coach; how we would stand aside in the crowd until he began to look about for us in surprise, and then one of us would step forward and ask if he wished to be directed to any particular part of the town, and so lead him on and talk to him as a stranger for some time before revealing who we were. And much more to the same effect. But when next day came our plans and our conceptions were utterly upset.

A little before two we sauntered down to the coach-office, and waited impatiently for nearly twenty minutes. Of course

the coach was late; it always is on such occasions.

“Suppose he does not come,” said I.

“What a fellow you are,” cried Peterkin, “to make uncomfortable suppositions! Let us rather suppose that he does come.”

“Oh, then, it would be all right; but if he does not come, what then?”

“Why, then, it would be all wrong, and we should have to return home and eat our dinner in the sulks, that’s all.”

As my companion spoke we observed the coach come sweeping round the turn of the road about half a mile distant. In a few seconds it dashed into the town at full gallop, and finally drew up abruptly opposite the door of the inn, where were assembled the usual group of hostlers and waiters and people who expected friends by the coach.

“He’s not there,” whispered Peterkin, in deep disappointment—“at least he’s not on the outside, and Jack would never travel inside of a coach even in bad weather, much less in fine. That’s not him on the back-seat beside the fat old woman with the blue bundle, surely! It’s very like him, but too young, much too young. There’s a great giant of a man on the box-seat with a beard like a grenadier’s shako, and a stout old gentleman behind him with gold spectacles. That’s all, except two boys farther aft, and three ladies in the cabin. Oh, *what a bore!*”

Although deeply disappointed at the non-arrival of Jack, I could with difficulty refrain from smiling at the rueful and woe-begone countenance of my poor companion. It was evident that he could not bear disappointment with equanimity, and I was on the point of offering some consolatory remarks, when my attention was attracted by the little old woman with the blue bundle, who went up to the gigantic man with the black beard, and in the gentlest

possible tone of voice asked if he could direct her to the white house.

“No, madam,” replied the big man hastily; “I’m a stranger here.”

The little old woman was startled by his abrupt answer. “Deary me, sir, no offence, I hope.”

She then turned to Peterkin and put the same question, possibly under a vague sort of impression that if a gigantic frame betokened a gruff nature, diminutive stature must necessarily imply extreme amiability. If so, she must have been much surprised as well as disappointed, for Peterkin, rendered irascible by disappointment, turned short round and said sharply, “Why, madam, how can I tell you where the white house is, unless you say which white house you want? Half the houses of the town are white—at least they’re *dirty* white,” he added bitterly, as he turned away.

“I think I can direct you, ma’am,” said I, stepping quickly up with a bland smile, in order to counteract, if possible, my companion’s rudeness.

“Thank you, sir, kindly,” said the little old woman; “I’m glad to find *some* little civility in the town.”

“Come with me, ma’am; I am going past the white house, and will show you the way.”

“And pray, sir,” said the big stranger, stepping up to me as I was about to move away, “can you recommend me to a good hotel?”

I replied that I could; that there was one in the immediate vicinity of the white house, and that if he would accompany me I would show him the way. All this I did purposely in a very affable and obliging tone and manner; for I hold that example is infinitely better than precept, and always endeavour, if possible, to overcome evil with good. I offered my arm to the old woman, who thanked me and took it.

“What!” whispered Peterkin, “you don’t mean me to take this great ugly gorilla in tow?”

“Of course,” replied I, laughing, as I led the way.

Immediately I entered into conversation with my companion, and I heard “the gorilla” attempt to do so with Peterkin; but from the few sharp cross replies that reached my ear, I became aware that he was unsuccessful. In the course of a few minutes, however, he appeared to have overcome his companion’s ill-humour, for I overheard their voices growing louder and more animated as they walked behind me.

Suddenly I heard a shout, and turning hastily round, observed Peterkin struggling in the arms of the gorilla! Amazed beyond measure at the sight, and firmly persuaded that a cowardly assault had been made upon my friend, I seized the old woman’s umbrella, as the only available weapon, and flew to the rescue.

“Jack, my boy! can it be possible?” gasped Peterkin.

“I believe it is,” replied Jack, laughing.—“Ralph, my dear old fellow, how are you?”

I stood petrified. I believed that I was in a dream.

I know not what occurred during the next five minutes. All I could remember with anything like distinctness was a succession of violent screams from the little old woman, who fled shouting thieves and murder at the full pitch of her voice. We never saw that old woman again, but I made a point of returning her umbrella to the “white house.”

Gradually we became collected and sane.

“Why, Jack, how did you find us out?” cried Peterkin, as we all hurried on to my lodgings, totally forgetful of the little old woman, whom, as I have said, we never saw again, but who, I sincerely trust, arrived at the white house in safety.

“Find you out! I knew you the moment I set eyes on you. Ralph puzzled me for a second, he has grown so much stouter; but I should know your nose, Peterkin, at a mile off.”

“Well, Jack, I did not know you,” retorted Peterkin, “but I’m safe never again to forget you. Such a great hairy Cossack as you have become! Why, what do you mean by it?”

“I couldn’t help it, please,” pleaded Jack; “I grew in spite of myself; but I think I’ve stopped now.”

“It’s time,” remarked Peterkin.

Jack had indeed grown to a size that men seldom attain to without losing in grace infinitely more than they gain in bulk, but he had retained all the elegance of form and sturdy vigour of action that had characterised him as a boy. He was fully six feet two inches in his stockings, but so perfect were his proportions that his great height did not become apparent until you came close up to him. Full half of his handsome manly face was hid by a bushy black beard and moustache, and his curly hair had been allowed to grow luxuriantly, so that his whole aspect was more like to the descriptions we have of one of the old Scandinavian Vikings than a gentleman of the present time. In whatever company he chanced to be he towered high above every one else, and I am satisfied that, had he walked down Whitechapel, the Horse Guards would have appeared small beside him, for he possessed not only great length of limb but immense breadth of chest and shoulders.

During our walk to my lodgings Peterkin hurriedly stated his “plan and proposal,” which caused Jack to laugh very much at first, but in a few minutes he became grave, and said slowly, “That will just suit—it will do exactly.”

“What will do exactly? Do be more explicit, man,” said Peterkin, with some impatience.

“I’ll go with you, my boy.”

“Will you?” cried Peterkin, seizing his hand and shaking it violently; “I knew you would. I said it; didn’t I, Ralph? And now we shall be sure of a gorilla, if there’s one in Africa, for I’ll use you as a stalking-horse.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Jack.

“Yes; I’ll put a bear-skin or some sort of fur on your shoulders, and tie a lady’s boa to you for a tail, and send you into the woods. The gorillas will be sure to mistake you for a relative until you get quite close; then you’ll take one pace to the left with the left foot (as the volunteers say), I’ll take one to the front with the right—at fifty yards, ready—present—bang, and down goes the huge puggy with a bullet right between its two eyes! There. And Ralph’s agreed to go too.”

“O Peterkin, I’ve done nothing of the sort. You *proposed* it.”

“Well, and isn’t that the same thing? I wonder, Ralph that you can give way to such mean-spirited prevarication. What? ‘It’s not prevarication!’ Don’t say that now; you know it is. Ah! you may laugh, my boy, but you have promised to go with me and Jack to Africa, and go you shall.”

And so, reader, it was ultimately settled, and in the course of two weeks more we three were on our way to the land of the slave, the black savage, and the gorilla.

CHAPTER TWO.

Life in the wild woods.

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One night, about five or six weeks after our resolution to go to Africa on a hunting expedition was formed, I put to myself the question, "Can it be possible that we are actually here, in the midst of it?"

"Certainly, my boy, in the very thick of it," answered Peterkin, in a tone of voice which made Jack laugh, while I started and exclaimed—

"Why, Peterkin, how did you come to guess my thoughts?"

"Because, Ralph, you have got into a habit of thinking aloud, which may do very well as long as you have no secrets to keep but it may prove inconvenient some day, so I warn you in time."

Not feeling disposed at that time to enter into a bantering conversation with my volatile companion, I made no reply, but abandoned myself again to the pleasing fancies and feelings which were called up by the singular scene in the midst of which I found myself.

It seemed as if it were but yesterday when we drove about the crowded streets of London making the necessary purchases for our intended journey, and now, as I gazed around, every object that met my eye seemed strange, and wild, and foreign, and romantic. We three were reclining round an enormous wood fire in the midst of a great forest, the trees and plants of which were quite new to me, and totally unlike those of my native land. Rich luxuriance of

vegetation was the feature that filled my mind most. Tall palms surrounded us, throwing their broad leaves overhead and partially concealing the starlit sky. Thick tough limbs of creeping plants and wild vines twisted and twined round everything and over everything, giving to the woods an appearance of tangled impenetrability; but the beautiful leaves of some, and the delicate tendrils of others, half concealed the sturdy limbs of the trees, and threw over the whole a certain air of wild grace, as might a semi-transparent and beautiful robe if thrown around the form of a savage.

The effect of a strong fire in the woods at night is to give to surrounding space an appearance of ebony blackness, against which dark ground the gnarled stems and branches and pendent foliage appear as if traced out in light and lovely colours, which are suffused with a rich warm tone from the blaze.

We were now in the wilds of Africa, although, as I have said, I found it difficult to believe the fact. Jack and I wore loose brown shooting coats and pantaloons; but we had made up our minds to give up waistcoats and neckcloths, so that our scarlet flannel shirts with turned-down collars gave to us quite a picturesque and brigand-like appearance as we encircled the blaze—Peterkin smoking vigorously, for he had acquired that bad and very absurd habit at sea. Jack smoked too, but he was not so inveterate as Peterkin.

Jack was essentially moderate in his nature. He did nothing violently or in a hurry; but this does not imply that he was slow or lazy. He was leisurely in disposition, and circumstances seldom required him to be otherwise. When Peterkin or I had to lift heavy weights, we were obliged to exert our utmost strength and agitate our whole frames; but Jack was so powerful that a comparatively slight effort was

all that he was usually obliged to make. Again, when we two were in a hurry we walked quickly, but Jack's long limbs enabled him to keep up with us without effort. Nevertheless there were times when he was called upon to act quickly and with energy. On those occasions he was as active as Peterkin himself, but his movements were tremendous. It was, I may almost say, awful to behold Jack when acting under powerful excitement. He was indeed a splendid fellow, and not by any means deserving of the name of gorilla, which Peterkin had bestowed on him.

But to continue my description of our costume. We all wore homespun grey trousers of strong material. Peterkin and Jack wore leggings in addition, so that they seemed to have on what are now termed knickerbockers. Peterkin, however, had no coat. He preferred a stout grey flannel shirt hanging down to his knees and belted round his waist in the form of a tunic. Our tastes in headdress were varied. Jack wore a pork-pie cap; Peterkin and I had wide-awakes. My facetious little companion said that I had selected this species of hat because I was always more than half asleep! Being peculiar in everything, Peterkin wore his wide-awake in an unusual manner—namely, turned up at the back, down at the front, and curled very much up at the sides.

We were so filled with admiration of Jack's magnificent beard and moustache, that Peterkin and I had resolved to cultivate ours while in Africa; but I must say that, as I looked at Peterkin's face, the additional hair was not at that time an improvement, and I believe that much more could not have been said for myself. The effect on my little comrade was to cause the lower part of his otherwise good-looking face to appear extremely dirty.

"I wonder," said Peterkin, after a long silence, "if we shall reach the niggers' village in time for the hunt to-morrow. I

fear that we have spent too much time in this wild-goose chase.”

“Wild-goose chase, Peterkin!” I exclaimed. “Do you call hunting the gorilla by such a term?”

“*Hunting* the gorilla? no, certainly; but *looking* for the gorilla in a part of the woods where no such beast was ever heard of since Adam was a schoolboy—”

“Nay, Peterkin,” interrupted Jack; “we are getting very near to the gorilla country, and you must make allowance for the enthusiasm of a naturalist.”

“Ah! we shall see where the naturalist’s enthusiasm will fly to when we actually do come face to face with the big puggy.”

“Well,” said I, apologetically, “I won’t press you to go hunting again; I’ll be content to follow.”

“Press me, my dear Ralph!” exclaimed Peterkin hastily, fearing that he had hurt my feelings; “why, man, I do but jest with you—you are so horridly literal. I’m overjoyed to be pressed to go on the maddest wild-goose chase that ever was invented. My greatest delight would be to go gorilla-hunting down Fleet Street, if you were so disposed.—But to be serious, Jack, do you think we shall be in time for the elephant-hunt to-morrow?”

“Ay, in capital time, if you don’t knock up.”

“What! / knock up! I’ve a good mind to knock you down for suggesting such an egregious impossibility.”

“That’s an impossibility anyhow, Peterkin, because I’m down already,” said Jack, yawning lazily and stretching out his limbs in a more comfortable and *dégagé* manner.

Peterkin seemed to ponder as he smoked his pipe for some time in silence.

“Ralph,” said he, looking up suddenly, “I don’t feel a bit sleepy, and yet I’m tired enough.”

“You are smoking too much, perhaps,” I suggested.

“It’s not that,” cried Jack; “he has eaten too much supper.”

“Base insinuation!” retorted Peterkin.

“Then it must be the monkey. That’s it. Roast monkey does not agree with you.”

“Do you know, I shouldn’t wonder if you were right; and it’s a pity, too, for we shall have to live a good deal on such fare, I believe. However, I suppose we shall get used to it.—But I say, boys, isn’t it jolly to be out here living like savages? I declare it seems to me like a dream or a romance.—Just look, Ralph, at the strange wild creepers that are festooned overhead, and the great tropical leaves behind us, and the clear sky above, with the moon—ah! the moon; yes, that’s one comfort—the moon is unchanged. The same moon that smiles down upon us through a tangled mesh-work of palm-leaves and wild vines and monkeys’ tails, is peeping down the chimney-pots of London and Edinburgh and Dublin!”

“Why, Peterkin, you must have studied hard in early life to be so good a geographer.”

“Rather,” observed Peterkin.

“Yes; and look at the strange character of the tree-stems,” said I, unwilling to allow the subject to drop. “See those huge palmettoes like—like—”

“Overgrown cabbages,” suggested Peterkin; and he continued, “Observe the quaint originality of form in the body and limbs of that bloated old spider that is crawling up your leg, Ralph!”

I started involuntarily, for there is no creature of which I have a greater abhorrence than a spider.

“Where is it? oh! I see,” and the next moment I secured my prize and placed it with loathing, but interest, in my

entomological box.

At that moment a hideous roar rang through the woods, seemingly close behind us. We all started to our feet, and seizing our rifles, which lay beside us ready loaded, cocked them and drew close together round the fire.

“This won’t do, lads,” said Jack, after a few minutes’ breathless suspense, during which the only sound we could hear was the beating of our own hearts; “we have allowed the fire to get too low, and we’ve forgotten to adopt our friend the trader’s advice, and make two fires.”

So saying, Jack laid down his rifle, and kicking the logs with his heavy boot, sent up such a cloud of bright sparks as must certainly have scared the wild animal, whatever it was, away; for we heard no more of it that night.

“You’re right, Jack,” remarked Peterkin; “so let us get up a blaze as fast as we can, and I’ll take the first watch, not being sleepy. Come along.”

In a few minutes we cut down with our axes a sufficient quantity of dry wood to keep two large fires going all night; we then kindled our second fire at a few yards distant from the first, and made our camp between them. This precaution we took in order to scare away the wild animals whose cries we heard occasionally during the night. Peterkin, having proposed to take the first watch—for we had to watch by turns all the night through—lighted his pipe and sat down before the cheerful fire with his back against the stem of a palm-tree, and his rifle lying close to his hand, to be ready in case of a surprise. There were many natives wandering about in that neighbourhood, some of whom might be ignorant of our having arrived at their village on a peaceful errand. If these should have chanced to come upon us suddenly, there was no saying what they might do in

their surprise and alarm, so it behoved us to be on our guard.

Jack and I unrolled the light blankets that we carried strapped to our shoulders through the day, and laying ourselves down side by side with our feet to the fire and our heads pillowed on a soft pile of sweet-scented grass, we addressed ourselves to sleep. But sleep did not come so soon as we expected. I have often noted with some surprise and much interest the curious phases of the phenomenon of sleep. When I have gone to bed excessively fatigued and expecting to fall asleep almost at once, I have been surprised and annoyed to find that the longer I wooed the drowsy god the longer he refused to come to me; and at last, when I have given up the attempt in despair, he has suddenly laid his gentle hand upon my eyes and carried me into the land of Nod. Again, when I have been exceedingly anxious to keep awake, I have been attacked by sleep with such irresistible energy that I have been utterly unable to keep my eyelids open or my head erect, and have sat with my eyes blinking like those of an owl in the sunshine, and my head nodding like that of a Chinese mandarin.

On this our first night in the African bush, at least our first night on a hunting expedition—we had been many nights in the woods on our journey to that spot—on this night, I say, Jack and I could by no means get to sleep for a very long time after we lay down, but continued to gaze up through the leafy screen overhead at the stars, which seemed to wink at us, I almost fancied, jocosely. We did not speak to each other, but purposely kept silence. After a time, however, Jack groaned, and said softly—

“Ralph, are you asleep?”

“No,” said I, yawning.

“I’m quite sure that Peterkin is,” added Jack, raising his head and looking across the fire at the half-recumbent form of our companion.

“Is he?” said Peterkin in a low tone. “Just about as sound as a weasel!”

“Jack,” said I.

“Well?”

“I can’t sleep a wink. Ye-a-ow! isn’t it odd?”

“No more can I. Do you know, Ralph, I’ve been counting the red berries in that tree above me for half an hour, in the hope that the monotony of the thing would send me off; but I was interrupted by a small monkey who has been sitting up among the branches and making faces at me for full twenty minutes. There it is yet, I believe. Do you see it?”

“No; where?”

“Almost above your head.”

I gazed upward intently for a few minutes, until I thought I saw the monkey, but it was very indistinct. Gradually, however, it became more defined; then to my surprise it turned out to be the head of an elephant! I was not only amazed but startled at this.

“Get your rifle, Jack!” said I, in a low whisper.

Jack made some sort of reply, but his voice sounded hollow and indistinct. Then I looked up again, and saw that it was the head of a hippopotamus, not that of an elephant, which was looking down at me. Curiously enough, I felt little or no surprise at this, and when in the course of a few minutes I observed a pair of horns growing out of the creature’s eyes and a bushy tail standing erect on the apex of its head, I ceased to be astonished at the sight altogether, and regarded it as quite natural and commonplace. The object afterwards assumed the appearance of a lion with a crocodile’s tail, and a serpent

with a monkey's head, and lastly of a gorilla, without producing in me any other feeling than that of profound indifference. Gradually the whole scene vanished, and I became totally oblivious.

This state of happy unconsciousness had scarcely lasted—it seemed to me—two minutes, when I was awakened by Peterkin laying his hand on my shoulder and saying—

“Now then, Ralph, it's time to rouse up.”

“O Peterkin,” said I, in a tone of remonstrance, “how could you be so unkind as to waken me when I had just got to sleep? Shabby fellow!”

“Just got to sleep, say you? You've been snoring like an apoplectic alderman for exactly two hours.”

“You don't say so!” I exclaimed, getting into a sitting posture.

“Indeed you have. I'm sorry to rouse you, but time's up, and I'm sleepy; so rub your eyes, man, and try to look a little less like an astonished owl if you can. I have just replenished both the fires, so you can lean your back against that palm-tree and take it easy for three-quarters of an hour or so. After that you'll have to heap on more wood.”

I looked at Jack, who was now lying quite unconscious, breathing with the slow, deep regularity of profound slumber, and with his mouth wide open.

“What a chance for some waggish baboon to drop a nut or a berry in!” said Peterkin, winking at me with one eye as he lay down in the spot from which I had just risen.

He was very sleepy, poor fellow, and could hardly smile at his own absurd fancy. He was asleep almost instantly. In fact, I do not believe that he again opened the eye with which he had winked at me, but that he merely shut the other and began to slumber forthwith.

I now began to feel quite interested in my responsible position as guardian of the camp. I examined my rifle to see that it was in order and capped; then leaning against the palm-tree, which was, as it were, my sentry-box, I stood erect and rubbed my hands and took off my cap, so that the pleasant night air might play about my temples, and more effectually banish drowsiness.

In order to accomplish this more thoroughly I walked round both fires and readjusted the logs, sending up showers of sparks as I did so. Then I went to the edge of the circle of light, in the centre of which our camp lay, and peered into the gloom of the dark forest.

There was something inexpressibly delightful yet solemn in my feelings as I gazed into that profound obscurity where the great tree-stems and the wild gigantic foliage nearest to me appeared ghost-like and indistinct, and the deep solitudes of which were peopled, not only with the strange fantastic forms of my excited fancy, but, as I knew full well, with real wild creatures, both huge and small, such as my imagination at that time had not fully conceived. I felt awed, almost oppressed, with the deep silence around, and, I must confess, looked somewhat nervously over my shoulder as I returned to the fire and sat down to keep watch at my post.

CHAPTER THREE.

Wherein I mount guard, and how I did it, etcetera.

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Now it so happened that the battle which I had to fight with myself after taking my post was precisely the converse of that which I fought during the earlier part of that night. Then, it was a battle with wakefulness; now, it was a struggle with sleep; and of the two fights the latter was the more severe by far.

I began by laying down my rifle close by my side, leaning back in a sitting posture against the palm-tree, and resigning myself to the contemplation of the fire, which burned merrily before me, while I pondered with myself how I should best employ my thoughts during the three long hours of my watch. But I had not dwelt on that subject more than three minutes, when I was rudely startled by my own head falling suddenly and heavily forward on my chest. I immediately roused myself. "Ah! Ralph, Ralph," said I to myself in a whisper, "this won't do, lad. To sleep at your post! shame on you! Had you been a sentinel in time of war that nod would have cost you your life, supposing you to have been caught in the act."

Soliloquising thus, I arose and shook myself. Then I slapped my chest several times and pulled my nose and sat down again. Only a few minutes elapsed before the same thing occurred to me again, so I leaped up, and mended the fires, and walked to and fro, until I felt thoroughly awake, but in order to make sure that it should not occur again, I