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Pride of the Plains

Colin Dann

PRIDE OF THE PLAINS

BOOKS IN THE LIONS OF LINGMERE SERIES

Journey to Freedom

Lion Country

Pride of the Plains

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Colin Dann

**RED
FOX**

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For Susie

Preface

The sister lionesses, Huru and Kimya, had adapted well to life in the African game park since their release from the animal refuge centre at Kamenza. It was the life they had been intended to lead and was far removed from their upbringing in an English zoo. Their journey from there to Africa was now only a faint memory for them. They had mated with resident lions in the game park and six cubs had been born, three to Huru and three to Kimya. So, together with the four adults, the pride numbered ten animals.

During the wet season the pride had moved on to the plains to take advantage of the abundant prey there. A while later the pride's eldest cub, a male called Moja, had disappeared after being attacked and tossed by a grieving mother elephant. Huru and Kimya searched for him in vain. They didn't know what had happened to him; not even if he was alive or dead.

Moja

In fact Moja was very much alive. His sturdy frame and thick furry coat had broken his fall. Though bruised and shocked by the elephant's sudden attack, the lion cub scrambled hastily to his feet amongst the soft, tall grass-stems where he had landed with a thump. He hardly knew where he was, but he did know that he was very frightened and must get away from that place as fast as he possibly could. He imagined the thunderous tread of the elephant coming towards him again and he fled, bounding blindly through the thick growth that reached way above his head. He didn't stop running until his panic subsided. Then, as he slowed, he tripped over a root and pitched into a whistling-thorn bush, badly scratching his scalp and one ear. Moja felt very sorry for himself. He didn't stir for a while, not wanting to risk more prickles scraping his skin. But eventually, wide-eyed, he peered through the sharp thorns, hoping to catch a glimpse of some of his family.

There was not a sign of any of them. The landscape was blank and unfamiliar. Moja realised he was lost. At first he was not unduly worried. He was confident that his mother or one of the other adult lions would come looking for him, and it wouldn't be long before he was found. But as time passed and he continued neither to see anyone from his pride, nor even to recognise a sound or a call, he became more and more fretful.

His mother, Huru, was worried. She turned to her sister as they lay with their other cubs around them. 'Did we really look everywhere we could? Did we go far enough?' she asked. 'How is it we didn't catch Moja's scent anywhere or hear his cries?'

Kimya narrowed her eyes as she looked towards the sinking sun on the horizon. A light breeze blew across the plains, refreshing the evening air. 'We should face the fact that Moja has probably been killed,' she said as gently as she could. 'I hope he survived, but the longer he's missing the more likely it is that he hasn't.'

'I still believe he has,' Huru answered quickly, almost before Kimya had finished. She was trying to reassure herself. 'I shan't give up on him yet. And if I can't find him, perhaps Moja will find us.'

Kimya said nothing. She was not optimistic.

'He's a brave little male. He resembles his father,' Huru went on quietly, as though talking to herself. 'He'll be trying even if he's afraid, I know he will.'

Towards dusk, as the sky began to darken, Moja longed to call - to tell his family where he was, that he was lost, that he needed them - but he had the sense to remain silent. He knew that ears other than those of his own pride could be listening. He tried to comfort himself by licking his coat. He wet his paws and wiped them across his face and ear where it smarted. That soothed him a little. Then at last he stirred from the thorn bush, his slightly spotted cub's coat invisible in the darkness. Moja knew he couldn't be seen, and he also knew he mustn't be heard.

'I have to get back to the others somehow,' he told himself. 'If only I knew where they were.' He stood and tried to think of the best way to go. 'Perhaps if I just run back to the place where the elephant dropped me? But ... but which way is that? How can I tell in the dark?' He sank down on to his haunches and gave way to a frightened whimper. The