

**TOMMY SMITH
AT THE ZOO**

***Books by
Edmund Selous***

Tommy Smith's Animals

Tommy Smith's Other Animals

Tommy Smith's Birds

Tommy Smith at the Zoo

Tommy Smith Again at the Zoo

The Zoo Conversation Book

***The Zoo Conversation Book,
Hughie's Second Visit***

Jack's Insects

**TOMMY SMITH
AT THE ZOO**

by
Edmund Selous

with illustrations

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CHAPTER I

THE LION

THE next animal that Tommy Smith had a conversation with was—the lion! You will see, from this, that he was not at home, in the country, any longer, because there are no lions to talk to in the woods and fields. The fact is, it was Christmas-time, and his parents had come with their family to spend a few weeks (or perhaps months) in London. In London, as you know, there is the Zoological Gardens, and of course Tommy Smith was very fond of going there. This was his first visit, and he found that the animals who lived there were as ready to talk to him as the ones at home had been. Perhaps they were even more glad of a chat. All that was necessary was that he should be by himself, because they wouldn't talk if there were other people there. But as Tommy Smith didn't want to talk to animals before other people, and as there was often nobody else to interrupt them, that made it all the better.

I am not quite sure whether it was the lion that first began the conversation with Tommy Smith, or Tommy Smith with the lion, only the first seems more likely, because for a little boy to begin a conversation with a

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lion would be a very bold thing to do. But anyhow, from the very first, the lion had an encouraging manner, and it was not long before he told Tommy Smith that he need not feel nervous in talking to him, because, after all, he was only just a great big cat.

“Are you really, Mr. Lion?” said Tommy Smith.

“To be sure I am,” said the lion, “and so are the rest of us here. Why, what are the tiger and leopard, then, if they’re not cats? I thought you knew that.”

“Yes, I did know that they were, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith, “but then you don’t look so much like a cat as they do.”

“Why not?” said the lion.

“I suppose it’s because you’ve got a mane, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith. “Cats that one has in houses never have manes, and none of the others here have.”

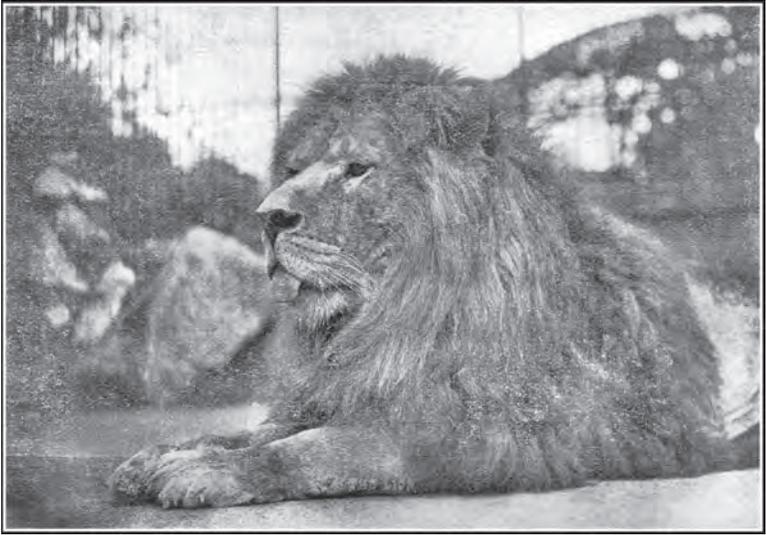
“That’s their misfortune,” said the lion, “but it doesn’t make any real difference. Why, what real difference would it make, if your hair was much longer than other boys’ hair? You’d still be a boy, I suppose. The only difference would be that you’d be a handsomer boy. You see that, don’t you?”

“Er—yes, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith. He saw the first part of it, at any rate.

“It’s the same with me,” said the lion. “I’m as much a cat as any of them, only I’m a handsomer one.”

Tommy Smith thought that the tiger might think in the same way about his beautiful striped skin, and

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the leopard about his spotted one. Of course it was true that his mane made the lion very handsome, but he didn't think that it was a handsome way for him to talk about it, because the lioness had none. However, he saw what the lion meant, and he knew that he was a cat now, both because he said so, and because he began to remember that it said so in the natural history books too, which was just as if two very great learned judges were to be of the same opinion about something. But it was not quite so much what the lion was, as what he did, that Tommy Smith wanted to hear him talk about, so instead of waiting for his next remark (for he looked just as if he was going to say: "Yes, we all belong to the great cat family") he said: "Please, Mr. Lion, do tell me something about what you do when you're wild and not shut up in a cage."

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“Cage!” said the lion indignantly. “My den, if you please. A nice thing it would be if a lion were shut up in his own den. It is mine. If anyone thinks it is not, let him try to turn me out of it—that’s all. And as for anybody but me coming inside it, I allow nobody to, and that is so well understood that nobody ever tries to. So now I hope *you* understand.”

Tommy Smith thought he did understand, for he felt quite sure that the poor lion did not like to think that he was shut up in a cage, and so pretended that he was in his own den. So as Tommy Smith was not too old to pretend, he pretended, too, and said: “Oh, yes, I see, Mr. Lion, but please tell me something about what you do when you’re not in your den here, but in your own country.”

“Well,” said the lion, “I do a great many things, so where would like me to begin?”

“How do you kill animals, Mr. Lion?” said Tommy Smith, for he thought that would be the most interesting.

“Why, with my teeth and my claws, to be sure,” the lion answered. “They were not made for nothing, you know.”

“But I mean, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith, for this wasn’t like telling about it, “when you see an animal and want to kill it, what do you do?”

“Why, it depends on what animal it is,” said the lion. “I don’t kill them all in just the same way.”

“Supposing it was a buffalo, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith.

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“I should have to be careful with him,” said the lion, “especially if it were a bull. The first thing would be to creep up so near to him, without his knowing, that I should be able to rush in and seize him, before he had time to run away, when he saw me.”

“I suppose you’d creep through the bushes, so that he couldn’t see you, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith.

“That’s all very well, when there are bushes all about,” said the lion, “but sometimes there are only a few, or not any at all. Then, I must creep through the grass, if there is any, but in the winter it is poor and thin and that makes it more difficult for me. I press my body quite flat to the ground, and move along almost as if I were a snake. Every now and then, I stop and raise my head, just a little, so that I can peep through the grass, to see just where the buffalo that I am stalking is. But I soon bring it down again, and, all the time I’m not looking, I hold it as low as the rest of my body, or even lower.”

“So that he shan’t see you, Mr. Lion?” said Tommy Smith.

“Yes,” said the lion, “and it isn’t as if there was only one of them to think about, for buffaloes go in herds, and browse about in each other’s company, so that even though there may be one, here or there, by itself, there are sure to be others, scattered about, that one has to get by.”

“It must be difficult, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith.

“Yes, and what makes it hardest of all,” said the lion, “is that if the wind should be behind me, it takes my

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scent to any animal in front of me, and then it runs away. Of course when one buffalo runs away, others that see it think there must be something the matter, so they go off too, and soon the whole herd is in motion.”

“I wonder you ever get one, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith.

“Of course, I hide my scent when I can,” said the lion, “by creeping up against the wind. When the wind’s blowing from them to me, they can’t scent me, and, almost always, I get up so close to the one I want, without his seeing me either, that I have time to make a great rush, and get hold of him, before he can get into full flight. You see, for a little while, I can gallop very fast indeed, faster than a horse even.”

“Can you really, Mr. Lion?” said Tommy Smith. This was quite a surprise to him. “Oh, I wish I could see you.”

“I wish you could,” said the lion, in rather a sad tone of voice, Tommy Smith thought. “Yes,” he continued, “my speed, for just a time, is tremendous, but it doesn’t last long. It’s just a rush, and after that, I can’t go so fast even as a buffalo can. But often I don’t have to make a rush at all. I creep up so quietly that I seem to rise out of the earth, just by the side of my quarry (that’s the buffalo I’m stalking, of course), and in one moment, I have one of my paws over his shoulder and the other one on his nose, pulling his head down to the ground.”

“But where are you, Mr. Lion?” asked Tommy Smith. “I mean,” he explained, “how are you standing?”

“I’m not standing at all,” said the lion, “I’m hanging

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on to the buffalo, with my whole body underneath his, and my hind feet only just touching the ground.”

“What, with your back to the ground, Mr. Lion?” said Tommy Smith. “I don’t see what you can do like that.”

“I don’t have to do anything except hold on,” said the lion, “and I do that well, till he falls down.”

“But then he must fall on you, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith, “and if it was a buffalo——”

“It is a buffalo,” said the lion, “and he does fall down, as I told you, but not on me. If he did, he would crush me or hurt me badly; but as he rushes along, trying to get away from me, and quite mad with fright, I keep dragging his head down between his forelegs, with my weight, till, at last, he loses his balance and stumbles and down he comes, with his head under him, so that he turns right over in the air, and lies on his back, right in front of me. But I still have my paw in his muzzle, with my sharp claws sticking into it, and, as I scramble up, with my powerful forearm I give his head a tremendous wrench round to one side, so that the neck is broken, and, after that, it’s all fun and feasting.”

Tommy Smith thought that there was not much fun about it for the buffalo, but he knew it would be no good to explain that there wasn’t, and besides, he hardly felt big enough to explain things like that to a lion. He felt very sorry for the buffalo, but then he knew that lions and tigers had to eat other animals, and that they must be large animals because they were so large themselves, and one could hardly expect them to be sorry about

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it; and, even if they were, that would not make it any better for the animals they killed. And then, too, he remembered that there were ladies who seemed to think it fun to see a cat playing with a mouse, though the only difference between the two things was that the mouse was smaller, and that the cat took much longer in killing it than the lion seemed to take in killing a buffalo. So he thought it would be better and much more sensible, to be angry with these ladies than with any lion or tiger. And besides, if it came to that, he might just as well feel angry with himself, whenever he ate beef or mutton, because, although he didn't kill the ox or the sheep that it came from, yet somebody else killed them for him. So all he said was: "I think it's very clever of you, Mr. Lion, and you must be very strong to be able to do it. But doesn't the buffalo sometimes hurt you with his horns, because, you know, he's very strong too?"

"If it comes to that," said the lion, "he's great deal stronger than I am. He's so much bigger, you see, only besides my strength, which is very great for my size, I have four other things, my skill, my courage, my teeth, and my claws. All these together make me able to manage cow-buffaloes, or bulls that have not got their full size and strength; but an old bull is a different thing, and I generally leave him alone."

"But don't you always, then, Mr. Lion?" said Tommy Smith.

"Why, of course, if I was very hungry," said the lion, "and could find no other game——"

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“Do you mean no other animals, Mr. Lion?” said Tommy Smith.

“Yes, that’s what I mean,” said the lion. “I speak like a sportsman, because I am one. If I could find no other game, as I say, and was very hungry, there’s no saying what I mightn’t do; only if I were alone, I should be carrying my life in my claws. The best way, with an old buffalo, is to make a family affair of it.”

“What do you mean by that, Mr. Lion?” asked Tommy Smith.

At this moment the lioness came stealing out of what was really the den (however the lion might talk about it), through a small square opening in the wall at the back of the cage. She looked as if she had been asleep, but, at any rate, she must have heard the last part of the conversation, for she said at once: “Why, that his wife and children help him, to be sure. That’s what he means, and so they do, very often.”

“Very true, my dear,” said the lion, “and you know how grateful I am to you all.”

“Not always,” said the lioness. “Sometimes you snarl at us for wanting our share.”

“Only just at first, when I’m excited,” said the lion. “We soon settle down to a quite friendly family meal, and even when you and your cubs have not helped me at all, I’ve often stood with my two fore-paws on the carcass, and roared loudly till you all came running up to share it with me.”

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“But do the cubs really help to kill buffaloes, Mrs. Lioness?” said Tommy Smith.

“After they’re not quite little they do,” said the lioness. “That’s how we teach them their business in life. They stay with us for two years, and sometimes longer, and we give them the best of educations.”

“I suppose you mean in killing animals,” said Tommy Smith.

“Oh, yes,—it’s practical,” said the lion.

“No use filling their heads with things they don’t really require,” said the lioness.

“What other animals do you kill, Mr. Lion?” asked Tommy Smith.

“Almost all that there are in the country I live in, which is Africa,” said the lion, “because I’m the African lion. But antelopes and zebras are my favourites. They’re not so difficult to kill. A bite or two in the neck, behind the ears, would be enough for most of them, but sometimes one has to be careful about the horns. Have you heard of the gemsbuck?”

“Oh, yes I have, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith, “and I’ve seen its picture in natural history books. It’s a beautiful antelope that runs very fast, about as large as a pony—I mean quite a small pony. It’s black and white, I think, Mr. Lion, at least its head is, and its horns are very long and quite straight, and——”

“The worst horns there are,” said the lion.

“Oh, those horrid long horns with points as sharp

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as a needle,” said the lioness. “They’d go right through one if——”

“They do sometimes,” said the lion. “Our two bleached skeletons have been found fixed together like that.”

“Then did you kill each other, Mr. Lion?” asked Tommy Smith.

“We did—it was a tragedy,” said the lion. “I stalked him, and flung myself upon him, with my right paw over his right shoulder. But before I could bite him behind the ears, which would have been the end of him, he flung back his head—I suppose in a frenzy of terror—and those terrible horns were driven almost through the length of my body.”

“It was some other lion’s body, really, you know, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith, “because you’re still alive.”

“It might have been mine,” said the lion, “and when I tell the story I feel as if it was.”

“Do you ever kill giraffes, Mr. Lion?” was Tommy Smith’s next question.

“Sometimes I do,” said the lion, “but not very often. You see, they’re so tall. Beautiful necks! They make one feel hungry. But then it’s like climbing up a tree. As for the bulls—I mean the males—they’re almost too strong for me, but, from time to time, I kill a cow or a young one.”

“Sometimes we pull one down together, you know,” said the lioness. “We might get a grown-up bull then.”

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“They grow up so high,” said the lion, “and they do plunge and shake so, even cows.”

“Still, together——” urged the lioness.

“Together we might do wonders,” said the lion, with an affectionate glance at his partner. “But then, dear, they get into the thirst country, where we can’t live. We lions, you know, must have water.”

“But can giraffes live without water?” asked Tommy Smith.

“Much better than we can,” answered the lion. “They go right away into the sandy desert, and if they get any water at all, for months as a time, I think it must be from the melons that grow all about there.”

“But can’t you, too, Mr. Lion?” said Tommy Smith.

“Certainly not,” said the lioness. “Lions can’t live upon melons.”

“But, if they’ve got water inside them, Mrs. Lioness,” said Tommy Smith, “why——?”

“I’ve told you the reason,” said the lioness. “Lions can’t live upon melons.”

“Impossible,” said the lion; “so that makes another reason why we can’t live on giraffes either. It’s a pity, for they certainly have beautiful necks.”

“Never mind, dear,” said the lioness. “So have ostriches.”

“True, true,” said the lion, “and just one bite is sufficient with them.”

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“But can you catch an ostrich, Mr. Lion?” asked Tommy Smith, “because, you know, they run so fast. Faster than a horse,” he added, for he had always heard that.

“We don’t try to race them,” said the lion; “but there’s a way of doing things, and we manage to get a few now and then. Do we not, dear?”

“We know what they taste like,” said the lioness.

“You see, they’re not nocturnal, as we are,” the lion explained (Tommy Smith knew what “nocturnal” meant quite well, because the barn-owl had told him), “so they have to sit down somewhere at night, and sometimes we take them by surprise.”

“How the feathers do fly, when we do,” said the lioness.

“And how soon it’s all over,” said the lion. “Yes, they have nice necks, and how they do crunch.”

Tommy Smith felt sorry for the poor ostriches, but as they were caught suddenly, at night, and as just one bite of the neck was sufficient to kill them—as the lion said—he thought it must be better for them than for the poor buffaloes and antelopes. But he had heard enough now about how the lion killed animals, so he thought he would ask him some questions of a different kind. “Please, Mr. Lion,” he said, “will you tell me something about the people you live amongst in Africa—I mean who live in Africa too? I suppose they’re black people.”

“Some are,” said the lion, “but where I’m most common, they’re not black, but brown. Those are the

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Kaffirs, and I don't so much mind living near them, because they keep cattle. They're very fond of cattle, and we're very fond of them too."

"I suppose you like living near them, because you kill their cattle, Mr. Lion?" said Tommy Smith.

"That's the best part of it," said the lion, "but accidents happen."

"Very disagreeable ones," said the lioness. "It would be better to leave them alone."

"But aren't they easier to kill than buffaloes, Mr. Lion?" said Tommy Smith.

"Much," said the lion.

"We don't mind them," said the lioness.

Tommy Smith saw that it was another sort of accident the lions were thinking of. "Are the Kaffirs angry when you kill their cattle, Mr. Lion?" he asked.

"Very," said the lion.

"Very angry, indeed," said the lioness. And there was rather a long pause after that, for neither of them seemed inclined to say anything more, so that Tommy Smith didn't quite know how to go on.

"Do they do anything, Mr. Lion?" he asked at last.

"They kill us," said the lion. "That's what they do."

"That's all," said the lioness. And they both looked very cross and discontented.

"But how can they kill you, Mr. Lion?" asked Tommy

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Smith. "Because you're so strong and so fierce, you know."

"I dare say I am," said the lion, a little surlily, "but I can't win a fight against a nation. I'm not strong enough for that, and, as for fierceness, no one could be fiercer than those brown men with their assegais. That's what they call their spears, you know."

"Yes, and with their shields," said the lioness. "They wouldn't be so fierce if they hadn't those great shields to fight behind. All *we* have is our own teeth and claws."

"One naked lion," said the lion, in a grumbling tone of voice, "against weapons and numbers. No, I can't fight a nation in arms."

"You do," said the lioness, with a look of pride at her husband.

"Anyhow, I can't win," said the lion.

"Oh, do please tell me about it, Mr. Lion," said Tommy Smith.

"What generally happens is this," said the lion. "I just kill one single ox, and when I have had a reasonable meal, I go to sleep somewhere near it. Then all the fighting men from everywhere round, each carrying a shield and assegai, march up to where I lie. They tread softly, so as not to wake me, and spread round me on every side, so that when I do wake up, I find myself in the centre of a circle of men. Whichever way I turn there are spears and shields, with tall savages behind them, thirsting for my blood. And now, as I stand growling fiercely, with eyes blazing and tail lashing my sides, the

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circle begins to close in on me, so that it gets narrower and narrower. Then, all at once, before I can make up my mind where to try to break through, one of the men who has been chosen for his strength and ferocity—the greatest ruffian of the gang—starts out, alone, before the rest, and rushes straight at me, calling me names and insulting me.”

“What does he call you, Mr. Lion?” asked Tommy Smith.

“Oh, a thief and a vagabond, and all sorts of other disgraceful names,” said the lion; “perhaps a murderer even, just as if a lion could live without killing his dinner. And it’s not only myself that he abuses in this shameful way, but my family and all my ancestors, going right back, ever so far. Of course, I rush upon my reviler, but just as I get within striking distance, he sinks down beneath that great shield of his and stabs up at me from under it. I do my best to dash it aside, and often get my teeth through his arm or his shoulder, but all his friends rush in so quickly that, almost as I seize hold of him, a dozen or twenty assegais are quivering in my body or driven right through me.”

“Oh, poor Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith. “Then I suppose they kill you.”

“Always—I told you so,” said the lion, with a pained expression. “If I did not accept the challenge of the man who runs out at me, I might break through the circle and get away. But that would not be courageous, so, of course, I always do accept it; and whilst I am occupied

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with my principal enemy, all the rest come up and kill me.”

“Never mind, dear,” said the lioness. “You die like a hero.”

“I know that, of course,” said the lion, “but it’s very unjust. And then there are the Bushmen.”

“Oh, do tell me about them, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith, for he had heard about the Bushmen, and was interested in them.

“They’re worse,” said the lion, “for they don’t keep oxen, and so can’t pretend that they’re injured. But that doesn’t matter. Whenever they see me lying asleep—even if I haven’t killed anything—they creep up as close as they can to me, and shoot me with one of those poisoned arrows of theirs.”

“Horrid things!” said the lioness.

“Does the poison kill you, Mr. Lion?” said Tommy Smith.

“What a question!” said the lion. “Why, the Bushman poison kills everything. And yet one would hardly believe it. It isn’t as if it were an assegai that goes right through one, very often, but just a thin reed, not so long as your arm, with a little piece of bone at the end. A sort of toy arrow it looks like, and yet it kills me.”

“But does it go through your skin, Mr. Lion?” said Tommy Smith.

“It goes into it, anyhow,” said the lion, “and that’s enough with a poisoned arrow.”

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“It does its work,” said the lioness, and then there was another rather long pause. It seemed as if it was too painful a subject for either of them to want to talk about, but Tommy Smith didn’t think it was properly finished yet, so, after a little, he asked: “Does it wake you up, Mr. Lion?”

“Yes, indeed,” said the lion. “It pricks me, so, of course, I wake; and when I see something hanging to me, I’m surprised and jump up, and bound away. Perhaps I make a bite at it first, but, whether I do or not, the shaft of the arrow—the reed part, I mean—soon breaks off, but the bone head, with the poison on it, still sticks where it was, because it’s made in such a way that it can’t come out.”

“Oh, is it barbed, Mr. Lion?” said Tommy Smith.

“I dare say that’s what you’d call it,” said the lion. “All I know is that it won’t come out, and those cruel little yellow men make it like that on purpose.”

“Just to torture us,” said the lioness—and she looked very fierce.

“Such puny creatures, too,” said the lion. “That seems to make it worse.”

“Yes, and so ugly,” said the lioness. “Little yellow men with eyes like slits, and hair that doesn’t curl properly, because there isn’t enough of it.”

“And yet they kill us,” said the lion. “What a puzzle it all is.”

“I suppose the poisoned arrow begins to hurt you soon, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith.

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“Dreadfully,” said the lion, “dreadfully.” Then he gave a few low growls, and so did the lioness, after which they were both silent again.

“How does it go on, please, Mr. Lion?” said Tommy Smith, after he had waited a little.

“Very badly indeed,” said the lion, whilst the lioness put her face between her paws, and looked another way. “I told you that it pricks me at first, and how I wake up and bound away. Of course, the pain of a prick is not much—nothing to a lion—only one expects it to go. But it doesn’t go. Instead of that, it gets worse, and very soon I’m suffering the most horrible torture.”

“Where, Mr. Lion?” asked Tommy Smith.

“Oh, all over me,” said the lion. “It’s a dreadful burning heat that seems to scorch up my blood, and I get dreadfully thirsty and go to the nearest water, and lap and lap and lap at it, as if that were the only way to feel as I used to, again. But I never do any more. It doesn’t do me any good at all. It’s as if a great fire were burning inside me which all the water of the country could never put out, and this fire gets hotter and hotter, and dreadful pains keep shooting through me as well; and I get so weak, at last, I can’t even drink any more, but just lie on the ground, moaning and biting at the grass, or at sticks or anything.”

“Don’t go on, dear,” said the lioness, “it’s too painful.” And then she looked a little reproachfully at Tommy Smith, and said: “I don’t think you ought to want him to.”

“Oh, no, I don’t, Mrs. Lioness,” said Tommy Smith,

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“only——Please, how long does it last, Mr. Lion?” He couldn’t help asking, because it was so interesting.

“Oh, a horrible time,” said the lion with great feeling. “I don’t quite know, only, however long it is, it seems ever so much longer. All I can tell you is that it’s the longest thing I’ve ever had anything to do with; and then, at last, I die, and those little fiends of yellow men follow up my track, and find me lying on my side—still warm perhaps—and begin to skin me. Such an indignity! It’s a good the thing the breath is out of my body, for I should feel it more than anything, if it were not.”

Tommy Smith certainly thought that being skinned alive might be even more painful than being shot with a poisoned arrow, but he knew what the lion meant. “It is a shame, Mr. Lion,” he said.

“It’s bad enough, I think,” the lion continued, “to be run through with twenty or thirty assegais, perhaps, so as to look more like a porcupine than a lion—of course a much larger and nobler porcupine. But, after all, one may kill two or three of those big brown men—the Kaffirs—if one’s lucky, and perhaps wound a great many more. That’s something. But to have a wretched little yellow dwarf creeping up to one whilst one’s asleep, and shooting one with poisoned arrows, so that one dies slowly, in agony, without ever seeing him even, is ever so much worse. It’s too bad.”

“So it is, dear,” said the lioness, “but don’t get too excited about it. Remember, I’ve suffered as much as you.”

“Why were they made?” said the lion (he didn’t

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seem at all comforted by this remark of the lioness). “There’s very little meat on them, and even if there were more, one can’t often get it—they’re so cunning. They’re no good to lions. Then why were they made?”

“Don’t you think, dear,” said the lioness, “that if you were to have a good roar—a thorough good roar now—you’d feel better after it?”

The lion shook his head and muttered something which sounded like “Nonsense.”

“It’s such a relief,” urged the lioness.

“It does something, of course,” said the lion, “but it doesn’t answer questions.”

But whatever it did or did not do, the lion meant to do it, for when he had said this, he got up—he had been lying down for some little time—opened his mouth—but not quite so wide as in yawning—and gave several deep roars, one after the other, with very short pauses between them. It was a long, deep, rolling sound which grew louder and deeper as it went on, till the whole air trembled (and so did Tommy Smith, too, a little), and all the more when the lioness joined in and began to roar too—then, of course, it was tremendous. At the beginning of each roar, both the great cats lowered their heads, and then raised them again as it went on, as if to fling out the sound, and they certainly did fling it out. They both of them looked very grand as they did this, but the lion, of course, looked much the grander of the two, because of his mane. “There!” said the lioness, after the concert had come to an end. “We both of us feel better now, I dare say. Nothing like a good roar for

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getting rid of disturbing thoughts. After all, if it were not for Bushmen, lions might grow too proud. Well”—this was to Tommy Smith—“what do you think of it?”

“Oh, I think it’s splendid, Mrs. Lioness,” said Tommy Smith. “You *do* make a noise.”

The lion tossed his mane, and the lioness her head (as she had only that). Somehow neither of them looked as if they were quite satisfied with this remark, only Tommy Smith didn’t know why, because, of course, it was a noise. The lioness was just beginning with: “Well, really——” but the lion looked at her in a way that made her stop, and said: “No, dear, he’s only a child,” which Tommy Smith thought rather curious, because there was no doubt at all about that. Then he gave a grand sort of smile at Tommy Smith, and said: “Of course, you will understand that this is music which sounds better in the wilderness.”

“So does thunder,” said the lioness; “but perhaps you would call that ‘a noise.’”

“Thunder has been compared to *our* thunder,” said the lion, “and perhaps there is some faint resemblance.”

“Very faint,” said the lioness.

“Only, of course,” the lion added, “it must be right overhead.”

“And very low down,” said the lioness. “If not, we should drown it.”

“Yes,” continued the lion, “it’s then that you ought to hear us, when the sun sinks and night comes down over the great African waste. That’s the time for us to

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roar, under a million bright twinkling stars, ever so much brighter than they are here, and the moon, when she rises, is like a pale sun, but not so pale as this one. Only we roar most when it's as black and dark as the night, without the moon, can make it. No one can see us then, as we prowl about, and we lions, when we roar, like to be heard but not seen."

"Do you roar louder then, Mr. Lion?" said Tommy Smith.

"Oh, much," said the lion. "You see, here, the damp air is bad for our lungs, but there it's a dry climate."

"Tell him how we roar against each other," said the lioness.

"That's the finest of all," said the lion. "When one of us begins, another answers, perhaps from quite a long way off, so that it only sounds faintly, but, before long, another of us, from somewhere between, answers him; and so it goes on, nearer or farther away, rumbling all round the horizon, and over the forests and hills and plains, lion against lion, thunder answering thunder."

"It must sound splendid, Mr. Lion," said Tommy Smith.

"Oh, grand, grand," said the lion, with a much more satisfied smile. "But we've something even beyond that. The grandest of all is when we roar in troops, and one troop—a troop of lions—answers another troop."

"But do lions go in troops?" asked Tommy Smith.

"Anyhow, we go in families," the lion answered, "and sometimes there are a few more than just the family.

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There may be eight or nine, or, sometimes, even a dozen of us together. That may not be a large troop, but if you were to meet it, one day, all of a sudden, without any idea beforehand that you were going to, I dare say you would find it quite large enough.”

Tommy Smith thought he would find it quite large enough, even if he had had an idea beforehand that he was going to meet it, and he said so to the lion.

“Well, we all roar together,” said the lion, “and when another troop hears us, they all roar together too. Try to imagine the effect.”

Tommy Smith did try, and he thought that the lion had described it very well indeed, when he said: “Oh, grand, grand!” But there was one question he wanted to ask: “Please, Mr. Lion,” he said, “when you roar so, don’t all the animals that are afraid of you go right away? And then, how do you kill them for your dinner?”

“Oh, but it’s after we’ve had our dinner that we roar like that,” the lion answered. “When we’re hungry, and still have it to catch, we’re quiet enough. But when we have eaten as much as we want, then we march down to the nearest water, to drink, and on the way, every now and then, we stop on purpose to roar, and you should hear us then. Ah, those are the concerts of the desert.”

“Why do you roar so much then, Mr. Lion?” asked Tommy Smith.

“Because, we’re so happy,” said the lion. “You see, we’ve eaten as much as we want to eat, and we’re just on the way to drink as much as we want to drink. There

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could hardly be a happier state than that for a lion to be in, so our hearts go out in joy and thankfulness—and we roar. It's a high feeling—perhaps as high a one as mere lions can have.”

“There's the feeling one has just after pulling something down, before beginning to eat it, you know,” said the lioness. “Isn't that a higher one still, dear?”

“I don't know,” said the lion. “We don't roar so much then.”

“Well, if you make that the test,” said the lioness thoughtfully.

Tommy Smith didn't know which of the two feelings was the higher one, because he wasn't a lion, but he thought that whatever made lions roar most, was the most interesting. “I should like to hear you, Mr. Lion,” he said,—“I mean where you live,” he added, because, of course, he had just been hearing both of them.

“You might be frightened if you did,” said the lion. “Supposing you were camping out, one night, on the banks of some African river, with hardly any fire, because it had been raining, and you couldn't get the wood to burn—and, all at once, you heard us roar like that, in the distance, and then, after a few minutes, nearer, and then nearer still, and always getting nearer and nearer, as we came down to the water, till at last we seemed to be passing right by you, though you couldn't see us, because the night was so dark—and then, if, between the intervals of our roaring, you heard us lapping the water, just below where you sat, and there was a hiss after every roar, as we drew in our breath

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like this,”—and the lion made the sound—“wouldn’t you be very frightened?”

“Yes, I think I should be, Mr. Lion,” said Tommy Smith.

“Then we agree with each other,” said the lion, “so that makes a good place for finishing the conversation.”

And without saying anything else, the lion paced slowly across the floor of his cage, and disappeared through the square opening, followed by the lioness.