

The following is one of three very interesting short stories in *Cassell's Family Magazine* for July.

### CHASED BY A LION; A STORY OF ALDERSHOT CAMP.

Morning parade had just been dismissed, and the long line of red-coats melted away from the drill-ground as though by magic. In twos and threes the officers moved towards their quarters, there to rid themselves of tunic and helmet and sword, and to rest awhile after the fatigue of a hot and dust route march. I gladly divested myself of the gorgeous costume in which I had been slowly grilling all the morning, and then stepped into the mess hut, where about a dozen of the officers were already congregated. The *badinage* of the mess-room when the colonel is out of the way is seldom very entertaining, and I avoided the little hilarious group which had collected round the spot where the waiter was dispensing cooling drinks and took my seat in an arm-chair at the further end of the apartment. I picked up a paper which lay within arm's reach of me, and scanning the columns, came presently upon a paragraph which stated how a lion had escaped from a travelling menagerie at Guildford: how it had eluded all pursuit: had already done no inconsiderable amount of damage amongst the sheep and poultry in the district: and had last visited a farm quite close to the town of Aldershot. I read the item of intelligence through merely, I suppose because it concerned that part of the country in which I happened to be, and then, with about as great or as small a degree of interest as one usually feels in such commonplace paragraphs, I passed on down the column, not giving the matter a second thought.

"Ferguson," called one of the officers—a captain named Angus—across to me, as we sat at lunch an hour later, "will you come for a ride this afternoon?"

"Where are you going?" I inquired.

"Anywhere you like—Bagshot I should suggest."

"Very well, I will go with you," I replied; and catching sight of my orderly at that moment, I called to him, and gave him instructions to see that my horse was saddled and ready for me by two o'clock.

Captain Angus and I mounted, and set forward at a leisurely canter down the long line of huts which reach from the banks of the canal to the limits of the North Camp. It was a very hot day and I was not a little grateful for the shade we presently got from the thick woods of pine-trees between which run the Farnborough road. We chatted briskly on various matters as our horses jogged along, and by-and-by, catching a glimpse of a field full of sheep through a break in the foliage, I recollected the paragraph I had read, and asked my companion whether he knew that a lion was supposed to be roaming at large in the vicinity of the camp.

"A lion!" said he quickly. "No; you don't mean that?"

"So the papers say," said I. "The beast escaped from a menagerie at Guildford, and has not yet been recaptured."

"It's no joke for a lion to be roving about at his own sweet will," said Captain Angus, scanning the trees with a slight expression of uneasiness.

I gave a little laugh. "You are not apprehensive that we shall be attacked by the brute?" said I.

"Oh, no," he answered, "I do not fear that. But a lion is a formidable creature. I recollect that when our battalion lay at the Cape some of us were ordered right away up country on an expedition. We camped one night on the banks of a river, and about three o'clock in the morning, when all was quiet, a huge lion suddenly sprang out of a thicket near which we had established a post and killed the sentry on duty before the guard could turn out to save him."

"I believe," said I, "that I am right in saying a lion will never attack a man unless driven to do so by hunger. Not so with a tiger. But so long as our friend from the Guildford menagerie continues to find the fields stocked with mutton, and the farms with poultry, I do not think he is very likely to risk his liberty by attacking men."

Thus chatting, we rode leisurely onwards. We tarried frequently by the roadside, so that by the time we had gained the summit of the range of Bagshot hills, the hour was close upon five o'clock. We dismounted from our horses to give them a rest, and stood awhile admiring the rich and varied landscape, spreading mellow in the sunshine, and gradually growing fainter and fainter till the prospect died out with the dim blue streak of the distant Portsmouth hills. The camp lay, a mere tiny patch among the surrounding foliage about nine miles away, but there was no occasion for us to be back in it before first mess-call, at half-past seven, and our horses were so fresh that we could easily have covered the distance in an hour had we any mind to hurry. After lingering for about ten minutes, Captain Angus and I again climbed into our saddles.

"Let us return through the Long Valley," said my companion, "It will take us a little longer, it is a true, but then we are in no great hurry, and it is a much prettier road."

Accordingly we descended the hill-slope, and entered a vale communicating with the famous sandy tract celebrated alike for reviews and dust. The ground here was rough and broken, there being, indeed, no regular road, but only a sort of beaten track, so that riding mares still at an easy canter, their progress was much slower than it had been over the hard, level highway. For about an hour we kept leisurely on, and by that time the sun had sailed close down to the brown and barren shoulder of Hungary Hill, and the near set furze bushes cast shadows which infinitely multiplied their stunted growth upon the thin sparse grass of the defile.

We had come to a tract of the valley from which the lofty banks rose precipitately on either hand, within a quarter-mile of one another. The camp was then about two miles away. There was a sort of foreign wilderness in the aspect of the little pass into which we were entering. The soil was of fine yellow sand: not smooth or level, but broken up into a succession of billowy ridges, with here and there an abrupt hillock rising high enough to impede the view. We were riding with our horses neck to neck. I had just lighted a cigar, and was following with some interest an account which Captain Angus was giving me of an exploit in the hunting field, which the reader perhaps would scarcely thank me to recount. Suddenly he stopped dead, and at the same moment reined his horse in with such vehemence that the creature reared right up on to its hind legs with a loud and long-drawn neigh. Wondering at the reason of this abrupt arrest, I checked my own mare, and came to a standstill beside my companion.

"What is the matter, Angus?" I enquired.

For answer he did not speak a word, but slowly raising his arm, and extending it from his shoulder, with the fore-finger pointing nearly straight ahead of us, he brought his eyes to my face, and remained in that posture watching my countenance as I perceived the object he was indicating. And what was it that I saw? Following the direction of his raised arm, I discovered upon the summit of one of the little hillocks about two hundred yards away, standing motionless as a statue, its form blending with the yellow colour of the sand, the figure of a great shaggy lion! The creature stood stock-still, its tail alone whisking slowly from side to side, intently surveying us. For our part, we sat equally motionless in our saddles, Angus with his arm extended and his eyes fixed upon my face, as though he had become transfixed in that posture, and I in the posture of astonished regard into which I had fallen on first perceiving the lion.

Suddenly my horse grew restive; it fretted and neighed, and commenced to curvet and paw the ground as though alarmed. My friend's horse likewise evinced the same signs of apprehension. I kept my eyes as steadily upon the lion as Angus did his upon me. The creature, with stealthy cat-like bounds, commenced advancing very slowly towards us, pausing at about every three steps it made to rear its head and stand staring at us, then continuing its sneaking advance along the ridge of the hillock upon which we had first discovered it.

I withdrew my fixed stare to turn in my saddle and look around