Microsoft

Born Free

Joy Adamson

By The Same Author

LIVING FREE

FOREVER FREE

ELSA: THE STORY OF A LIONESS

ELSA AND HER CUBS

Born Free

Joy Adamson 1960

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Then the chief' captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, "Yea."

And the chief captain answered, with a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, "But I was free born".

ACTS, XXII, 27, 28

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing the story of Elsa, I have made much use of my husband's records, as well as including his letters in the last chapter, and I would like to say that it is therefore partly his book as well as mine.

There are several other people to whom it also owes much: Lord William Percy who has written the preface and honoured Elsa with his friendship; Captain Charles Pitman, the former Game Warden of Uganda, who has contributed the foreword and given me valuable information; Cecil Webb, formerly Curator of Mammals at Regent's Park Zoo, and Director of Dublin Zoo, who has helped me with the revision of the text; Dr. E. G. Appelman, Director of Blydorp, who checked certain zoological data. I would also like to thank Mrs. Robert Atkinson and Mr. Adrian House for taking such a personal interest in the production of the book.

But I owe most to Mrs. George Villiers without whose help and advice, particularly in regard to the collation of the material, this record of Elsa's life would never have appeared in its present form.

J.A.

PREFACE

WHETHER FACT or fiction lies at the root of tales which credit the Assyrians with having trained lions as cheetahs, greyhounds or retrievers are to-day trained to hunt in cooperation with man, the Adamsons can certainly claim to be the first for several thousand years to have made an approach to achieving that result with a lioness-and that, not by any deliberate attempt to do so, but merely by allowing the animal to grow up in their company and never allowing her nature to he subjected to the strains of being confined in any way.

The history of their lioness “Elsa,” reared from earliest infancy to three years old and finally returned to a wild life, forms a unique and illuminating study in animal psychology a subject to which the last half-century has seen a wholly new approach. Partly, no doubt, in revolt against the tendency of nineteenth-century writers to attribute to animals anthropomorphic qualities of intelligence, sentiment, and emotion, the twentieth century has seen the development of a school of thought according to which the springs of animal behaviour are to be sought in terms of “conditioned reflexes,” “release mechanisms,” and the rest of a wholly new vocabulary which is regarded as the gateway to a clearer understanding of animal psychology.

To another way of thinking which cannot reconcile that mechanical conception with the diverse character, intelligence, and capabilities exhibited by different individuals of the same species, that gateway to understanding seems as far removed from truth as the anthropomorphism of a previous generation, and more apt to raise a further barrier to a sympathetic understanding of animal behaviour than a revelation of it.

To whatever way of thinking the reader of Elsa’s history may lean, it provides a record of absorbing interest depicting the gradual development of a controlled character which few would have credited as possible in the case of an animal potentially as dangerous as any in the world.

That such a creature when in a highly excited state, with her blood up after a long struggle with a bull buffalo, and while still on top of it, should have permitted a man to walk up to her and cut the dead beasts throat to satisfy his religious scruples, and then lend her assistance in pulling the carcass out of a river is an astonishing tribute no less to her intelligence than other self-control.

If the most fanciful author of animal stories of the nineteenth century had drawn the imaginary character of a lioness acting in that manner it would assuredly have been ridiculed as altogether “ out of character “ and too improbable to carry conviction-and yet Elsa’s record shows that it is no more than sober fact.

If in her development Elsa has made her own commentary both on the anthropomorphism “ of the nineteenth century and the science “ of the twentieth, she has not lived in vain.

WILLIAM PERCY

FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

TO Be, invited to write a Foreword to joy Adamson's fascinating story of Elsa, the lioness who was never "treated with either force or frustration," is indeed an honour and a privilege.

Vividly describing a most remarkable, probably unique, man-animal relationship, it well illustrates how the truth can be stranger than fiction.

The author and her husband, George, by the exercise of inexhaustible patience, cultivated so strong a bond of sympathy with the cub that they were able to retain not only her friendship but her affectionate devotion when, long after reaching maturity, she became a full-grown, free-roaming lioness, and when one cuff from her mighty paw could mean a broken neck.

Despite manifestations of her latent inherent savagery,

Elsa never lost-and I believe never will lose-that perfect trust and confidence in her human "parents" whom she regards with a peculiar devotion, a devotion which she would never have accorded her own kind. Thus it was that, when in the best interests of both it became advisable to return Elsa to the wild whence she had originally come, she accepted with equanimity and a pathetic dignity a situation which evidently puzzled her and, above all, she displayed no resentment.

But there is pathos in George's letters about his subsequent visits to Elsa's domain: she never failed to turn up to greet him, but he invariably wrote that there was no indication that she had joined up with a wild mate or pride. She had often associated with her feral congeners but to join up with any of them permanently seemed to her to be a contingency to be avoided. Had her intimate association with the human race created too great a gulf between herself and the wild one, which could never be bridged? Was she an integral part of those she has so long loved and trusted? Many animals are subject to man, but Elsa is not; she was free-born, never subject, developed a passionate devotion and became an equal.

But, for a solution of this problem let us turn to the Envoi. Elsa is no longer dependent on her foster parents; at long last she has found a mate and her story moves towards a happy natural ending. So neither side has broken faith, and the Adamsons have eventually achieved what they set out to do. Elsa once again is of the wild. Long may she enjoy her natural existence.

We owe a debt of gratitude to joy Adamson for a factual, vivid portrayal of the many aspects of this strange relationship which has lasted for more than four years. Some of the carefully compiled observations are of considerable scientific value: some have confounded certain of my own impressions of leonine behaviour. May Elsa be spared for many years to add yet further to the incredible store of knowledge to which she has already so freely contributed.

George Adamson is the Senior Game Warden in an

East African Game Department. His duties are primarily to preserve the wild life so long as it is not in direct conflict with man and his works. In consequence he is also charged with the control of wild life, and when necessary he may have to destroy dangerous and destructive wild animals such as lion and elephant, and so it was that Elsa was acquired. The area under him, mainly uninhabited, covers tens of thousands of square miles and this lie had to police, with a hopelessly inadequate force of Africans, in order to detect and prevent the poaching which is rife. This tale in its telling gives a general idea of his functions and of the manifold difficulties of his task, complicated as they invariably were when he was accompanied by a full-grown lioness! Those were indeed astonishing

journeys!

I conclude with the fervent hope that there may long be in this harsh world such human and kindly folk as joy and George Adamson to take pity on the waifs of the wild.

C. R. S. PITMAN formerly Game Warden, Uganda Protectorate.

Chapter One

CUB LIFE

FOR many years my home has been in the Northern Frontier Province of Kenya, that vast stretch of semi-arid thornbrush, covering some hundred and twenty thousand square miles, which extends from Mount Kenya to the Abyssinian border.

Civilisation has made little impact on this part of Africa; there are no settlers; the local tribes live very much as their forefathers did, and the place abounds in wild life of every description.

My husband, George, is Senior Game Warden of this huge territory and our home is on the southern border of the Province, near Isiolo, a small township of about thirty Whites, all of -,whom are government officials engaged in the task of administering the territory.

George has many duties, such as enforcing the Game Laws, preventing poaching and dealing with dangerous animals that have molested the tribesmen. His work causes him to travel over tremendous distances; these journeys we call safaris. Whenever it is possible I accompany my husband on such trips and in this way I have had unique opportunities of coming to grips with this wild, unchanged land, where life is tough and nature asserts her own laws.

This story has its beginning on one of these safaris.

A Boran tribesman had been killed by a man-eating lion.

It was reported to George that this animal, accompanied by two lionesses, was living in some nearby hills and so it became his duty to track them down. This was why we were camping far to the north of Isiolo among the Boran tribesmen.

Early on the morning of the 1st of February, 1956, I found myself in camp alone with Pati, a rock hyrax who had been living with us as a pet for six and a half years.

She looked like a marmot or a guinea-pig; though zoologists will have it that on account of the bone structure of its feet and teeth, the hyrax is most nearly related to rhinos and elephants.

Pati snuggled her soft fur against my neck and from this safe position watched all that went on. The country around us was dry with outcrops of granite and only sparse vegetation; all the same there were animals to be seen, for there were plenty of gerenuk and other gazelles, creatures that have adapted themselves to these dry conditions and rarely, if ever, drink.

Suddenly I heard the vibrations of a car; this could only mean that George was returning much earlier than expected. Soon our Land-Rover broke through the thornbush and stopped near our tents, and I heard George shout: “Joy, where are you? Quick, I have something for you . . .

I rushed out with Pati on my shoulder and saw the skin of a lion. But before I could ask about the hunt, George pointed to the back of the car. There were three lion cubs, tiny balls of spotted fur, each trying to hide its face from everything that went on. They were only a few weeks old and their eyes were still covered with a bluish film. They could hardly crawl, nevertheless they tried to creep away. I took them on my lap to comfort them, while George, who was most distressed, told me what had happened. Towards dawn, he and another game warden, Ken, had been guided near to the place where the man-eater was said to lie up. When first light broke they were charged by a lioness who rushed out from