

FROM DAYS GONE BY

Roping Lions in the Grand Canyon

Don ceased barking. How strange that seemed to me! We were no longer man and hound, but companions, brothers, each one relying on the other. A protruding corner shut us from sight of what was beyond. Don slipped around. I had to go sidewise and shuddered as my fingers bit into the wall.

To my surprise I soon found myself on the floor of a shallow wind cave. The lion trail had led straight across it and on. Shelves of rock stuck out above under which I hurriedly walked. I came upon a shrub cedar growing in a niche and marveled to see it there. Don went slower and slower.

We suddenly rounded a point, to see the lion lying in a box-like space in the wall. The shelf ended there. I had once before been confronted with a like situation, and had expected to find it here, so was not frightened. The lion looked up from

his task of licking a bloody paw, and uttered a fierce growl. His tail began to lash to and fro; it knocked the little stones off the shelf. I heard them click on the wall. Again and again he spat, showing great, white fangs. He was a Tom, heavy and large.

It had been my purpose, of course, to photograph this lion, and now that we

had cornered him I proposed to do it. What would follow had only hazily formed in my mind, but the nucleus of it was that he should go free. I got my camera, opened it, and focused from between twenty and twenty-five feet.

Then a growl from Don and roar from the lion made me come to my senses. I did so and my first movement after seeing the lion had risen threateningly was to whip out my revolver.

The lion's cruel yellow eyes darkened and darkened. In an instant I saw my error. Jones had always said in case any one of us had to face a lion, never for a single instant to shift his glance. I had forgotten that, and in short interval when I focused

my camera the lion had seen I meant him no harm, or feared him, and he had risen. Even then in desperate lessening ambition for a great picture I attempted to take one, still keeping my glance on him.

It was then that the appalling nature of my predicament made itself plain to me. The lion leaped ten feet and stood snarling horribly right in my face.

Brave, noble Don, with infinitely more sense and courage than I possessed, faced the lion and bayed him in his teeth. I raised the revolver and aimed twice, each time lowering it because I feared to shoot in such a precarious position. To wound the lion would be the worst thing I could do, and I knew that only a shot through the brain would kill him in his tracks.

"Hold him, Don, hold him!" I yelled, and I took a backward step. The lion put forward one big paw, his eyes now all purple blaze. I backed again and he came forward. Don gave ground slowly. Once the lion flashed a yellow paw at him. It was frightful to see the wide-spread claws.

In the consternation of the moment I allowed the lion to back me across the front of the wind cave, where I saw, the moment it was too late, I should have taken advantage of more space to shoot him.

Fright succeeded consternation, and I began to tremble. The lion was master of the situation. What would happen when I came to the narrow point on the shelf where it would be impossible for me to back around? I almost fainted. The thought of heroic Don saved me, and the weak moment passed.

"By God, Don, you've got the nerve, and I must have it too!"

I stopped in my tracks. The lion, appearing huge now, took slow catlike steps toward me, backing Don almost against my knees. He was so close I smelt him. His wonderful eyes, clear blue fire circled by yellow flame, fascinated me. Hugging the wall with my body I brought the revolver up, short armed, and with clinched teeth, and nerve strained to the breaking point, I aimed between the eyes and pulled the trigger.

The left eye seemed to go out blankly, then followed the bellow of the revolver and the smell of powder. The lion uttered a sound that was a mingling of snarls, howls and roars and he rose straight up, towering high over my head, beating the wall heavily with his paws.

In helpless terror I stood there forgetting weapon, fearing only the beast would fall over on me.

But in death agony he bounded out from the wall to fall into space.

I sank down on the shelf, legs powerless, body in cold sweat. As I waited, slowly my mind freed itself from a tight iron band and a sickening relief filled my soul. Tensely I waited and listened. Don whined once.

Would the lion never strike? What seemed a long period of time ended in a low, distant roar of sliding rock, quickly dying into the solemn stillness of the canyon. ■

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This issue's excerpt was selected by B&C Associate, Richard Olewiler from *Tales of Lonely Trails* by Zane Gray, published in 1922.

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