

6. Simba

Roald Dahl



Roald Dahl (1916-1990) was a British writer whose most notable works include books for children. His books *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *James and the Giant Peach* are enjoyed by children all over the world

The Sanford house was on a hill outside the town. On the burnt-up plain itself, there grew nothing but those bare, spiky thorn trees that you find all over East Africa. We sat there watching the sun go down behind the flat down plain that was covered with thorn trees.



Suddenly, the voice of a man yelling in Swahili exploded into the quiet of the evening. It was my boy, Mdisho. 'Bwana! Bwana! Bwana!' he was yelling from somewhere behind the house. 'Simba, bwana! Simba! Simba!'





Simba is Swahili for lion. All three of us leapt to our feet and the next moment Mdisho came tearing round the corner of the house yelling at us in Swahili, Come quick, bwana! Come quick! Come quick! A huge lion is eating the cook's wife!

That sounds pretty funny when you put it on paper here in England, but to us, standing on a veranda in the middle of East Africa, it was not funny at all. Robert Sanford flew into the house and came out again in five seconds flat holding a powerful rifle and ramming a cartridge into the breach.



Get those children indoors!’ he shouted to his wife as he ran down off the veranda with me behind him.

Mdisho was dancing about and pointing towards the back of the house and yelling in Swahili, ‘The lion has taken the cook’s wife and he is chasing the lion!’

The servants lived in a series of low whitewashed outbuildings at the back of the house and as we came running round the corner we saw four or five house-boys leaping about and pointing and shrieking, ‘Simba! Simba! Simba!’ The boys were all clothed in spotless white cotton robes that looked like long nightshirts and each had a fine scarlet tarboosh on his head. The tarboosh is a sort of top-hat without a brim and there is often a black tassel on it. The women had come out of their huts as well and were standing in a separate group, silent, immobile and staring.

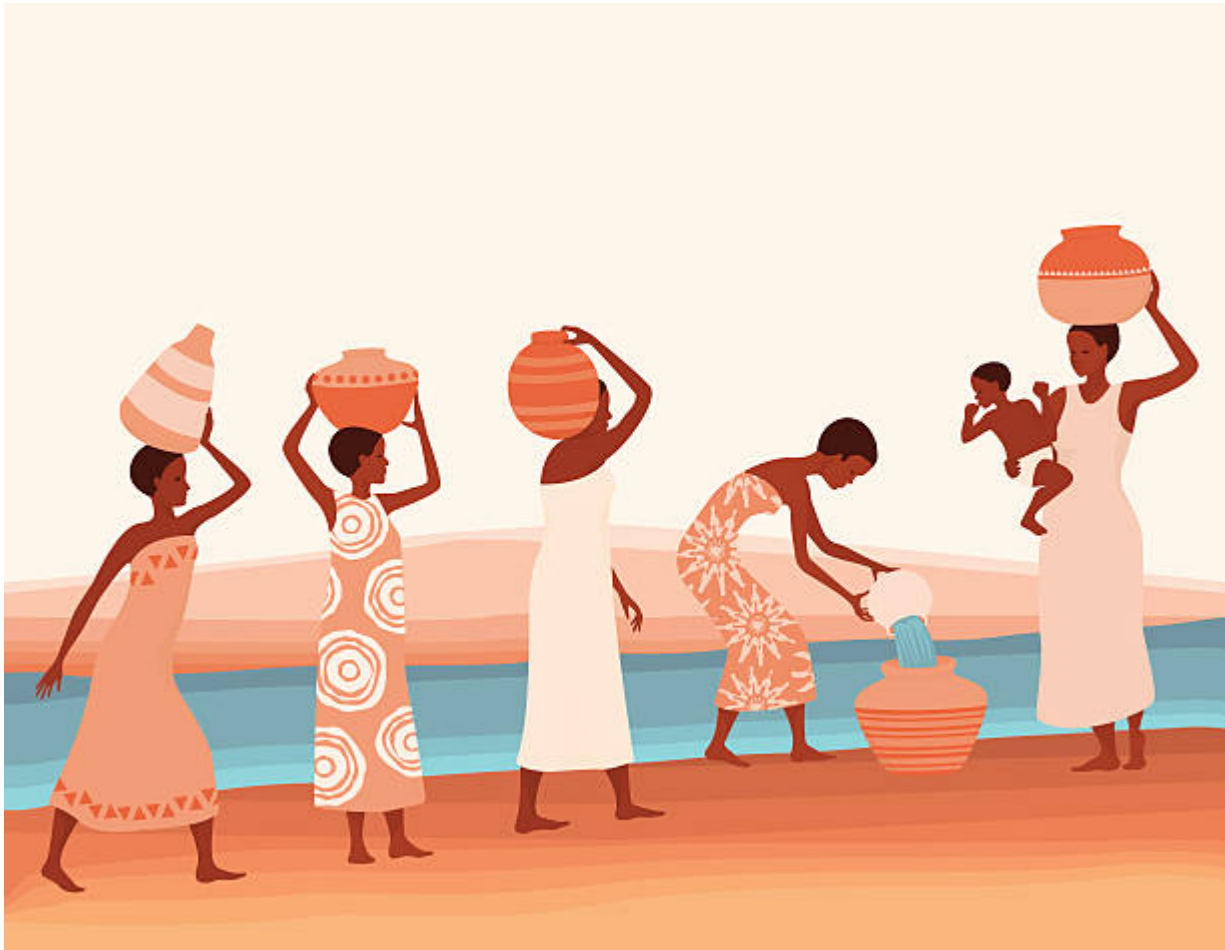


'Where is it?' Robert Sanford shouted, but he had no need to ask, for we very quickly spotted the massive sandy-colored lion not more than eighty or ninety yards off and trotting away from the house. He had a fine bushy collar of fur around his neck, and in his jaws he was holding the wife of the cook. The lion had the woman by the waist so that her head and arms hung down on one side and her legs on the other and I could see that she was wearing a red and white spotted dress. The lion, so startlingly close, was loping away from us in the calmest possible manner with a slow, long-striding, springy lope and behind the lion, not more than the length of a tennis court behind, ran the cook himself in his white cotton robe and with his red hat on his head, running most bravely and waving his arms like a whirlwind, leaping, clapping his hands, screaming, shouting, shouting, shouting, 'Simba! Simba! Simba! Simba! Let



go of my wife! Let go of my wife!

Oh, it was a scene of great tragedy and comedy both mixed up together, and now Robert Sanford was running in full speed after the cook who was running after the lion. He was holding his rifle in both hands and shouting to the cook, 'Pingo! Pingo! Get out of the way, Pingo! Lie down on the ground so I can shoot the simba! You are in my way! You are in my way, Pingo!



But the cook ignored him and kept on running, and the lion ignored everybody, not altering his pace at all but continuing to lope along with slow springy strides and with the head held high and carrying the woman proudly in his jaws, rather like a dog that is trotting off with a good bone.

The lion was heading for one of those hillocks that was densely covered with jungle trees and we all knew that once he got in there, we would never be able to get at him. The incredibly brave cook was actually catching up on the lion and was now not more than ten yards behind him and Robert Sanford was thirty or forty yards behind the cook. 'Aye!' the cook was shouting. 'Simba! Simba! Simba! Let go my wife! I am coming after you, Simba!' Then Robert Sanford stopped and raised his rifle and took aim and I thought surely he is not risking a shot at a moving lion when it's got a woman in its jaws. There was an almighty crack as the big gun went off and I saw a spurt of dust just ahead of the lion. The lion stopped dead and turned his head, still holding the woman in his jaws. He must have

thought an army was coming after him, because instantaneously he dropped the cook's wife on to the ground and broke for cover. I have never seen anything accelerate so fast from a standing start.



The cook reached the wife first, then Robert Sanford, then me. I couldn't believe what I saw. I was certain that the grip of those terrible jaws would have ripped the woman's waist and stomach almost in two, but there she was sitting up on the ground and smiling at the cook, her husband.

'Where are you hurt?' shouted Robert Sanford, rushing up.

The cook's wife looked up at him and kept smiling and she said in Swahili, 'That old lion, he couldn't Scare me; I just lay there in his mouth pretending I was dead and he didn't even bite through my clothes. He carried me as gently as if I had been one of his own cubs. But now I shall have to wash my dress.'



The story of this strange happening with the lion spread in the end all over East Africa and

it became a bit of a legend. Nobody could give a sensible explanation of this bizarre' incident. Many tried at the time, but none of them made any sense. The matter has remained a mystery ever since.



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