

TERROR AT DAWN

February 1982

We, our friends Ida and Kurt, return from Kilimanjaro and are picked up at the gate by Lilian and David, who run a plantation in Arusha.

We spend a few days of rest and preparation for a longer trip to the wildlife of Africa on the farm of Lilian and David.

We are a small group with two Toyota Landcruisers, 7 people 3 couples and a black cook and our drive past small African villages with their happy population, the children waving at the roadside, our destination the Serengeti. We reach the Ngorogoro Crater and pitch our tents in a spot at the bottom of the crater overlooking the whole crater.

On the third morning, it is just getting light, the visibility is not exactly good, but still far enough to be able to recognize everything in the immediate vicinity....

Our open-air toilet is located about 80 meters below the tents at a small group of trees and bushes. With a broad hoe, as they are usual in Africa, I make myself still a little sleepy on the way. On the left, I guess so 40 meters I see three elephants like they tear small branches from the trees. When I go down, I pay special attention to whether there are more in the vicinity. Make a hole, throw the hoe with a slight swing behind me and sit down. Around me everything is quiet, no birdsong, strangely dead silent.

After a while a larger bird flutters about three meters above me, once to the right, once to the left, as it turns out later a hawk. I watch the bird as it flutters above me and cannot explain its strange behavior. Distracted by the bird, I no longer observed the immediate surroundings.

Suddenly, I can no longer tell if I heard something or was it my instinct, I looked around and to my horror I see a lion's head, just a young one I think, no more than 8 meters half right in front of me. I pull up my pants and with a terrible roar I rush toward the heel, which is stupidly two and a half meters in front of me, of all things in almost the same direction of the lion. Startled by my behavior, the lion and a second female lion I had not yet seen, flees to the left side.

Now good advice is expensive, the pants in the left, the hoe raised in the right, I stand there. The first lion is about 8, the second 9 meters in front of me. It costs me a great overcoming not to run away; that would have been probably the last thing I did in my life. Stand still ? This proved to be the case almost a year ago when two big dogs attacked me. After my thoughts had calmed down a bit, I tried it with very slow deep breathing in and out, I tried it with very slow steps, like in slow motion, to walk backwards. But after 6 to 7 steps I have to give up this endeavor because the front lion follows me step by step, the mouth once closed,

then half open again. Slightly crouched, the tail goes back and forth, it is only a matter of time until he jumps at me.

A feeling of fear slowly spreads and I notice how the lion gains the upper hand. Only now it occurs to me what would have been the most obvious, I call several times loudly David-David. This runs off, turns however after approx. 30 meters around, because if an elephant should press me so he could align alone also nothing. So he has to get the car key in his tent, Eusenio our cook is also on the spot and is already sitting in the car, I thought for a long time to my rescue but Lilian later enlightened me that he was almost white with fear.

Although hardly more than one at most two minutes have passed since my call, the time seems infinitely long to me until they drive between me and the lions.

I breathe a sigh of relief, my self-confidence slowly returns and I can finally button my pants. Having become courageous, I take the hoe in hand, run the few meters to scrape the hole, take the toilet roll and get in. David looks at me for a while and finally says, "Maidlinger" you never get enough".

Soon we start our last game drive and get very close to several rhinos and as we drive along the small forest we meet 3 female lions which probably had the encounter with me. That this assumption was correct was confirmed by Lilian who stayed in the camp and followed the lions with binoculars to the edge of the forest.

Days later back in Arusha, we meet friends who were on another tour, Gundula and Heinz they both work in the Wilhelma in Stuttgart, Fritz in the Zurich Zoo, so people who are very familiar with the behavior of the animals. The unanimous opinion of all is; running away would have been disastrous for me. Fritz is still hanging on: One may have fear, but one may not show it.

The three lions were clearly looking for food, because when a lion's belly is full, he hardly takes a step, except from the sun into the shade. Also the crouched creeping up to me indicates that it was only a few seconds before the jump, because in the first moment I thought to have a young lion in front of me.

I must add, it has been observed several times that birds have alerted predators to a possible prey.

But as it is in life, one must have luck and I had it, much luck even.

To all the warmest greetings Dorly and Wolf

