

nish the wherewithal for my sister and myself to attend school in that city. He had neglected us for many years, but we believed eagerly in his promises and made the change.

I was 14: tall and gangling and ridden almost equally with ambitions to be a crack entomologist specializing in butterflies and moths and to enlist in the Army for service overseas in World War I. Neither of these ambitions was achieved; but I did try.

On the entomological front, I soon made contact with Dr. Gerhardt at the Field Museum. Why this genial man put up with me is something I will never know; but he did his best to welcome the fumbling intrusion of an enthusiastic boy who came claiming his time on Saturdays and sometimes late on weekday afternoons also.

One cold winter day, in that drafty tangle of dim hallways I found a small assemblage of museum officials and workmen who were, for the moment, honored by the presence of Carl Akeley. He had dropped in to give his opinion concerning some exhibits. I stood close and, with the rest, thrilled to the impressive conversation of this internationally famous naturalist, explorer, and sculptor, who towered like a silver-clad peak in his field.

There were not many more moments of happiness for me in Chicago, however. My father was arrested for using the mails to defraud; I quit school and went to work as an office boy to help provide eating money for the family. Then the Child-Labor inspectors caught up with me and threw me out of my job because I was under 16. We had to go back to Iowa.

For me, returning to Webster City High School was a painful experience. I was now three years behind my old class, and I was more aware than ever that the school was filled with parrot voices, squeaking and quacking trivial parrot notions. But I did not know how really painful school could be until I made the mistake of bragging that I had met Carl Akeley, stood beside him, even—I laughed—worked with him.

Fervently, I launched into a recital of Akeley's accomplishments. I pointed out how he had revolutionized the whole process of zoological exhibitions by striving for a presentation in which specimens were set before the public in their natural posture and surroundings. I told of his journeys and writings, his fight to protect the gorillas from those who would murder them pointlessly.

"And yet I guess you couldn't call a man like that very soft," I added, "not a man who actually killed a leopard with his bare hands!"

"Bare hands?"

"He had nothing else at the moment, and it was a case of either Dr. Akeley or the leopard. He doesn't hanker after killing animals, but that time he had to do it."

#### Loose Talk in Front of Spies

They stood regarding me doubtfully. There were not only friends in this crew, there were Enemies as well: the ones whom we called spies—spies for the Principal, spies for the Superintendent. I was sticking my neck way out. I should have known better, but didn't.

"What do you mean, Mack? You say you worked with him—"

"Certainly!" I shot back with all the show-off arrogance of youth (most especially youth which has been savagely bruised). "We helped move

some things out of an exhibit and put them in another case. Everybody worked and shoved, side by side! Even the head of the museum. Sure, I met Carl Akeley and worked with him."

That time I was really asking for it. And I got it. Oh, *how* I got it . . .

When I arrived at school that fateful morning, there were people waiting for me in the hall. I saw faces smiling, and some of the smiles weren't very pleasant. I felt a little chilly but still didn't know why.

"Mack, have you seen the bulletin board?"

No, I had not; so they led me up to read the thing displayed there.

The homemade handbill was prepared in neat type. There was a picture of Carl Akeley and the announcement that, while in town for the lecture, he had consented to talk to the high-school students that very morning. Worst of all was the paragraph appended, which read something like this:

"It may interest the high-school classes to know that one of their fellow members, Mack Kantor, once became acquainted with Dr. Akeley and worked side by side with him at the Field Museum in Chicago. No doubt this will come as a surprise to many, and probably it will be an especially happy surprise for Dr. Akeley to greet his old friend. Mack will be encouraged to meet with Dr. Akeley immediately after the latter has finished his discourse in the assembly room."

The whole purpose of this enterprise, of course, was to reveal me as a liar. In our tenderhearted Webster City of that period there was, unhappily for me, a school of thought which reiterated through the years: "Mack will probably turn out to be just like his father."

I stood there with personal and social disaster only minutes ahead. Carl Akeley wouldn't remember me, naturally enough. Why should he recall a bony schoolboy who had been one of a throng—three years before—and during a momentary encounter?

#### Loading a Lamb to Slaughter

There was sweat on the back of my neck, sweat under my hair. I tried to smile . . .

"Did you hear that?" said a voice in my ear. "They've just rung the bell for assembly. Come on, Mack. Up to the assembly room!"

Then I was walking. My footfalls sounded tiny and far away.

We reached the assembly room. I was in a trance. Somehow I sat down, tried to grin feebly; and then the next moment the Superintendent was on the platform with Carl Akeley beside him.

I haven't the slightest idea what Carl Akeley talked about that morning; didn't know then, can't tell you now. Brief it must have been: speakers were never asked to appear for more than 15 minutes. But it seemed like 15 hours to me.

Eventually we applauded the speaker. A bell rang for dismissal, and we all rose up and turned away from our desks; we filled the aisles.

I tried to find shelter behind others, tried to droop down, efface myself physically, and this was difficult to manage because I was tall. Then quickly . . . *oh, it will be over soon, it will be over* . . . my nickname was called—a single syllable like the cracking of a whip.

"Mack," the Superintendent called. "Come here!" He was smiling—how he smiled—and the burly Principal was grinning behind him.

Carl Akeley halted and looked puzzled.

"Just a minute, sir, if you please," said the Principal. "Here's an old friend of yours."

Somehow, I'd walked that distance to the front of the room. I stood there and looked into those deep-set eyes. Feebly, I was extending my hand.

"Surely, Dr. Akeley," said the Superintendent, "you'll remember someone who says he knew you at the Field Museum?"

They repeated my name again and again—repeated it with various inflections, and their triumphant leer was as the smirk of devils. Three hundred students stood staring, wondering what would happen; but most of them thought they knew. And all those teachers rimmed along the back of the room and at the sides—they were watching, the world was watching.

I said: "Dr. Akeley, sir. It was only once that we met. I was with Dr. Gerhardt. They were moving an exhibit—"

#### A Last-Minute Reprieve

The expression on his face underwent complete alteration. Never have I seen so much compassion, such nobility projected into a human countenance, and all in a split second.

He *knew!* Dr. Akeley *knew!* He knew what they were trying to do to me.

"Remember you?" he cried. "Of course I remember you!"

He repeated the name they had uttered to him, the name he had never heard before, would never recall more; yet he made a magic of it.

"Of course, of course!" he cried. "In Chicago, some years ago. Yes, you've grown so much, Mack, I didn't know you! You were a friend of Osgood, right? Of course, of course—"

And I hadn't been a friend of Dr. Osgood; I had only watched him in admiration, when sometimes we passed in a museum corridor.

Carl Akeley moved leisurely toward the staircase—and I was moving with him because he had his arm across my shoulders and was impelling me on his way, which had now become my way.

"Tell me," he said, "what are you doing here?"

"Well, sir, I was interested in entomology at that time. But now I want to be a writer. I'm working on a newspaper, part time, and going to school the rest of the time."

"Ah, yes," he said. "Writing: sad and lonely business! But of course—" The deep eyes peered at me. "If you're determined, there will be no stopping you." His thick arm, that arm so torn and scarred, tightened across my shoulders.

Students and teachers had parted to let us through as we went down the stairs. We reached the second floor and then shook hands.

"Sir," I said, "I've got to go to class. It was nice of you to—remember me—"

"How could I help it?" said the Great Man. "And, Mack—you'll be at my lecture tonight?"

"Yes, sir. I'll be there."

So his voice comes down the years—all the way from the Africa where his gnarled bones rest, all the way from that challenging Paradise which his soul must be exploring.

In those few minutes, by force and example, he had taught me something that I needed very much to learn. He taught me that the measure of a man's true greatness is not necessarily in the extent of his accomplishments but in the extent to which his heart remains unsoiled, unspoiled, forever understanding.

I had been surrounded by rodents and needed to meet up with a tawny lion. I had met one.