

# THE DAY I MET A LION

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*As a youngster, the author had met Carl Akeley in a Chicago museum, but would the great explorer remember him three years later at a high-school assembly in a small Iowa town?*

**T**HE GREAT MAN was coming to our little town.

The Great Man's cragged face stared with a kind of defiant serenity from posters, from pages of our two local newspapers. Power and enigma of the African wilderness shone in his eyes—as if a pride of lions walked with him.

His name was Carl Akeley; and although it is now more than 40 years since last I looked at him, I still remember vividly the moment when his big misshapen fingers touched my life.

In those days, I was surrounded by Little Men. My father was divorced and mainly out of the picture. My maternal grandfather—hard-working, taciturn, grimly honest—was still a Little Man. So was the man who owned the newspaper which my mother edited, and where I worked, helping her. So were the bulk of those who walked the Webster City streets.

There were perhaps a dozen statuesque souls in our Iowa community. But I was only a teenager; rarely can the gulf between maturity and immaturity be bridged with any intimacy.

Night after night, on my way home from work, I stopped at a shopwindow where the powerful face of Carl Akeley looked out into space, and I recognized and bowed before his majesty. I pinched myself—I had actually stood beside the man, even exchanged conversation with him!

It had happened in Chicago three years before. Surprisingly, my father had volunteered to fur-



*Carl Akeley moved leisurely toward the stairs—and I was moving with him. "Tell me," he said, "what are you doing here?"*