

## GOMBE

I ROLLED OVER and looked at the time — 5.44 A.M. Long years of early rising have led to an ability to wake just before the unpleasant clamour of an alarm clock. Soon I was sitting on the steps of my house looking out over Lake Tanganyika. The waning moon, in her last quarter, was suspended above the horizon, where the mountainous shoreline of Zaire fringed Lake Tanganyika. It was a still night, and the moon's path danced and sparkled towards me across the gently moving water. My breakfast — a banana and a cup of coffee from the thermos flask — was soon finished, and ten minutes later I was climbing the steep slope behind the house, my miniature binoculars and camera stuffed into my pockets along with notebook, pencil stubs, a handful of raisins for my lunch, and plastic bags in which to put everything should it rain. The faint light from the moon, shining on the dew-laden grass, enabled me to find my way without difficulty and presently I arrived at the place where, the evening before, I had watched eighteen chimpanzees settle down for the night. I sat to wait until they woke.

All around, the trees were still shrouded with the last mysteries of the night's dreaming. It was very quiet, utterly peaceful. The only sounds were the occasional chirp of a cricket, and the soft murmur where the lake caressed the shingle, way below. As I sat there I felt the expectant thrill that, for me, always pre-

cedes a day with the chimpanzees, a day roaming the forests and mountains of Gombe, a day for new discoveries, new insights.

Then came a sudden burst of song, the duet of a pair of robin chats, hauntingly beautiful. I realized that the intensity of light had changed: dawn had crept upon me unawares. The coming brightness of the sun had all but vanquished the silvery, indefinite illumination of its own radiance reflected by the moon. The chimpanzees still slept.

Five minutes later came a rustling of leaves above. I looked up and saw branches moving against the lightening sky. That was where Goblin, top-ranking male of the community, had made his nest. Then stillness again. He must have turned over, then settled down for a last snooze. Soon after this there was movement from another nest to my right, then from one behind me, further up the slope. Rustlings of leaves, the cracking of a little twig. The group was waking up. Peering through my binoculars into the tree where Fifi had made a nest for herself and her infant Fiossi, I saw the silhouette of her foot. A moment later Fanni, her eight-year-old daughter, climbed up from her nest nearby and sat just above her mother, a small dark shape against the sky. Fifi's other two offspring, adult Freud and adolescent Frodo, had nested further up the slope.

Nine minutes after he had first moved, Goblin abruptly sat up and, almost at once, left his nest and began to leap wildly through the tree, vigorously swaying the branches. Instant pandemonium broke out. The chimpanzees closest to Goblin left their nests and rushed out of his way. Others sat up to watch, tense and ready for flight. The early morning peace was shattered by frenzied grunts and screams as Goblin's subordinates voiced their respect or fear. A few moments later, the arboreal part of his display over, Goblin leapt down and charged past me, slapping and stamping on the wet ground, rearing up and shaking the vegetation, picking up and hurling a rock, an old piece of

wood, another rock. Then he sat, hair bristling, some fifteen feet away. He was breathing heavily. My own heart was beating fast. As he swung down, I had stood up and held onto a tree, praying that he would not pound on me as he sometimes does. But, to my relief, he had ignored me, and I sat down again.

With soft, panting grunts Goblin's young brother Gimble climbed down and came to greet the alpha or top-ranking male, touching his face with his lips. Then, as another adult male approached Goblin, Gimble moved hastily out of the way. This was my old friend Evered. As he approached, with loud, submissive grunts, Goblin slowly raised one arm in salutation and Evered rushed forward. The two males embraced, grinning widely in the excitement of this morning reunion so that their teeth flashed white in the semi-darkness. For a few moments they groomed each other and then, calmed, Evered moved away and sat quietly nearby.

The only other adult who climbed down then was Fifi, with Fioffi clinging to her belly. She avoided Goblin, but approached Evered, grunting softly, reached out her hand and touched his arm. Then she began to groom him. Fioffi climbed into Evered's lap and looked up into his face. He glanced at her, groomed her head intently for a few moments, then turned to reciprocate Fifi's attentions. Fioffi moved half-way towards where Goblin sat—but his hair was still bristling, and she thought better of it and, instead, climbed a tree near Fifi. Soon she began to play with Fanni, her sister.

Once again peace returned to the morning, though not the silence of dawn. Up in the trees the other chimpanzees of the group were moving about, getting ready for the new day. Some began to feed, and I heard the occasional soft thud as skins and seeds of figs were dropped to the ground. I sat, utterly content to be back at Gombe after an unusually long time away—almost three months of lectures, meetings, and lobbying in the USA

and Europe. This would be my first day with the chimps and I planned to enjoy it to the full, just getting reacquainted with my old friends, taking pictures, getting my climbing legs back.

It was Evered who led off, thirty minutes later, twice pausing and looking back to make sure that Goblin was coming too. Fifi followed, Fiossi perched on her back like a small jockey, Fanni close behind. Now the other chimps climbed down and wandered after us. Freud and Frodo, adult males Atlas and Beethoven, the magnificent adolescent Wilkie, and two females, Patti and Kidevu, with their infants. There were others, but they were travelling higher up the slope, and I didn't see them then. We headed north, parallel with the beach below, then plunged down into Kasekela Valley and, with frequent pauses for feeding, made our way up the opposite slope. The eastern sky grew bright, but not until 8.30 A.M. did the sun itself finally peep over the peaks of the rift escarpment. By this time we were high above the lake. The chimpanzees stopped and groomed for a while, enjoying the warmth of the morning sunshine.

About twenty minutes later there was a sudden outbreak of chimpanzee calls ahead—a mixture of pant-hoots, as we call the loud distance calls, and screams. I could hear the distinctive voice of the large, sterile female Gigi among a medley of females and youngsters. Goblin and Evered stopped grooming and all the chimps stared towards the sounds. Then, with Goblin now in the lead, most of the group moved off in that direction.

Fifi, however, stayed behind and continued to groom Fanni while Fiossi played by herself, dangling from a low branch near her mother and elder sister. I decided to stay too, delighted that Frodo had moved on with the others for he so often pesters me. He wants me to play, and, because I will not, he becomes aggressive. At twelve years of age he is much stronger than I am, and this behaviour is dangerous. Once he stamped so hard on my head that my neck was nearly broken. And on another occasion he pushed me down a steep slope. I can only hope that, as he ma-

tures and leaves childhood behind him, he will grow out of these irritating habits.

I spent the rest of the morning wandering peacefully with Fifi and her daughters, moving from one food tree to the next. The chimps fed on several different kinds of fruit and once on some young shoots. For about forty-five minutes they pulled apart the leaves of low shrubs which had been rolled into tubes held closely by sticky threads, then munched on the caterpillars that wriggled inside. Once we passed another female—Gremlin and her new infant, little Galahad. Fanni and Fiossi ran over to greet them, but Fifi barely glanced in their direction.

All the time we were climbing higher and higher. Presently, on an open grassy ridge we came upon another small group of chimps: the adult male Prof, his young brother Pax, and two rather shy females with their infants. They were feeding on the leaves of a massive *mbula* tree. There were a few quiet grunts of greeting as Fifi and her youngsters joined the group, then they also began to feed. Presently the others moved on, Fanni with them. But Fifi made herself a nest and stretched out for a mid-day siesta. Fiossi stayed too, climbing about, swinging, amusing herself near her mother. And then she joined Fifi in her nest, lay close and suckled.

From where I sat, below Fifi, I could look out over the Kasekela Valley. Opposite, to the south, was the Peak. A surge of warm memories flooded through me as I saw it, a rounded shoulder perched above the long grassy ridge that separates Kasekela from the home valley, Kakombe. In the early days of the study at Gombe, in 1960 and 1961, I had spent day after day watching the chimpanzees, through my binoculars, from the superb vantage point. I had taken a little tin trunk up to the Peak, with a kettle, some coffee and sugar, and a blanket. Sometimes, when the chimps had slept nearby, I had stayed up there with them, wrapped in my blanket against the chill of the night air. Gradually I had pieced together something of their daily life, learned

about their feeding habits and travel routes, and begun to understand their unique social structure—small groups joining to form larger ones, large groups splitting into smaller ones, single chimpanzees roaming, for a while, on their own.

From the Peak I had seen, for the first time, a chimpanzee eating meat: David Graybeard. I had watched him leap up into a tree clutching the carcass of an infant bushpig, which he shared with a female while the adult pigs charged about below. And only about a hundred yards from the Peak, on a never-to-be-forgotten day in October 1960, I had watched David Graybeard, along with his close friend Goliath, fishing for termites with stems of grass. Thinking back to that far-off time I relived the thrill I had felt when I saw David reach out, pick a wide blade of grass and trim it carefully so that it could more easily be poked into the narrow passage in the termite mound. Not only was he using the grass as a tool—he was, by modifying it to suit a special purpose, actually showing the crude beginnings of *tool-making*. What excited telegrams I had sent off to Louis Leakey, that far-sighted genius who had instigated the research at Gombe. Humans were not, after all, the *only* tool-making animals. Nor were chimpanzees the placid vegetarians that people had supposed.

That was just after my mother, Vanne, had left to return to her other responsibilities in England. During her four-month stay she had made an invaluable contribution to the success of the project: she had set up a clinic—four poles and a thatched roof—where she had provided medicines to the local people, mostly fishermen and their families. Although her remedies had been simple—aspirin, Epsom salts, iodine, Band-Aids and so on—her concern and patience had been unlimited, and her cures often worked. Much later we learned that many people had thought that she possessed magic powers for healing. Thus she had secured for me the goodwill of the local human population.

Above me, Fifi stirred, cradling little Fioffi more comfortably

as she suckled. Then her eyes closed again. The infant nursed for a few more minutes, then the nipple slipped from her mouth as she too slept. I continued to daydream, reliving in my mind some of the more memorable events of the past.

I remembered the day when David Graybeard had first visited my camp by the lakeshore. He had come to feed on the ripe fruits of an oil-nut palm that grew there, spied some bananas on the table outside my tent, and taken them off to eat in the bush. Once he had discovered bananas he had returned for more and gradually other chimpanzees had followed him to my camp.

One of the females who became a regular visitor in 1963 was Fifi's mother, old Flo of the ragged ears and bulbous nose. What an exciting day when, after five years of maternal preoccupation with her infant daughter, Flo had become sexually attractive again. Flaunting her shell-pink sexual swelling she had attracted a whole retinue of suitors. Many of them had never been to camp, but they had followed Flo there, sexual passions overriding natural caution. And, once they had discovered bananas, they had joined the rapidly growing group of regular camp visitors. And so I had become more and more familiar with the whole host of unforgettable chimpanzee characters who are described in my first book, *In the Shadow of Man*.

Fifi, lying so peacefully above me now, was one of the few survivors of those early days. She had been an infant when first I knew her in 1961. She had weathered the terrible polio epidemic that had swept through the population — chimpanzee and human alike — in 1966. Ten of the chimpanzees of the study group had died or vanished. Another five had been crippled, including her eldest brother, Faben, who had lost the use of one arm.

At the time of that epidemic the Gombe Stream Research Centre was in its infancy. The first two research assistants were helping to collect and type out notes on chimp behavior. Some twenty-five chimpanzees were regularly visiting camp by then,

and so there had been more than enough work for all of us. After watching the chimps all day we had often transcribed notes from our tape recorders until late at night.

My mother, Vanne, had made two other visits to Gombe during the sixties. One of those had been when the National Geographic Society sent Hugo van Lawick to film the study—which, by then, they were financing. Louis Leakey had wangled Vanne's fare and expenses, insisting that it would not be right for me to be alone in the bush with a young man. How different the moral standards of a quarter of a century ago! Hugo and I had married anyway, and Vanne's third visit, in 1967, had been to share with me, for a couple of months, the task of raising my son, Grub (his real name is Hugo Eric Louis) in the bush.

There was a slight movement from Fifi's nest and I saw that she had turned and was looking down at me. What was she thinking? How much of the past did she remember? Did she ever think of her old mother, Flo? Had she followed the desperate struggle of her brother, Figan, to rise to the top-ranking, alpha position? Had she even been aware of the grim years when the males of her community, often led by Figan, had waged a sort of primitive war against their neighbours, assaulting them, one after the other, with shocking brutality? Had she known about the gruesome cannibalistic attacks made by Passion and her adult daughter Pom on newborn infants of the community?

Again my attention was jerked back to the present, this time by the sound of a chimpanzee crying. I smiled. That would be Fanni. She had reached the adventurous age when a young female often moves away from her mother to travel with the adults. Then, suddenly, she wants mother desperately, leaves the group, and sets off to search for her. The crying grew louder and soon Fanni came into sight. Fifi paid no attention, but Fiossi jumped out of the nest and scrambled down to embrace her elder sister. And Fanni, finding Fifi where she had left her, stopped her childish crying.

Clearly Fifi had been waiting for Fanni—now she climbed down and set off, and the children followed after, playing as they went. The family moved rapidly down the steep slope to the south. As I scrambled after them, every branch seemed to catch in my hair or my shirt. Frantically I crawled and wriggled through a terrible tangle of undergrowth. Ahead of me the chimpanzees, fluid black shadows, moved effortlessly. The distance between us increased. The vines curled around the buckles of my shoes and the strap of my camera, the thorns caught in the flesh of my arms, my eyes smarted till the tears flowed as I yanked my hair from the snags that reached out from all around. After ten minutes I was drenched in sweat, my shirt was torn, my knees bruised from crawling on the stony ground—and the chimps had vanished. I kept quite still, trying to listen above the pounding of my heart, peering in all directions through the thicket around me. But I heard nothing.

For the next thirty-five minutes I wandered along the rocky bed of the Kasekela Stream, pausing to listen, to scan the branches above me. I passed below a troop of red colobus monkeys, leaping through the tree tops, uttering their strange, high-pitched, twittering calls. I encountered some baboons of D troop, including old Fred with his one blind eye and the double kink in his tail. And then, as I was wondering where to go next, I heard the scream of a young chimp further up the valley. Ten minutes later I had joined Gremlin with little Galahad, Gigi and two of Gombe's youngest and most recent orphans, Mel and Darbee, both of whom had lost their mothers when they were only just over three years old. Gigi, as she so often does these days, was "auntying" them both. They were all feeding in a tall tree above the almost dry stream and I stretched out on the rocks to watch them. During my scramble after Fifi the sun had vanished, and now, as I looked up through the canopy, I could see the sky, grey and heavy with rain. With a growing darkness came the stillness, the hush, that so often precedes hard rain. Only the rumbling of

the thunder, moving ever closer, broke this stillness; the thunder and the rustling movements of the chimpanzees.

When the rain began Galahad, who had been dangling and patting at his toes near his mother, quickly climbed to the shelter of her arms. And the two orphans hurried to sit, close together, near Gigi. But Gimble started leaping about in the tree tops, swinging vigorously from one branch to the next, climbing up then jumping down to catch himself on a bough below. As the rain got heavier, as more and more drops found their way through the dense canopy, so his leaps became wilder and ever more daring, his swaying of the branches more vigorous. This behaviour would, when he was older, express itself in the magnificent rain display, or rain dance, of the adult male.

Suddenly, just after three o'clock, heralded by a blinding flash of lightning and a thunderclap that shook the mountains and growled on and on, bouncing from peak to peak, the grey-black clouds let loose such torrential rain that sky and earth seemed joined by moving water. Gimble stopped playing then, and he, like the others, sat hunched and still, close to the trunk of the tree. I pressed myself against a palm, sheltering as best I could under its overhanging fronds. As the rain poured down endlessly I got colder and colder. Soon, turned in upon myself, I lost all track of time. I was no longer recording—there was nothing to record except silent, patient and uncomplaining endurance.

It must have taken about an hour before the rain began to ease off as the heart of the storm swept away to the south. At 4.30 the chimps climbed down, and moved off through the soaked, dripping vegetation. I followed, walking awkwardly, my wet clothes hindering movement. We travelled along the stream bed then up the other side of the valley, heading south. Presently we arrived on a grassy ridge overlooking the lake. A pale, watery sun had appeared and its light caught the raindrops so that the world seemed hung with diamonds, sparkling on every leaf, every blade

of grass. I crouched low to avoid destroying a jewelled spider's web that stretched, exquisite and fragile, across the trail.

The chimpanzees climbed into a low tree to feed on fresh young leaves. I moved to a place where I could stand and watch as they enjoyed their last meal of the day. The scene was breathtaking in its beauty. The leaves were brilliant, a pale, vivid green in the soft sunlight; the wet trunk and branches were like ebony; the black coats of the chimps were shot with flashes of coppery-brown. And behind this vivid tableau was the dramatic backcloth of the indigo-black sky where the lightning still flickered and flashed, and the distant thunder rumbled.

There are many windows through which we can look out into the world, searching for meaning. There are those opened up by science, their panes polished by a succession of brilliant, penetrating minds. Through these we can see ever further, ever more clearly, into areas that once lay beyond human knowledge. Gazing through such a window I have, over the years, learned much about chimpanzee behaviour and their place in the nature of things. And this, in turn, has helped us to understand a little better some aspects of human behaviour, our own place in nature.

But there are other windows; windows that have been unshuttered by the logic of philosophers; windows through which the mystics seek their visions of the truth; windows from which the leaders of the great religions have peered as they searched for purpose not only in the wondrous beauty of the world, but also in its darkness and ugliness. Most of us, when we ponder on the mystery of our existence, peer through but one of these windows onto the world. And even that one is often misted over by the breath of our finite humanity. We clear a tiny peephole and stare through. No wonder we are confused by the tiny fraction of a whole that we see. It is, after all, like trying to comprehend the panorama of the desert or the sea through a rolled-up newspaper.

As I stood quietly in the pale sunshine, so much a part of the rain-washed forests and the creatures that lived there, I saw for a brief moment through another window and with other vision. It is an experience that comes, unbidden, to some of us who spend time alone in nature. The air was filled with a feathered symphony, the evensong of birds. I heard new frequencies in their music and, too, in the singing of insect voices, notes so high and sweet that I was amazed. I was intensely aware of the shape, the colour, of individual leaves, the varied patterns of the veins that made each one unique. Scents were clear, easily identifiable — fermenting, over-ripe fruit; water-logged earth; cold, wet bark; the damp odour of chimpanzee hair and, yes, my own too. And the aromatic scent of young, crushed leaves was almost overpowering. I sensed the presence of a bushbuck, then saw him, quietly browsing upwind, his spiralled horns dark with rain. And I was utterly filled with that peace “which passeth all understanding.”

Then came far-off pant-hoots from a group of chimpanzees to the north. The trance-like mood was shattered. Gigi and Gremlin replied, uttering their distinctive pant-hoots. Mel, Darbee and little Galahad joined in the chorus.

I stayed with the chimps until they nested — early, after the rain. And when they had settled down, Galahad cosy beside his mother, Mel and Darbee each in their own small nests close to the big one of auntie Gigi, I left them and walked back along the forest trail to the lakeshore. I passed the D troop baboons again. They were gathered around their sleeping trees, squabbling, playing, grooming together, in the soft light of evening. My walking feet crunched the shingle of the beach, and the sun was a huge red orb above the lake. As it lit the clouds for yet another magnificent display, the water became golden, shot with gleaming ripples of violet and red below the flaming sky.

Later, as I crouched over my little wood fire outside the house, where I had cooked, then eaten, beans and tomatoes and an egg, I was still lost in the wonder of my experience that afternoon. It

was, I thought, as though I had looked onto the world through such a window as a chimpanzee might know. I dreamed, by the flickering flames. If only we could, however briefly, see the world through the eyes of a chimpanzee, what a lot we should learn.

A last cup of coffee and then I would go inside, light the hurricane lamp, and write out my notes of the day, the wonderful day. For, since we cannot know with the mind of a chimpanzee we must proceed laboriously, meticulously, as I have for thirty years. We must continue to collect anecdotes and, slowly, compile life histories. We must continue, over the years, to observe, record and interpret. We have, already, learned much. Gradually, as knowledge accumulates, as more and more people work together and pool their information, we are raising the blind of the window through which, one day, we shall be able to see even more clearly into the mind of the chimpanzee.