ELEPHANT OUTLAW

LOUISE A. STINETORF

ELEPHANT OUTLAW

ELEPHANT OUTLAW

By LOUISE A. STINETORF
Pictures by HARPER JOHNSON

J. B. Lippincott Company
PHILADELPHIA NEW YORK

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 56-10723

FIRST EDITION

CONTENTS

1

THE-BOY-WITHOUT-A-SOUL

RICKEY ALLISON would probably never have met The-Boy-without-a-Soul if all the hoes on the Allison plantation had not gone dull at the same moment. One morning none of the hoe-boys picked up their hoes and went to chop the weeds out from around the young coffee trees. Instead, they gathered in a circle just outside the windows of the dining room where the Allison family was having breakfast. There one of the hoe-boys began a singsong chant saying that the hoes had all been bewitched. The teeth with which they bit into the earth had been stolen by the evil stones in the ground. It took more strength than the biggest and strongest hoe-boy had to force the blunt iron into the dirt. If the hoes were not given more teeth, that is, if they were not sharpened, new weeds would grow up between the hoe-boys' toes before the old weeds of a row were chopped out.

It took the singer a long time to finish his complaint because every time he paused for breath all the other hoe-boys repeated his last few words over and over in a monotonous chorus. Inside the house Rickey and his mother both turned on Mr. Allison triumphantly,

"Now you'll just have to go for old N'wodi," they crowed.

"I should have got him weeks ago when the hoeing started," he agreed.

Rickey followed his father out onto the back porch. The singsong complaint stopped immediately, and a dozen hoes were thrust within inches of the boss-man's nose so he could see how dull they were. He ran a finger along the edges of several blades and nodded agreement. They were very dull. He would hire a blacksmith that very day and before long all the hoes would have teeth again.

An hour later Rickey and his father were bouncing along in a jeep up one of the lower slopes of Mount Elgon, which is in Kenya Colony, East Africa. Near the Allison coffee plantation the road was unpaved, but smooth and free of stones. After a few miles, however, there was nothing left of the road except two dusty wheel ruts. Tall weeds slapped at their faces from the side, and crumpled under the hood. Presently there was only a single path along which both humans and animals had jogged: the men and women to market, and the animals to a nearby water hole. The jeep ran in second gear now because it took force to push through the tangle of grass and weeds. "Like an overgrown beetle shoving its way across a lawn," Rickey described it to his father.

It would have been easy to miss the village of Bafu, where old N'wodi lived, had not the path led directly into the middle of its small cluster of huts. Besides, Mr. Allison had been there before. Whenever

he needed a blacksmith he always hired N'wodi.

A visit to the old man's forge was something that both Rickey and his father enjoyed. Usually the blacksmith worked only the raw iron nodules picked up from among the grass roots. From this crude ore he had fashioned excellent spears for three generations of warriors from the Kavirondo tribe. He also could turn jeweler, and he had beaten out many a graceful arm and leg bracelet for the warriors' wives.

Bargaining for the blacksmith's services always took a good deal of time because N'wodi liked to haggle. But in the end Mr. Allison was well satisfied, and N'wodi felt he had driven a stiff bargain. He was a good workman and he knew it, therefore he could command a high price. As long as he worked for the white man, the blacksmith was to have all the greens he could eat whenever he was hungry. He was also to have a chunk of meat the size of his fist once a week, a shilling a month, and every day—every day while working—a spoonful of salt to lick up out of the palm of his hand like so much sugar.

Business over, Mr. Allison and Rickey started back toward the jeep and home. As they passed a small hut they heard someone moaning inside. Ordinarily when in a native village Rickey's father would have walked on past any distress signal unless his help were asked. The natives do not like interference in their personal affairs any more than Rickey's father would have liked similar meddling.

But now, "That sounds like a child," Rickey's father said, and stopped to listen carefully.

The moans were very feeble, and Rickey thought that most likely they came from a hungry puppy that had lost its mother.

"I don't believe there is anyone taking care of the child," continued Mr. Allison in a tone of wonder, as he strode to the door of the hut.

There was an old cowhide hanging over the low, semicircular hole in the wall that served as a door. Mr. Allison stopped beside it and clapped his hands gently, which is the African way of knocking on a door. There was no answer other than another whimper of pain from inside. Again Mr. Allison clapped his hands and waited. Again there was no answer. Then he did something which a planter who was not respected and liked by his workmen would never have dared to do in a native village. He put out his hand and pulled back the cowhide door. He had to squat on his heels to see inside. Rickey bent down and peered between his father's elbow and body. To his eyes the inside of the windowless hut was only a smudge of gloom.

"I don't see anything. Do you, dad?" the boy asked.

"There is someone lying in the middle of the floor," his father answered. "It's either a child or a shriveled up little old woman. If it's a very old woman, she's passed her days of usefulness to the tribe and has gone into the hut to die because she wants to."

Mr. Allison dropped the cowhide door over the opening and stood up. As he did so, his eyes fell on a dozen women watching them. Rickey's father walked over toward the group, and several fled as he approached. Others twisted their iron and copper brace-

lets about on their arms and dug their chigre-scarred toes in the dust. Others giggled. When he asked the nearest woman who was lying in the hut, a child or an old woman, she gave no sign of having heard him. Rather, she turned as though frightened and dived into the nearest hut, and her own cowhide door dropped behind her. Rickey and his father stared at the gently flapping skin for a moment and then turned back to the other women. But not one remained in sight, and there were cowhide curtains down over almost every door. Mr. Allison beckoned Rickey, and the two went back to the forge of old N'wodi, the blacksmith.

N'wodi did not want to talk about the small hut, but when Rickey's father insisted he answered, "*Bwana*—Master—it is a boy who has stubbornly refused to die." Then seeing that the planter did not understand, he went on, "There was a pickinin, neither a baby nor yet a man, into whose body devils entered that were too strong for even the cleverest witch doctors to drive out. The witch doctors danced around the hut and sang and beat their drums, but at the end of the third day the devils seized the boy's soul and fled with it." That was the blacksmith's way of saying that everyone thought the boy had died.

But he had not died. When the women started to carry him out to the plain, where they leave their dead for the jackals and vultures to eat, he opened his eyes and whimpered. So they shoved him back into the hut, dropped the door matting over the entrance, and went away.

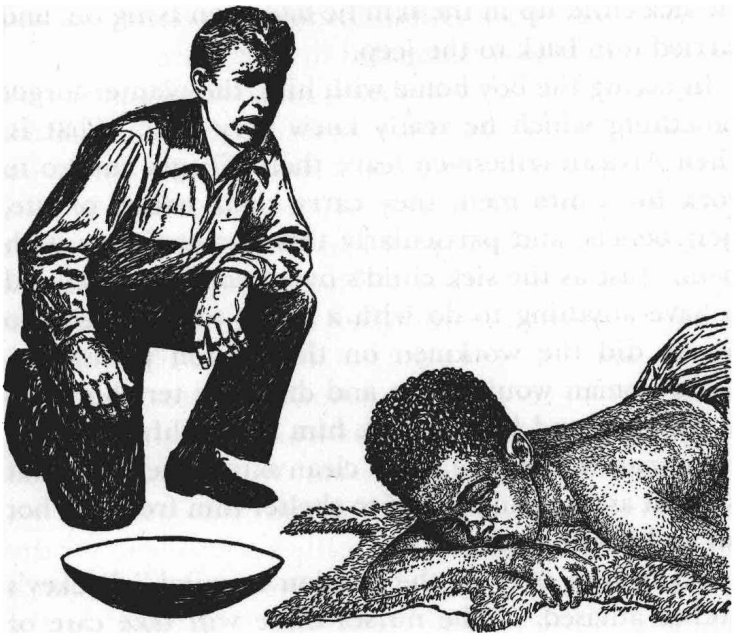
"Deserted a sick child? Didn't anyone try to help him?" Mr. Allison demanded in amazement.

It was clear that N'wodi was much surprised at what he considered the white man's stupidity. The blacksmith explained patiently, "Bwana, the soul was stolen by the evil spirits. If the body had lived, it would have been empty of what it is that makes a man a man and not a beast. That alone would be bad enough. But suppose some demon crept into the empty body and made its home there? Then the boy would no longer be human but a monster. Everyone would fear him and run away from him."

The old man shuddered, but Mr. Allison said that when the child had awakened and whimpered, it was proof that the soul had not really been stolen. Or that it had returned. N'wodi shook his head from side to side and answered that the devils of sickness were so strong that once they had a soul in their clutches it was almost impossible to get it back again.

"But one can get his soul back? Sometime? Somehow?" Rickey's father said—half questioning, half stating a fact.

The blacksmith puckered up his face and squinted into his forge, and finally answered, "If one were as cunning as the most cunning animal, as brave as the bravest beast, and as strong as the mightiest creature—Yes, Bwana, such a one might get his soul back. But who has ever seen such a mighty man, Bwana? Certainly this child in the hut is not such a one. Therefore no one will go near his soulless body, or give him meat or drink. So, presently, the unfortunate one's eyelids



will cease to flutter and his lips to whimper. Then the hut will be burned with the body in it, the ashes scraped up and thrown into the nearest swamp, and no trace of the evil will be left in the village."

With that N'wodi turned his back on Rickey and his father, picked up a split green banana stalk, and using it as tongs, drew a glowing chunk of iron out of the fire and began hammering it with a stone held in his bare hand. Mr. Allison started back toward his jeep, but halfway there stopped abruptly and walked over to the deserted hut. There he went down on his hands and knees, crawled through the low doorway, rolled

the sick child up in the skin he had been lying on, and carried him back to the jeep.

In taking the boy home with him, the planter forgot something which he really knew very well. That is, when African tribesmen leave their villages and go to work for white men, they carry their habits of life, their beliefs, and particularly their superstitions with them. Just as the sick child's own people had refused to have anything to do with a being too stubborn to die, so did the workmen on the Allison plantation. Not a woman would clean and dress the terrible sores on his back and legs or cook him a mouthful of food. Not a man would give him a clean skin to lie on, or cut as much as one banana leaf to shelter him from the hot sun and beating rains.

"Take him over to the mission hospital," Rickey's mother advised. "The nurses there will take care of him. When he is well again, I guess we can pay his tuition at one of the mission schools. After that . . ." But she stopped there. After all, what does become of a child when his own people believe he is only a walking, breathing mass of flesh and blood and bones because he has no soul?

The doctor and his wife in a nearby Christian mission station welcomed the sick boy, and the doctor carried him into his hospital. But when the Kavirondo boys and girls that had been trained as nurses and orderlies heard the child's story, they all shrank from him in horror. The middle-aged woman who was ordered to dress his sores dragged her feet as she approached him, walking almost as though someone were