

ŁUKASZ WIERZBICKI

KAZIK in AFRICA



A TRUE STORY FOR CHILDREN

TRANSLATED BY ZUZANNA GRZEŚKOWIAK-SHIPPI
ILLUSTRATED BY GENEVIEVE BAYMAN

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Translated from the Polish by **Zuzanna Grześkowiak-Shipp**

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The MAP of KAZIK'S GREAT JOURNEY





The NIGHT in the DESERT

The train kept going all day and all night. The following morning I arrived at the main train station in Rome, the capital of Italy. From there I cycled over several days to the port of Naples, from where I planned to sail across the Mediterranean Sea. The ship's horn blasted and my vessel embarked towards the shores of Africa...

My heart trembled at the thought of all the dangers that were awaiting me. There I was, sailing to come face to face with a great adventure! The ship was rolled by the waves, to the right, then to the left, to the left, then to the right again...

My old, kind-hearted bike, endured the sailing very well, unlike myself! I was dizzy from the continuous rolling and I felt as if my head was spinning. I had been lying on the cabin bank throughout the entire voyage. No wonder the moment we reached the shore I fled from the ship with a feeling of great relief.

How wonderful it felt to set foot on land again! First I checked carefully all the packs attached to my bicycle. Then I breathed in the hot air, carried by the desert wind, I breathed it deep into my lungs. I jumped up onto the saddle and tapped my bike on its handle.

- Let's hit the road old chap - I said.

Unfortunately, the road we eagerly followed came to an end right outside the town boundaries. Soon we were completely surrounded by desert. The bike's wheels were sinking deep in the sand; and the wind kept blasting sand into my eyes as a sandstorm blew past. So this was how Africa greeted me?!

I decided to wait the sandstorm out. I pitched the tent; I lit a fire and boiled some water for tea. Then I snuggled myself down for the night. I listened to the wind howling among rocks, and to the barking of hyenas, calling each other for a night hunt. These sounds of the desert lulled me to sleep.

In the middle of the night I was awakened by a strange tapping sound. I curiously listened to it for a little while with my eyes closed, until I realized it was the sound of my own teeth chattering from the cold! Then I opened my eyes and saw stars right above my head.

What had happened?! - I wondered. I went to sleep in a tent, and now I have only the sky above my head! Where on earth is my tent!? The cheeky wind had snatched the tent and swept it away like a kite, snatching the roof over my head. I set out to search for it. Who was to know how far my tent would have flown away, perhaps to the ends of the world, if some thorny desert bushes had not stopped it. I untangled the tent canvas from those thorny branches and once again set it all up.

This time, I secured the tent pegs with very heavy stones, which certainly wouldn't move in the wind. I crawled back inside and wrapped myself in the blanket. I hadn't even managed to fall asleep when I heard a sound of scratching. This is a night full of adventure! - I thought.

What can it be this time?! I raised my head and saw a small jerboa, trying to make a cosy bed in my warm blanket. As it turned out this amiable creature curled himself into a ball, on my stomach, and

fell asleep murmuring softly. It couldn't have been easy to find a safe place in the desert on such a windy night, so I allowed the little animal to spend that night with me, especially since this fluffy bundle, tucked in by my side, made me warmer too.



We had been sleeping soundly until the sun poured in slanting rays through the crack of the tent and woke us up. A new dawn was beginning, the gale had stopped and I was able to set off again. The jerboa joined me outside the tent and was now basking in the morning sun. For a parting gift, I offered my little friend a handful of nuts. He started to nibble them in a hurry. Finding a shelter in the desert is difficult enough, but it is even harder to find any food. In the desert each nut is as precious as gold.



The BOY CALLED REMO

and his FRIENDS

To defend myself from wild animals I bought a rifle from a local merchant. It is always safer for a man to roam across the jungle with a gun on his shoulder. The next day, at dawn, I went hunting to try out my new purchase. At the same time I wanted to get something to eat for the friendly villagers of Beni and in this way repay them for their

hospitality. I was trekking for a long time, but I didn't manage to track down any game. Suddenly I heard a cry:

- Help, a snake! Help!

I followed in the direction from which the young voice was coming, and soon I saw a boy running through the grasses, crying:

- Help, a snake ...help, puppy... help me!

The little boy bumped into me and stopped, breathing heavily.

- What has happened, my young friend? - I asked him.

- A snake...puppy..! - the upset boy kept shouting, unable to catch his breath.

- A snake or a dog? - I tried to find out more, still not being able to understand anything.

- The big snake grabbed my puppy! - he finally exclaimed.

Then the little boy grabbed my hand and started pulling me through the grass so quickly that I could barely keep up with him. We reached a clearing in the middle of which sat a terrified dog, surrounded by a mighty python. I aimed and shot my rifle, killing the mighty python and rescuing the puppy at the same time!



The little boy ran up to his four-legged friend and hugged him tightly.

- Thank you for your help! - He cried, having realised at the same time that I was a stranger.

- I am Kazik, I come from Poland - I introduced myself.

- My name is Remo and I live nearby, in a hut made out of branches - the boy informed me.

- Do you live alone? - I was astonished. - It seems to be a very dangerous area!

- Not all alone - Remo protested. - We've been living together, me and my puppy - he added. Just then the cute patchy mongrel wagged his tail and stood up on his back legs, proud to be talked about.

- And what do you eat when you're hungry? - I enquired. - A goat lives with us as well. We drink his milk when we're hungry - Remo replied.

- Meee - he made a cry like a bleating goat, and straight away, as if responding to the boy's calling, the goat jumped out from bushes and greeted us, with joyful bleating.

- Meee, meee ...

- You cannot stay here all by yourself. There are too many wild and dangerous animals around such as this terrifying beast - I said, pointing to the slaughtered python lying on the ground. - I shall take you all to the village, which will offer you shelter and security. And as for this here beast, we will take it with us and roast it for dinner!

I grabbed Remo's little hand and led him towards the village of Beni. The puppy followed us step by step, and behind him, jumping over the branches scattered on the ground, followed the goat. All

three friends, the boy, the puppy, and the goat, soon settled together with the kind people of Beni.

When I was leaving to continue on my journey, Remo waved his little hand goodbye and cried out:

- Farewell, Kazik! Thank you for saving my puppy from the snake!

- Farewell, you take care of yourself, little Remo! - I called out.

I became fond of that young boy, and I was glad that he would no longer live alone at the jungle's edge, where still a whole range of dangers lurked. In the village, among its people, he would be well looked after and above all safe; together of course with his puppy and goat.



CHRISTMAS

in the DESERT

December came. In Poland, my country, at this time of year snow falls gently, ice covers lakes and all children play at throwing snowballs and building snowmen. At Christmas time people hang decorations on Christmas trees, sing carols, exchange gifts and best wishes with their relatives. While all this was happening, I, just try to imagine it, was camping all alone in the middle of the desolate Kalahari Desert. My only companion was the hot wind howling among bushes, pulling the canvas of my tent and blasting sand all around. In Africa even in winter the weather is hot and the sun is scorching.

This cannot do! - I said to myself. Although away from home, deep in the desert and all alone, I made up my mind that Christmas shouldn't just pass me by.

I set to work. From a string and photographs, which I had been carrying with me, plus souvenirs, which I had received from people I'd encountered along the way, I created Christmas decorations. I hung

them on a shrub standing right next to my tent. From a piece of wood I carved an angel with my penknife and hung it on the highest twig.

- Look, old chap, we have a beautiful Christmas tree, don't we?! - I uttered proudly in the direction of my bicycle lying nearby.

Next I started a fire and boiled a pot of water for tea. I added to the water some aromatic fruits plucked from a desert shrub. Then, using flour, raisins and nuts I made a pancake. However modest, it was still a festive meal for me. Inquisitive meerkats peeked out of their burrows, lured by the smell of my pancake. As is Polish custom, when the first star twinkled in the sky I ate my festive meal and then started singing a Christmas carol.

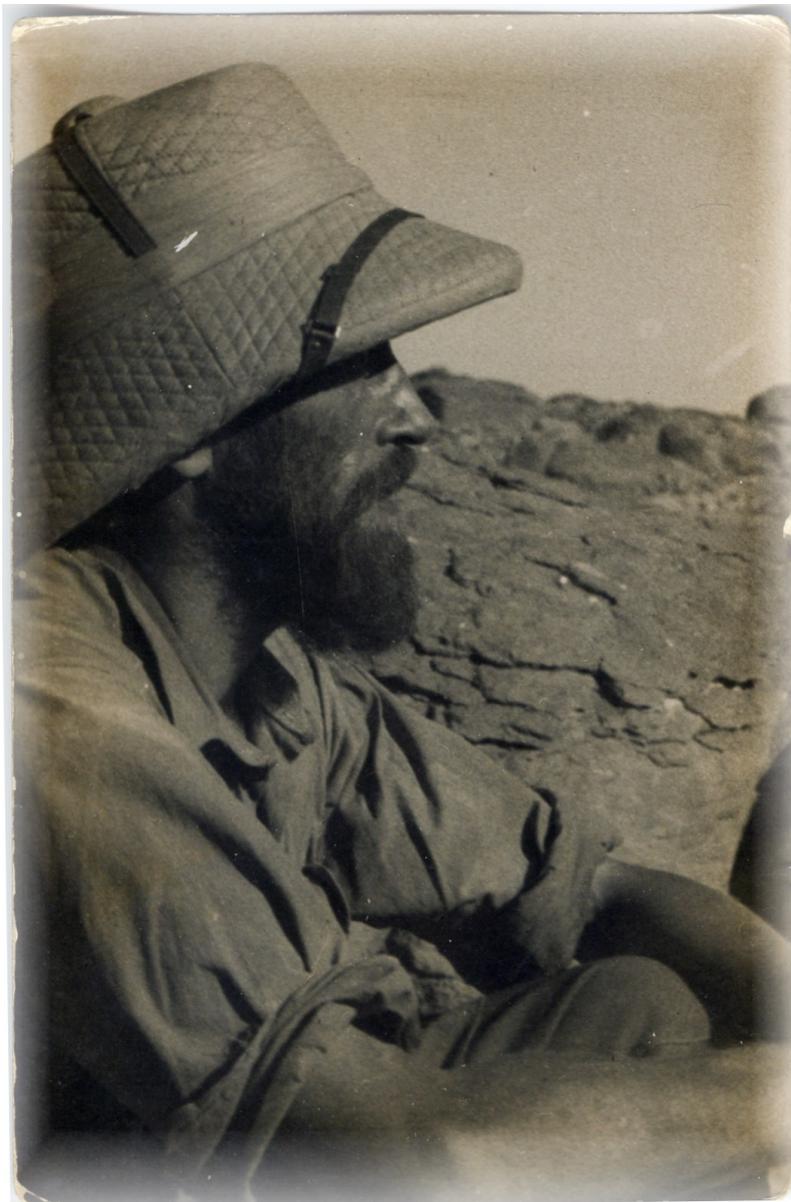
“Silent night, holy night.....” - my singing was carried across the African wilderness.

A family of curious baboons, hearing my singing, came running. They gathered near the fire and stared enchanted at the shrub covered with the decorations. Nothing like that had ever been seen in the desert before.

I stayed with those unusual companions until late at night, writing letters and composing Christmas greetings for my beloved in Poland. Despite feeling homesick and missing my wife and children, I wasn't

lonely. After all I couldn't complain about a lack of company; a cheerful bunch of meerkats was busy gorging with relish the pancake crumbs. Let them also know that it is Christmas!

- Merry Christmas from Kazik! - I whispered to them.





The GREATEST TREASURE of ALL

I returned home and I'm truly happy because every man, even if he is a traveller, feels best at home, reunited with his family. Yes, I have to admit that I do miss Africa and my adventures. Sometimes in the evenings, lying in my bed and staring at the ceiling, I long for those African nights spent lying next to a fire, under the open sky. On

such nights I go out to the roof of my house and sit there looking at the stars above my city and imagine that I'm back in Africa. In my imagination I'm back in those magical lands swamped with wild animals.

These days I tend to spend a large amount of time travelling from town to town, presenting the thousands of photographs taken during my journey. Many people come to those presentations to listen to my stories. I take great pleasure telling them about the faraway African continent and its treasures.

A little boy came to attend one such meeting. He sat in the front row and looked with such excitement at the pictures I was showing. When I finished my lecture he put his hand up and asked a question:

- Have you really found treasure in Africa, sir, real, true treasure?
- I've heard that gold can be found in Africa! - Someone else called out immediately.
- Have you found any, sir?
- Did you hunt a lot?
- Have you brought back any hunter's trophies, sir?
- Animal skins?

- Elephant tusks? People were shouting over each other. After I'd listened to all their questions with a smile on my face, I finally answered:

- Dear friends, I shall tell you the truth. I didn't look for any gold; I didn't bring back any trophies. I was hunting not with my rifle but with my camera. Otherwise I would always feel remorseful having disturbed the magnificent African environment, which you've just witnessed captured in my photographs.

- So have you brought back anything fascinating from Africa? -
Asked the curious little boy again.

- The most important thing that I've brought back with me from my journey are my memories. The greatest treasure to me is this collection of photographs you have just seen and the stories you've just heard. Travelling is not about gaining treasures, the most important are the things one sees, and people one encounters.

- And this is the reason why travelling is worth doing, to meet other people, is it? - The little boy asked surprised.

- Yes it is - I told him - because from other people you will always learn fascinating things.

The boy took a moment to think about my words and then he announced:

- When I grow up I want to become a traveller too.

I smiled at him.

- You already are a little bit of a traveller - I said - you have come to my presentation of these photos from Africa, you seem to have a desire to know more about the world and you are asking a whole range of questions. It is a very good thing. The day you set off on your journey you will also be full of questions, and then...then something fascinating will happen to you for certain.



THE END

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