

CAPTURING A KITTEN.

One bright day in May, when I was about 13 years old and my brother Charley was a year older, we started out together to visit the children on a farm about four miles distant. Charley walked, his gun on his shoulder, and I rode our old white horse, Bob.

I did little more than keep pace with my brother. I had been his companion ever since he had been allowed to have a gun. I had gone with him on his hunting expeditions to carry the game, and the old horse was often with us on our wanderings through the woods.

We lived on a large farm high up among the mountains of the coast range of California. The country was very sparsely settled and a visit to a neighbor meant a jaunt of several miles. I had learned to shoot well, but as we had but one gun and Charley was a boy, he usually claimed the right to the gun when we went hunting.

The mountains were full of deer, wildcats, and "coons." California lions and panthers were occasionally seen; to say nothing of rabbits, quail, and such small game.

On this day we left the house at about 9 o'clock. We trudged and jogged pleasantly along, but Charley did not kill even a squirrel and I took pains to tease him about his bad luck.

We spent the day with our young friends and started on our return at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

After we had left the main road and taken the trail toward home, Charley turned off into the woods to try to redeem his reputation as a hunter. I might have followed him, but I was in haste to get home. So I touched up old Bob with my whip, and jogged along down the lonely bridle-path.

Just as I was following a bend in the road, a mile and a half beyond the place where Charley and I had parted, something attracted my attention in what appeared to be a pile of leaves bedded in the hollow roots of a great oak. The object appeared to shine.

I turned my horse toward it to get a closer view and then discovered that the shining came from the bright eyes of several beautiful little creatures, which I at first took to be large kittens; but when I dismounted I found that they were the cubs of a mountain lion!

I was delighted. I had always had a fondness for kittens and these little animals were much prettier than any kitten. They were plump and most beautifully marked. They got up and began to gambol and play with each other in the most innocent and engaging manner.

What ideal pets! Instantly the thought came to me, "why not capture them and take them home?" Here would be glory for me, to be sure. How I would triumph over Charley!

I stooped over and picked up two of them; there were four in all.

I had much difficulty in mounting my horse with the baby lions in my arms for they wriggled and scratched and did everything in their power to prevent me from carrying them off; but at last I was in the saddle and started off. Fortunately my horse knew the road and was perfectly safe, so I merely threw the bridle over my arm and beld a crying kitten in each hand.

How they did meow and squall! First one and then the other, and then a duet!

All at once in the midst of all this yelling of the cubs the thought flashed across my mind that the mother would probably come home, and finding two of her babies gone go in quest of them; and here I was, creeping along on a slow old horse, three miles from home, with two young lions. It was about time to wake up old Bob!

I looked for my whip. It was gone. Probably I had dropped it in my attempts to mount.

Here was a new difficulty. It was impossible for me to get off and on again with the big kittens in my arms, and the old horse would trot along for only a few steps, and then subside into his usual slow walk. It was only by dint of hard kicking and fierce jerking of the bridle that I contrived to get him into an occasional fair trot.

We had gone about a mile farther, and I was cuffing one of my kittens into submission, when I heard what I fancied was a growl behind me.

I turned, but could see nothing. Nevertheless, I felt a little nervous, and kicked my feet against the horse's sides more vigorously than ever.

We went on about two rods, when I heard the same noise again. This time I thought I could not be mistaken, and I was not. Turning, I saw to my horror that a large California lioness was coming at a dead run not a too yards behind me.

Every few steps she uttered a horrid growl, and she looked really fiendish. My heart stood still, but I did not give up. Old Bob, too, heard the noise and increased his speed to the best pace he had.

Of course the little lions had caught the sound. They meowed and cried louder than ever. This excited the mother the more, and she redoubled her growls.

I dared not look around, but very soon it was not necessary for me to turn in order to see her. She was right by my side, and glaring at me in the most frightful manner.

There was nothing else to do; I took one of the kittens and threw it at the mother lion, and I threw it very hard, hitting her full in the face.

I fully believed that the old lioness would keep on and compel me to give up the other young one also, and I was astonished to see her seize this one in her mouth and make off as fast as possible toward her lair.

This was very pleasing, but I was perfectly certain that the old lioness would come back after the remaining one. And unless I could get home, which was not probable, or should meet some one who had a gun, which was not probable, either, she would get it away from me.

I shouted louder still at old Bob, and almost stood up in the saddle in my excitement; but the poor old horse was already going about as fast as he could go. He seemed to appreciate the emergency, but he was getting badly winded.

We went on about three-quarters of a mile more. It occurred to me that I might keep the kitten from continually announcing our whereabouts to its mother, so I propped its mouth wide open with my fingers, and this stopped its crying.

We were making pretty good time and I was beginning to feel a little reassured when I heard the leaves cracking behind me. I knew what was coming and did

not look around. I kept on, determined to hold the kitten at all hazards.

Very soon, however, I heard the old lioness much closer than I had expected and turned around just at the moment that my horse made a violent plunge forward. The lioness had dug her forefeet into the horse's thighs, preparatory to leaping upon his back.

With a terrified scream, I flung the kitten away with all my might. The lioness released her hold on the horse, and, taking this kitten in her mouth as she had taken the other, uttered a growl, and with a savage glare at me, disappeared in the thick underbrush.

Trembling with fright, and choked with indignation to think that after all my efforts I could not keep even one of the pretty little creatures, I continued my ride home.

I reached the gate soon, and in a few moments related my adventure at the supper table. Before I had finished Charley burst into the room, holding aloft a young lion!

My heart bounded. He had captured my kitten! In great excitement he began to tell his story. He was just returning to the trail from his hunt in the woods when he met face to face the mountain lioness bearing her young one in her mouth. Both were very much startled, lioness and boy; but Charlie recovered his presence of mind first and raising his gun fired, killing the she-lion instantly.

He then picked up the little one, and also succeeded in dragging the mother a short distance. He left her just at the edge of the woods and ran home with the living cub to get help.

Charley magnanimously gave me the baby. Of course I was a little crestfallen, feeling that I had lost my share of the glory, but I was commended and complimented after all.

I kept the little lion three years. We fed him on bread and milk, and as he grew he showed no signs of his wild nature. He played amicably with the dog, and was on good terms with all the family.

One day, however, I unfastened his chain to give him exercise, and one of the first things he did was to kill a chicken. It was his first taste of blood. After that he committed some depredation whenever he was let loose. He grew sullen and morose.

At last he bit a little girl who came to visit us, drawing blood, which he lapped eagerly. She was alone with him; and when we heard her cry and ran out we found that the cub had thrown the child down, and was resting his paws on her body.

He was killed at once. I felt a few severe pangs at his death, but we saved the skin. Charley had already tanned the skin of the mother. We had the cub's skin treated in the same way; and now, when my mother tells the story of our youthful experience, as she often does, she points proudly to the two beautiful robes—the spoils of her children's lion hunt.—*Beatrice Rodriguez Moses in the Youth's Companion.*

HAS IT ever occurred to the police that the burglars who are plying their trade so successfully now-a-nights in this city, are concealing themselves by day in the numberless ravines and canyons into which our main streets have been changed under the name of preparations for paving?