

The Nature of the Beast

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POOR FOOLISH FARU

It is man's lust and not any evil in the rhinoceros that has brought the beast to the brink of extinction. Cunning men have spread it abroad that there is magic in his powdered horn, reviving the failing powers of age, enhancing the vigour of youth. This lie is not new, but it has spread in recent years. It is a peculiarity of modern times that people will swallow any humbug so long as there is no real evidence to support it. The powdered horn, which is not horn at all but matted hair growing from the hide and unattached to the skull, is worth its weight in gold, in particular to libidinous Chinese, and the demand for it has caused the wholesale slaughter of the beast, so that it is estimated that there are only two thousand white ones left and eleven thousand black. The hairs adhering to your dog's comb after you have groomed him or those of a dead hyena would be as effective, and something similar will no doubt be put forward by rascally dealers when the last rhinoceros has been slain, which, it is estimated, will be in 1970.

Money is being raised for a campaign against the slaughter. No matter how much is raised it will never be sufficient effectively to check poaching, for that would need an army, and the only way to check the receivers would be by legislation, and legislation has never deterred greedy and unscrupulous men from buying cheap what can be resold at an enormous profit.

If it could be put over to the public that buys this useless nostrum that it is not even horn, but dirty hair which could have come from the animal's tail, and that it excites only their prurient imaginations, it is possible that the demand would cease and the rhino live. If I had the running of the

campaign—and I can think of nothing more unlikely—I would proclaim crushed crocodile teeth as the sure aphrodisiac, advertising it as having been the favourite stimulant of King Solomon, King Charles I and Casanova, amongst others. This would cause the poachers to descend upon the pests that haunt the lakes and rivers, and reduce, though it could never exhaust, their numbers. The crocodiles might in turn reduce the number of poachers, all of which would be for the public good.

The inoffensive white rhinoceros is now to be found only in Zululand and parts of the Sudan and West Nile country. He differs from his black brother in his temperament and size; he is as docile and peace-loving as the other is aggressive and short-tempered. He is nearly six feet at the shoulder, a foot taller than the black. A big bull weighs 3,500 pounds to the black's 2,800 pounds; he has a square lip and is a grazer, feeding on grass chiefly. The other has a pointed prehensile lip and is a browser, preferring foliage and tree twigs to grass, but he manages to browse on native crops when he gets the chance and bitterly resents it if the owners try to drive him off.

The white is not white and the black is not black. Both are grey. The former may have got his name because of his fondness for wallowing in the light-coloured mud of the Nile Valley; the mud, adhering to his hide, makes him appear white to casual observers. The calf of the black always follows its mother; the white mother, on the contrary, follows her calf, guiding it with her horn, which is often long and tapering—the longest recorded was five feet two and a half inches. Black always scatters its droppings with its hind feet, white leaves them where they fall. Both are very short-sighted, their vision being limited to about forty yards, but their poor eye-sight is compensated for by a remarkably acute sense of smell and hearing. Poor sight may make the black rhino irritable and pugnacious; it has no such effect on the white, nor, for that matter, on the elephant.

Most of my dealings have been with the black. I have never considered it sporting to shoot the harmless white. The

last time I did so was in 1921 when I was asked to collect one for the museum of the late Duke of Orléans.

I have on occasions been summoned by villagers to save their *shambas* from destruction by the black rhinoceros. And I soon learnt that with the rhino you could never foresee how he would react. You can put yourself in the elephant's place, or the lion's or the buffalo's, and fairly accurately predict how he will behave in the given circumstances. That is because he is an intelligent beast and will do the intelligent thing. The rhino—that is in truth a prehistoric beast with the brains, or lack of brains, that caused his prehistoric contemporaries to lose the struggle for survival—is unpredictable. And just as an unskilled duellist may defeat a great champion by his unorthodox methods, so does the dim-witted rhino sometimes take the hunter by surprise.

I was out in the Voi country of Kenya with an American named Kenneth Jenkins. We were thinking of anything but rhino when through the trees a bull appeared, slouching slowly in our direction. The wind was blowing from him to us so we stopped, hoping that he would stroll past us. Not he. He came right up as though wanting to make sure that he would recognize us next time he saw us; so near that Jenkins whispered: "Shall I shoot?"

Out of the corner of my mouth I whispered back: "No." And I produced a hollow cough.

He halted, stared; he would have scratched his poor puzzled head had he been able; and, blowing like a grampus, bolted off the way he had come. We went on. And twenty minutes later this same rhino attacked us! There was no doubt that he was after our blood. I had no wish to harm the old fool and I tried a shot which I have found effective nine times out of ten with *unwounded* rhinos.

When he was a few yards off I plugged a bullet into the earth under his nose. This throws stones and soil into the beast's face. This fellow accelerated! I yelled: "Blast him, Ken." We fired together and the poor brute, shot in the brain, turned a somersault and fell between us. We could have done nothing else. I suppose my cough had set rage

churning in his dull mind and he had decided to avenge the insult.

I was with another American in Northern Tanganyika, on the outskirts of the Yaida Swamp, when a deputation from a nearby village reported that a bull rhino had established himself in a patch of thick thorn scrub a short distance from the place. The path from the village to the *shambas* passed his lair and he was charging out at travellers; he had already killed a ten-year-old boy and seriously wounded a man.

Clearly the beast had to be destroyed. His behaviour was not only anti-social, it was not according to pattern. A rogue elephant or an old buffalo or a man-eating lion may hold up a village, but it is not consistent with the character of Faru the rhinoceros, who is too much of an idiot and too indolent to plan and execute such a campaign. So Peter, that was the American's name, and I got on the killer's tracks early next morning.

The rhinoceros sometimes, and the elephant and buffalo very often, is followed by those lovely birds the white egrets, for the sake of the insects that are disturbed from underfoot by the movements of the great animals when feeding. The spectacle of white egrets hovering over a swamp is a certain indication that elephants or buffaloes are present. And there is that constant attendant on rhino and buffalo: the tick bird, that picks parasites off their hides. These little birds, about the size of a starling, have red beaks and powerful claws by which they can attach themselves to the beast's belly or back. They are wonderful sentinels.

Manda was not with me on this occasion, but another tracker named Kioko—a Kamba like Manda—he was a little man, deaf, but none the less efficient. We tracked the beast from where he had drunk the previous night into the scrub where he was said to lie up, and very shortly heard the unmistakable note, the bir-r-r of tick birds. We cautiously moved towards the sound. And suddenly twenty yards ahead I discerned the huge grey shape of our quarry.

He was standing broadside on, quite still except for the

twitching of his ears, as though enjoying the attentions of the birds.

I nodded to Peter. He raised his rifle. The birds screamed. The rhino whirled to face us. The American fired. He was a good shot, but he muffed this one. The wounded beast fled into the trees. We followed, out of the thicket into open country, but he had moved fast. It was three hours before we set eyes on him again, standing at the edge of a thorn brake. We advanced to very close quarters and I signalled to Peter. And once more his shot failed to kill. I need hardly say that it is part of the hunter's code, based on honour and humanity alike, that no beast must be allowed to go wounded to what may be a painful and lingering end. The rhino crashed off into thick cover. With a hearty curse in Peter's direction, I followed. Kioko followed. The last I saw of Peter, a rather stout and stocky person, he was standing gaping.

There are times when you must hurry and I have acquired a knack of running over difficult ground. I put my knack into practice: like the fleeing rhino I was in a bad temper and a bad temper is a treacherous companion when in pursuit of dangerous game. I pushed on so hard that I overshot the spoor and ran past some scrub in which the infuriated bull had halted.

I heard him snort furiously and turned to meet him in full charge. He was like a tank pelting down a mountainside. I aimed, sure that I would stop him in the next instant. I put my foot into a hidden ant-bear hole, fell flat on my back, pulling trigger as I fell: and the killer was on me. The bullet was found later, lodged in the base of the horn.

He thrust his horn under me and flung me into the air. I came down in front of him and grabbed his horn and hung on to it while he shook his head and rattled every bone in my body. One's thoughts bolt in such crises. I vividly remember thinking: "This horn's a damn' sight longer than I believed when I told Pete to shoot." Then he shook my grip loose; I thudded to earth; he threw me heavenwards again. This time I came down on the back of my neck. He drew back to charge just as Kioko arrived, and the little man,

with splendid courage. rushed forward and tried to drag me away. I am six feet tall and I must have been nearly twice his weight. The attempt failed, but his bravery was none the less conspicuous. The beast was about to finish me off—Kioko had dodged—when Peter arrived and put an end to him with a bullet through the neck. I was badly hurt, too knocked about to travel forty miles in a motor-truck to M'bulu, the nearest Government station.

Someone went to summon aid. A Hindu doctor arrived in six hours—I shall always be grateful to him—patched me up, and in three days I was able to endure the rough journey by truck to M'bulu. A fortnight there and I was taken a further eighty miles to hospital at Arusha. Six weeks later I was fit again.

And twelve months after that—it was in 1952—a mother rhino and her child nearly put paid to my account again.

On this occasion, too, Manda was absent ill with fever. This was in country south of the Voi-Taveta railway in Tanganyika. I was returning to camp accompanied by two local lads from the nearest village when I noticed a cow rhino with a three-quarter-grown calf at heel. They were seventy yards or so away and her front horn was one of the longest I'd ever seen on a female. I stopped to observe her through my glass. She winded us in the fickle breeze and, followed by her calf, trotted towards us. I did not imagine she contemplated mischief, but when the trot changed to a gallop I was not so sure. A rhino can move fast and a wise man is careful. The two local boys were very careful. They made at full speed for a belt of trees fifty yards away.

I had no wish whatever to hurt the angry old lady, so I stepped behind a dense evergreen bush alongside. It was about thirty feet thick and I assumed that she would pass it by and not bother me. She came straight at the bush instead, plunged through it and emerged just where I stood. I had fired into the bush to scare her when I heard her crash into it, but the shot had no effect. She banged me on the chest with her head and nose and sent me flying. Had she seen me before she emerged she would have lowered her head and

spitted me with the long horn I had been admiring. I fell and she galloped over me, saw the African boys and chased them: but they were halfway up a friendly tree when she reached them. Not that my misfortunes were finished. Within seconds—I had begun to feel myself to see if I was whole: I was still prone—I heard the noise of a large body hurtling through the scrub. I was winded, a little dazed. I thought: "Hell! Here she is again!" But it was her bonny babe, all 1,500 pounds of him! He followed in mother's footsteps. For weeks afterwards my body was ornamented with huge blue bruises.

Mother and child galloped away; the boys came down from the tree; helped me to my feet. I was shaky, naturally, but it might have been worse. Her sharp horn had cut my arm from elbow to wrist and one of the two had cracked two of my ribs in their passage. I drove my truck one-handed into Voi next day and I was attended to in hospital. I called on my old friend the district commissioner, smugly expecting praise for having spared a cow and calf.

He said: "Good God, man! Why didn't you plug the old bitch? The rhino in this country are particularly vicious, I don't know why. But I've had some. I wish you'd killed her."

I am still glad I didn't. But she exemplified how unexpected the actions of Faru can be. A rhino will fly in apparent terror from an old woman taking a gourd to a well and half an hour later attack a hunter carrying a rifle from which comes death. And only an old fool would gallop slap-bang into an evergreen bush. . . .

Fool though he is, the rhino has taken a leaf out of the elephant's book. Even more than the latter he needs water. The elephant can, at a pinch, go without a drink for three or four days. At the end of twenty-four hours Faru is done. He has learnt to dig for water in dry river-beds. His sense of smell tells him where it is below the surface and he sets furiously to work with his horn. He cannot dig so deep because the elephant's tusks are longer and he does not dig so efficiently, nor does he always leave his well clean and fit for those who follow him, but at least he lives to drink

another day. Like the elephant, too, he has paths through the forest and over the veldt. They lack any sign of deliberate skill; the paths curl all over the bush and are probably caused by one rhino following where another broke through the undergrowth, until in the course of years the track becomes smooth. If you walk along one of these tracks in the early morning you may see unmistakable signs that Faru has been there a short while before, and if you follow you are sure to find where he has left it for his stronghold in the bush, and if you are careful not to let the tick birds know you are near you will find him sleeping like a great hog in a sty.

A wise man does not camp near a rhino path. Faru will almost inevitably make an early-morning call: he will be strolling home, a puff of wind will carry the human smell to him, he will turn and come blundering in. When he realizes where he is he will rush right and left, up and down, in a sort of frenzy, and leave chaos behind when he plunges into the bush. Inexperienced people panic too and try to kill him, adding to the riot; sensible folk laugh it off. He is, also, inquisitive, and will foolishly poke his nose into matters which do not concern him, such as a hunter on control work or in pursuit, perhaps, of a man-eating lion or a stock-thieving leopard. Then he may bolt at sight of the hunter or get into a rage, charge and be killed. His stupidity extends to his judgement of the wind's direction. The elephant or buffalo, seeking to escape, will go *upwind*. The rhino in a panic is just as likely to come blundering *downwind*; an inexperienced hunter jumps to the conclusion that he is being charged and foolish Faru pays for the mistake with his life. If Darwin was right—which I do not believe—that only the fittest survive, it is a miracle that this prehistoric idiot exists, unless by fitness Darwin meant only physical fitness, which is absurd.

The blunderings of Faru are sometimes broad farce. Wives occasionally accompany their husbands on safari, and I have very vivid memories of a most attractive and hard-bitten little lady, a Scotswoman, born and bred in the Highlands, a first-class shot, a tireless walker. In those days the

southern Masai country, now interlaced with motor roads, was no place for any kind of civilized transport and for two months the party trekked on foot, porters and ox-wagons carrying the baggage.

In the middle of one night the lady came to my tent, woke me up and whispered: "Sorry to disturb you, but there's something funny going on near the *cheroni* and I can't make out what it is!" The *cheroni* was the camp closet, made of leafy branches. She had been using it when what she called "a munching noise" had disturbed her. She had wisely not waited to investigate but had come to me at once.

I took my rifle and we went out. As we quietly approached, two rhino walked out from behind the *cheroni* and stood gazing at us in the moonlight from a distance of twenty yards. They were still chewing the twigs they had been "munching" outside when the lady inside heard them.

Suddenly both snorted loudly, turned and hared off at full speed, one of them galloping through the *cheroni* and taking the seat with him. The snort is the only noise the male rhinoceros makes. He is supposed to lack stamina, but that is not my experience. He can move at twenty miles an hour long enough to dwindle into a speck on the horizon of the plains.

An American, answering to the name of "Buffalo" Jones, a Texan, an ex-cowboy over sixty years of age and as tough as teak, arrived in Kenya—then British East Africa—in 1912 with two cow-punchers—Means and Loveless—and twenty well-schooled cow-ponies. There was not a firearm between the three. "Buffalo" Jones's idea of big-game hunting was to lasso the game. At first the old hands laughed at them. But they rode down and took zebra, wildebeest, every kind of large antelope, even buffalo, which, said Jones, reminded them of their steers at home back in Texas. Giraffes they spared, not because the long neck presented any technical difficulty to these experts, but a closely pressed giraffe may die from sheer terror.

But when they roped a bull rhino they met a beast equal to many Texas dogies. He took charge for a while, dragging

the ponies behind him as he fled: they had dug their toes in in the way they had been taught to do when the lasso falls over a steer's horns and he begins to pull. At one moment the rhino came within a few feet of blundering into the celebrated wild-animal photographer Cherry Kearton, who had been engaged by "Buffalo" Jones to record the campaign.

At last they subdued Faru and after a tussle of five hours tied him to a strong tree, and Jones crept up behind him and in true Texan style branded him with a hot iron. This indignity was too much. Faru broke away during the night and, ropes and all, vanished and was never seen again.

"Buffalo" Jones was a better man than three tough-looking Africans—South Africans—I saw with a captured rhino in Arusha some years ago. The poor beast had been chased in jeeps until it almost collapsed from exhaustion. When I saw it it had been shut into a cage of concrete and iron bars and all that day it was ceaselessly battering itself against the bars until its head was a mass of bruises. They told me it would eventually calm down. They do, I know, but how must they feel when an ignorant public gazes at them in zoos?

A rhino caught young is quite easily tamed and in a very short time will follow its master, but, if it be a black rhino, as it gets towards maturity a wise master will restore it to its natural habitat or sell it to a zoo, where it will be much more contented, at all events, than a full-grown one brutally caught and caged. The white rhino, on the other hand, is definitely tamable. They are happy to spend the night under cover and to be taken out in the morning to graze as if they were cattle. I knew one pair that lived on a trapper's farm in Kenya. I was too cautious to get near enough to pat them; one looked at me with a speculative eye, but the African in charge of them treated them as a farm-hand might treat a pair of bullocks in a paddock.

The black rhino is more solitary. I have seen them in company, but that was when a particular patch of fresh food attracted them; the largest number I ever met together was on the M'beyu Swamp near Meru in North Kenya. There

were seven of them and they were in company with a huge herd of buffalo. at least two hundred and fifty. And they were consorting with every sign of amiability.

The white rhino, on the contrary, does sometimes go about in herds; the biggest herd I ever saw numbered thirteen: bulls, cows and calves. This was on the West Nile in Northern Uganda.

Young calves of both species are quite harmless and they resemble nothing so much as huge pigs, but in about four months the horns begin to develop; there are two, as is well known, the one in front being much the longer, though very occasionally a freak is seen with the anterior horn shorter. I have encountered only three or four instances of this. The length of the front horn is affected by locality. In an animal of the plains it seldom exceeds twenty inches, though it may be very thick at the base. In the forests of Mount Kenya and the Aberdares the horn is much longer and heavier. One from Mount Kenya was fifty-three and a half inches long. The white rhino's horn may be even longer. The record is sixty-two and a quarter inches.

The period of gestation is less than the elephant's; eighteen months perhaps, but I cannot be certain. When the cow comes into season she will summon a mate—not any particular mate, the nearest bull will do—with a noisy, almost falsetto, call. Manda was a maestro at imitating this love-call and he taught it to me, though I never attained his proficiency. To amuse ourselves when we were in rhino country we sometimes climbed a low rocky hill and rent the air with the unmelodious high-pitched *Wh-eee, Wh-eee, Wh-eee*, and shortly there would be a crashing in the thickets and an excited snorting as the bull came seeking his love.

Of all the beasts of the wild the rhinos are the most shameless in love-making; the presence of a herd of buffalo or elephants, even the proximity of man: nothing stops Faru and his lady from coupling the instant they meet. The expression thick-skinned, used to describe some specimens of *homo sapiens*, may be derived from the rhino in a metaphorical no less than a literal sense: its hide is much thicker

and tougher than an elephant's or hippopotamus's. The calf often stays with its mother until it is nearly her size: you often observe a cow with a big calf and a baby. She is a splendid mother and her children are devoted to her, never leaving her side until they are more than half grown. There is nothing uglier than a young rhino, and there is nothing braver or more utterly loyal to its parent. It is the only young beast of all those in Africa that will stand and defend its mother when disaster threatens. I had once, with the utmost reluctance, and at the last moment, been compelled to shoot a rhino that was on the point of seriously injuring—or even killing—someone who was with me.

I waited before she was nearly on him before I was forced to act. The calf (which I had not previously seen in the long grass), a small one, would not let us approach the carcass. Every time we got near the body the brave little beast charged and scattered us. It was three hours before it seemed to realize that its mother was dead and it scuttled away. We derived some consolation from the thought that a rhinoceros mother will adopt a motherless calf and look after it as well as she will care for her own, and hoped that the youngster would find one.

On another occasion we found a dead cow rhino that had been killed by poachers. Her horn had been removed. She had been dead at least three days. The calf, a bull, about three feet high, was on guard. He had kept away hyenas and vultures. We succeeded in driving him away, hoping that a foster mother was within reach.

The rhinoceros is erratic, stupid and can be dangerous: but you would have to travel a long way in the wild lands before you found a more devoted mother or loving child. . . .

In the country of Manda's people there grows, in as much profusion as any part of Africa I have travelled, a tree called the euphorbia or candelabra tree; its branches grow upwards, resembling great candles, and when broken off yield a milky juice. This juice is a virulent poison and Manda's people—the Wa'Kamba—use it largely in the production of paste for arrows with which they kill big game, including rhinoceros.

No African will camp under a euphorbia tree. They say that a drop of the juice will blind you instantly.

These branches are among Faru's favourite foods. The trees rot and fall more often than other trees. When their fallen branches have withered and died the rhino eats them voraciously and apparently thrives on this sinister diet.

The wild is full of wonders. Those that have business in the forest and on the plain, like the men who sail on the great waters of the ocean, never feel any doubt that there is a God above them.

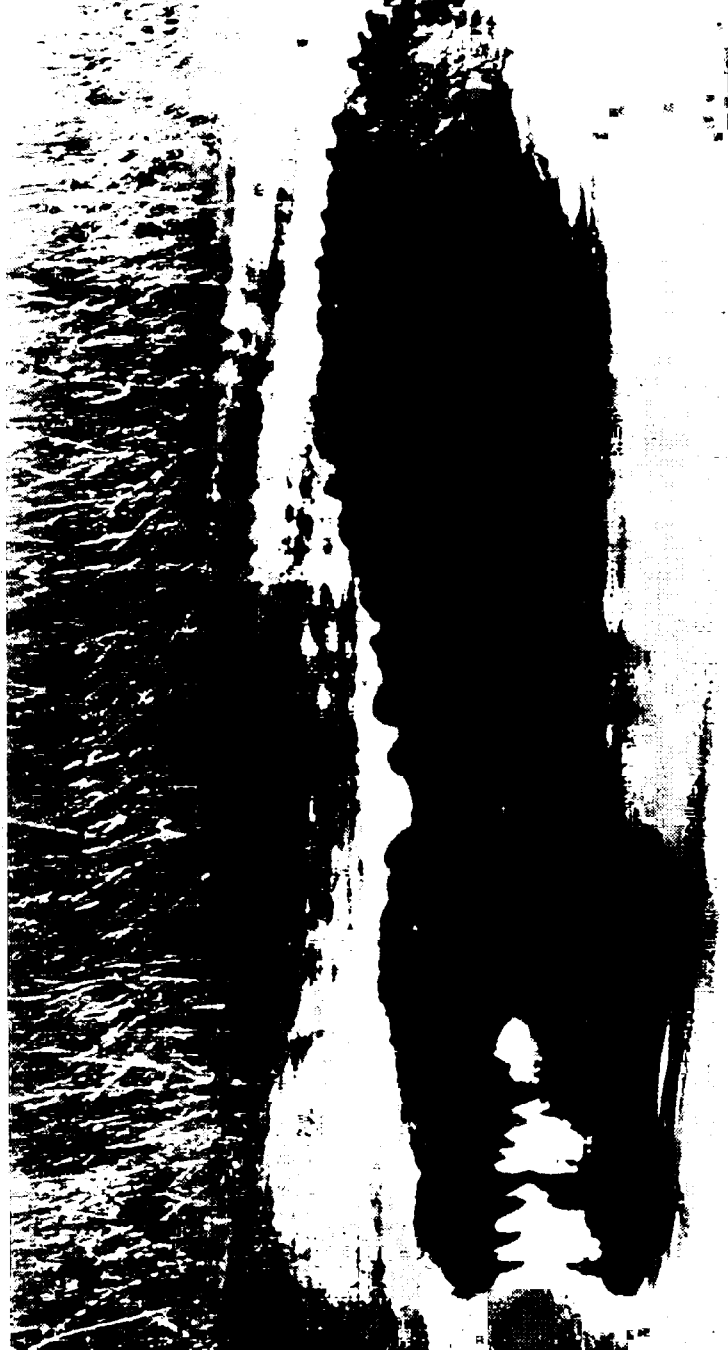
THE STARS IN THEIR COURSES

"We shan't stay long here," grunted Manda, gazing at the strange scene. I was inclined to agree with him. We were on location, a film set on the banks of the Kagera River which divides Tanganyika and Uganda. It was 1956 and the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Company had engaged me for what they called "protection" whilst the film *Mogambo* was being made. What I was to protect I never quite got round to—the ladies' virtue, the cast against wild animals, wild animals against the cast. Africans against the whites, the whites against Africans: I can think up a dozen combinations.

In fact, I was the camp butcher, I kept the African staff supplied with meat. There was plenty of it, from buffalo and zebra to the smaller antelopes. Manda and I were delighted at the opportunity to put a distance between us and the camp.

Before we arrived I had been entrusted with the job of taking delivery at Nairobi airport of an important member of the cast, a black leopard all the way from Milan. The plane was hours late and my already exiguous patience was strained to breaking point when I saw the poor beast. A superb animal, but thin and savage, snarling in the strong cage in which it had been cooped up and so terrorizing the Asian Customs officials that they let it through as speedily as though it had been His Excellency the Governor himself. The cage was pushed into my one-and-a-half-ton truck and I drove it to temporary quarters outside Nairobi to await transportation to the set.

The camp was five hundred miles from Nairobi and Manda's remark when he saw it did not surprise me. Our lives were lived in natural surroundings and this was artifi-



Nobody loves him

Poor foolish
Faru—
the black
rhino
charging



The
reticulated
giraffe