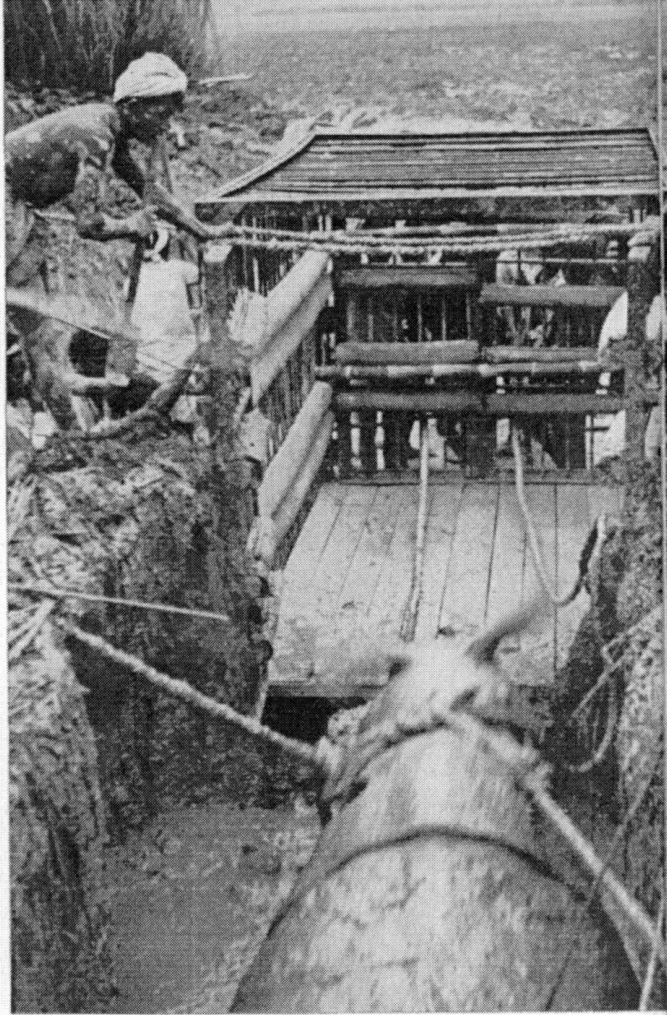




1 During the night the beast fell into the pit. Now natives remove the earth from one side until only an eighteen-inch dirt wall remains. Ropes restrain the rhino from bursting out.



2 After the cage has been maneuvered into place, dirt wall is removed. The outraged beast can charge only one way—straight into prison.



Above: The Ryhiners look for rhino tracks in the Kaziranga Sanctuary. Elephants, with their long tusks, are able to ward off the attack of a furious rhinoceros.

MY BEAUTY and MY BEASTS

PART TWO

We Hunt the Killers

Tracking down the rare, dangerous Indian rhino, the author and his wife gambled their lives, and had to defy a mob to get their prizes out of the country.



By PETER RYHINER
as told to
Daniel P. Mannix

Mercia and Peter: When a female Indian rhino proved tough to trap, she said, "Naturally, because all males are much stupider than females."



3 Although the two-ton rhino can gather but little momentum for charging, he can easily bend the iron bars. Now the ropes are used to lessen the power behind his lunge.

The Kaziranga Wild Life Sanctuary, where the last herd of the almost extinct Indian rhinos lives, lies along the south bank of the great Brahmaputra River in the foothills of the Himalayas. We flew to Jorhat—the roughest plane trip I've ever endured—and then took a car over tortuous mountain trails, through jungles and across vast open plains covered with the high, yellow *ekra* grass to the sanctuary. Here we stopped at a dak bungalow, left over from the British days. Mercia, my pretty Eurasian wife, collapsed on the rickety bed, moaning, "I thought in Assam we'd be living with a raja. How could you bring a woman to such a filthy hovel?"

I could think of nothing but the rhinos we planned to capture. The Indian rhinos are the largest of the rhinoceros clan, standing over six feet at the shoulder and weighing over two tons. Their skin hangs in great folds, giving them the effect of wearing armor plate, and they have only one horn, while the African rhino has two. They are thought to be the origin of the mythical unicorn and are one of the rarest animals in the world. There were none in captivity and my reputation as an animal collector depended on bringing a pair back alive to Europe.

We had hardly arrived when Pat Stracey, senior conservation officer of the area, who had got me permits to collect a male and

female, drove up in a battered English land rover with some of his rangers. Pat was a Eurasian and looked like a slender, dark-complexioned Englishman. We managed to get a bottle of whisky from a tiny, thatched store and sat on the veranda of my bungalow to discuss the rhino situation. I was particularly curious to know why the forestry department had granted my request for a permit, as no permits to collect rhinos had been issued for thirty years.

Pat told me, "Your request just happened to come at a good time. Fifty years ago there were only about ten rhinos left and it seemed almost sure they'd become extinct, as the locals hunted them mercilessly for their horns. The horn is supposed to be a powerful aphrodisiac and sells for a hundred rupees (about \$20) an ounce. However, since we started protecting the rhinos, the herd has built up. As the rhinos increase, they're apt to wander off the sanctuary and attack the local farmers."

Pat told me that an old bull rhino had left the sanctuary only a few days before I applied for my permits, entered a nearby village and killed a man. The bull had then skinned the man with his tongue. Apparently he was trying to get salt from the dead man's body.

Pat added that an Indian rhino seldom uses its horn as a

"Mercia was absolutely fearless with both animals and humans," says the author. She is shown here with an Indian rhino captured for the Philadelphia Zoo.



(Continued on Page 52)

My Beauty and My Beasts (Continued from Page 21)

weapon, preferring to bite. "A rhino slashes with the big incisors and can disembowel an elephant with one cut. But you'll go out on old Akbar, our best *kunki* (pad elephant). Akbar is a bull with big tusks, and he's used to handling rhinos."

While we were talking, Mr. E. P. Gee drove up. Mr. Gee is a tea planter; a thin, quiet man who has devoted his life to the preservation of the Indian rhino.

"The unfortunate rhinos really have had a miserable time of it in the past," said Gee, with a tenderness in his voice men usually employ only when speaking of a beloved child. "They're one of the oldest types of mammals in the world—really living fossils. If anything should happen to the herd here, it would be a comfort to know that the race is being perpetuated elsewhere."

Even though the two men were so cordial, I thought it might be a good idea for them to see Mercia. One look at Mercia clinches any deal, as far as men are concerned. I went in to get her, and found my pretty wife tossing on the lumpy, dirty bed with a headache and in a very bad mood. I told her that Stracey and Gee were on the veranda and the success of our trip depended on them. Mercia grumpily got off the bed and peered through the window.

"My heaven, a chi-chi and a thin, old, bespectacled planter in sweaty clothes!" she hissed contemptuously. "I should get dressed for trash like that!" and she flung herself back on the bed.

I went back to the veranda and explained that my wife was still feeling the effects of our plane ride. We resumed our rhino talks. Fifteen minutes later, Mercia joined us in a ravishing Japanese silk gown that clung to her luscious figure like wallpaper. She was overjoyed to meet dear Mr. Stracey, to whom we owed everything, fascinated by Mr. Gee's accounts of tea planting, and delightfully happy over our adorable little bungalow. When the two entranced men left, we could have sailed the Queen Mary up the Brahmaputra River to Assam and loaded every rhino in the place on board with their wholehearted assistance.

We started out early the next morning, riding on Akbar with Pat Stracey while the mahout sat astride the great bull's neck. A ranger accompanied us on another elephant, named Mohan. Travelers in the sanctuary always go in pairs because an elephant may be attacked by a rhino and disabled, leaving his riders helpless in the vast, swampy area.

Most of the 164 square miles of the sanctuary is covered by the great *ekkra* grass, often higher than a man's head, even when he is on the back of an elephant. Only on elephants is it possible to penetrate much of this great area, for a man on foot would be trapped in the dense grass and be unable to cross the cat's-cradle of waterways. Even an elephant has trouble, and Akbar would frequently stop and carefully test the soggy ground with one of his great feet before moving forward.

Then we saw our first rhino. He was a big bull lying in a *bheel*, a rhino wallow. Rhinos spend a great deal of their time in these wallows, and so are nearly always heavily coated with mud. We moved forward slowly, Akbar carefully parting the grass with his trunk to make sure that we wouldn't come on another rhino unexpectedly. We came closer and closer, until it seemed to me that we were looking directly down on the big fellow. Then Pat reached out and touched the mahout's arm, and he stopped Akbar.

Rhinos have poor sight, and since the wind was toward us, this bull was un-

conscious of our presence. He lay like a great pig, luxuriating in the wallow. All around him were white herons, which generally accompany a rhino, feeding on the insects which he disturbs. Suddenly the whole flock rose in the air like a cloud of white confetti blown by a sudden breeze. At once, the bull reared up and looked around him, his huge ears—the Indian rhino has much bigger ears than his African cousin—twitching about, independent of each other, like two sonar listening devices ready to catch the faintest sound.

Mercia strained around me to get a better look, and the bull caught the motion. Without the slightest warning, he exploded out of the wallow and stood on the soft ground, the water pouring off him, and both ears cocked forward. He

... ..

The Guest

(Age Ninety-three)

By Betty Jane Balch

Give her the room with the blue walls, please, With the little rose-carved chairs;

The room where the young spring wind sifts through At the top of the winding stairs.

Give her the room with the blue walls, please, Where the curtains blow in the dark,

For there she can hear the singing rain And the child who plays in the park.

Give her the room where the scent of rose Will nestle within her hair, For that was the room of her childhood years.

She will find it familiar there.

... ..

had changed suddenly from a peaceful, wallowing pig to a dangerous wild animal—an armored tank directed by a tiny, uncertain brain.

Akbar quietly curled his trunk out of harm's way and lowered his head to meet the charge with his tusks. The rhino stood considering us for a few seconds, and then gave a grunt and, swinging around with surprising nimbleness, trotted off down a path through the grass. In spite of his size he seemed to float over the marshy ground and moved much faster than an elephant could have done.

"They seldom charge now," said Pat with paternal pride. "They know that we won't hurt them. It's these damn poachers after their horns that cause all the trouble. If one of them wounds a rhino, of course, that makes him vicious, and after that he'll charge anything he sees."

I spent the next three weeks going out morning and evening to watch the rhinos. I needed to know a great deal about the animals to trap them and keep them alive during the long trip to Europe.

I noticed that the rhino calves always walked in front of their mother, so she could keep an eye on them. As a result, I decided to use pits to catch the calves.

If the calves had followed the mothers—as do the African rhino calves—pits would have been impossible because I'd have caught the adults rather than the youngsters. I also noted that the rhinos had to bathe frequently—in fact, seemed almost semiaquatic—and their favorite food was young bamboo shoots. All these details were of vital importance to me.

First, I directed the building of a corral near the bungalow. The corral covered slightly more than an acre and it included a good grove of bamboo and a stream that the calves could use for a wallow. The corral was made of heavy teak stakes, for the calves I intended to catch would have to be already weaned, although still running with their mothers, and so be two or three years old and weigh over a ton. I had the stakes covered with bamboo stems lashed together to serve as a bumper, so the youngsters wouldn't hurt themselves, in case they charged the corral wall.

When the corral was finished, we set about digging the pits. During my study of the rhinos I had carefully noted the trails used by mothers with suitable calves, and so knew exactly where the pits should be placed. I had the pits made narrow, so the calves could not turn around and injure themselves by mad thrashing.

The Assamese covered each pit with a layer of rushes and sprinkled earth on the top. They did an expert job, for when they had finished, no one could tell the trap covers from the surrounding ground, including the builders themselves. Later, when men had to go out to examine the traps to see if anything had been caught, several fell in by mistake. So I sent out mahouts on elephants to do the trap checking.

I fully expected to have my two calves in a few days, but nothing happened. Finally I found out what the trouble was. The mahouts who were checking the traps would ride close to them on their elephants and then look down from the advantage of their heights. Rhinos have a keen sense of smell and the odor of an elephant lingers a long time. The rhinos had simply abandoned the polluted paths.

I had fresh pits dug and insisted that the Assamese go on foot to check them. The Assamese didn't like this idea at all, for they had to follow the rhino paths through the tall grass and there was always the possibility of meeting a rhino or a tiger, so I checked as many of the traps as possible myself. Still, we got no rhinos. The rains were only a few days away, and once they began, trapping would be over for the season, for during those torrential downpours the pits would be flooded within an hour and become useless. Mercia alternated between fits of fury in which she denounced me for having delayed the trapping while I was studying the rhinos, execrating the rhinos themselves, swearing at the Assamese for cowardice and then going out alone to check the pits herself. Mercia was absolutely fearless with both animals and humans.

I went over and over my notes on the rhinos. Then I had an inspiration. The rhinos must be mad about salt. That was the only logical reason why the old bull had "skinned" a dead human with his tongue. I decided to scatter salt over the pit coverings and along the paths leading to the pits. Perhaps the rhinos, in their eagerness to get the salt, would forget caution.

Mercia and I spent an afternoon spreading the salt. We were out at dawn the next day. The cover of the first pit was gone; only a gaping hole remained. We approached it without daring to hope. Inside was a baby rhino. Mercia burst into tears of relief.

We raced back to camp, yelling with excitement. Thank heaven we didn't meet

a rhino, tiger or cobra on the narrow trails, for we took no precautions. Everyone in camp went mad with delight. Akbar was recuperating from an injury he'd got in a fight with a buffalo, so we started out on another pad elephant named Jess Pagli, which means "The Crazy One." Jess Pagli wasn't fully broken to rhinos, but we had no time to think of that. Mohan was hitched to a big transport cage and followed us more slowly. There were five people on Jess Pagli, including Mercia and myself. I was carrying a very fine German camera to photograph the transferring of the baby from the pit to the transport cage.

The mahout took us right up to the edge of the pit. The calf was a splendid little fellow weighing about a ton, and completely unhurt. While we were admiring him, there was a snort from the *ekkra*. Suddenly the mother rhino burst out and came straight for us, her mouth open, her tail straight in the air, scattering mud in all directions as she charged.

Jess Pagli gave a scream of terror and bolted. I was hanging to one of the rope grips of the pad for dear life. The mahout was yelling. Jess Pagli was trumpeting, the other riders screaming, and through it all came the deep, fierce bellow of the furious rhino.

Five people are too much for a single pad, even when an elephant is walking slowly, and I knew someone would fall. A great, black shape appeared below me and I saw the rhino slash at Jess Pagli's flank with her terrible incisors. The elephant screamed again, and now she really began to run, but the rhino kept alongside and slashed again. I was still clinging to the camera and half off the pad. The rhino was just under me.

Jess Pagli reached a broad waterway. Without hesitating, she plunged into it. As her leg fell away from beneath me, I was left sitting on air. I turned over and dived, with the camera in my hand. My only idea was to swim far enough underwater so the rhino couldn't get me.

I swam until my lungs were burning, and then surfaced. Jess Pagli had finally halted in midstream. There was no sign of the rhino.

Mercia was screaming at me, "Don't get that camera wet, you fool!"

No one was hurt except poor Jess Pagli; she had two bad gashes in her flank. When the mahout had succeeded in quieting her, we returned to camp and got two bulls with tusks. But even the two big bulls refused to face the raging mother rhino, and at last we had to set fire to the grass to drive her away. Then we all worked desperately to put out the fire before it spread to other parts of the sanctuary.

Mohan with the transport cage had arrived, and I told the Assamese to dig an incline down toward the head of the pit, but to leave a solid wall of earth about a foot thick between the pit and the incline. The cage was slid down this incline, the doors opened and the dirt wall dug away. Ropes were thrown around the young rhino and he was hauled into the cage and the door secured behind him. Then Mohan dragged him to the corral.

The baby was a male with a little bud of a horn just showing. Everything depended on getting him tame, because an animal as large and powerful as a rhino is extremely hard to handle unless he knows that you don't mean to hurt him. We put him in a narrow chute for a few days, first taking the precaution of smearing the inside of the chute with his dung so it would smell homey. In the chute we could scratch his ears and pat him, so he soon grew used to us.

Within a week, the little fellow was so tame that he'd run to us like a big dog to be petted and fondled. Mercia could even

ride on his back. He actually got to be a nuisance, following us about and poking us with his stump of a horn to get attention. Mercia named him Gadadahar, after an ancient Assamese king, and when she called, "Gadadahar! Gadadahar!" from outside the corral, Gadadahar would squeak back in reply and butt his head against the stakes trying to reach her.

We caught three other males before we got a female. "Naturally, because all males are much stupider than females," Mercia remarked triumphantly. We finally got a female two days before the rains broke. She tamed even more quickly than Gadadahar had. We named her Joymothi after an Assamese queen. The two rhinos got along very well together and took their baths lying side by side in the wallow I'd made for them at one end of the corral.

To reach Calcutta, the shipping center of Eastern India, the rhinos would have to be floated down the Brahmaputra River by flatboat. This meant a three weeks' trip and exposing our babies to all the dangers of rapids, sudden floods and uncertain native craft. Also, the shipping had to be accurately timed. Not every ship that puts into Calcutta is going to Europe or will accept animal freight. I spent several days cabling shipping lines until I found that the Dutch merchant ship Alcione was arriving in Calcutta and would take both us and the rhinos. Even then, I did not dare to leave until the last minute. I could not arrive in Calcutta ahead of time, for there was no place in the city where I could keep the rhinos. The Alcione would be in the harbor for only eight hours, so I had to float the rhinos down 700 miles of river, arrive during those eight hours and load them directly on the ship without delay.

While I was making these arrangements, Mercia hired a paddle-wheel steamer to tow our flatboat down the river, got a lorry to transport the rhino cages to the flatboat, got coolies to help with the loading and unloading, and laid in a supply of food for the rhinos. These preparations were finished in the nick of time. If everything went exactly right, we had just time enough to load the rhinos and reach Calcutta before the Alcione sailed.

We lured the rhinos into their shipping boxes with bamboo shoots. I was constantly glancing at my watch, for a delay of even a few hours meant that we'd miss connections with the Alcione. I had just given the order to have the cages pushed up the tailgate of the lorry when a young forestry official came up to me, looking very natty in his immaculate uniform.

"Your permits have just been revoked," he told me importantly. "The Forestry Department has decided that no female rhinos are to leave the sanctuary. These animals are an important national asset and the females cannot be allowed to leave Assam."

I pleaded, begged and protested, but it was no good. A foreigner dealing with a native official is the most helpless being in the world, and the smug ranger knew it. For generations, his people had been kicked around by "sahibs," and now was his chance to retaliate.

If I was beaten, Mercia was not. She went into a really terrifying rage. Even the ranger dropped his haughty air and became nervous. At last, ignoring Mercia, he went over to the cages and started to open the door of the female's box.

Mercia threw herself across the door. "You'll have to kill me first!" she screamed.

"Get away from that door!" the ranger shouted, struggling with Mercia to release the catch.

He was stronger than she was and managed to tear her hands loose. "Very well, open it! That's a wild rhino and she'll kill me!" Mercia did not mention that she had been riding the rhino around the corral the day before. "You'll be held responsible for my death. It'll go on your record that you killed a helpless woman. You'll be ruined for life."

The ranger hesitated. "I'll have the police remove you."

"They can't!" Mercia now had both arms and legs locked around the bars in the door. Then she shouted to me, "Don't just stand there, Peter! Call Pat Stracey!"

There was a telephone at Gauhati and I was able to find a car to drive me there. I had some qualms about leaving Mercia, but from experience I knew that she was quite capable of looking after herself.

At Gauhati I called the sanctuary. Pat had just come in from a tour of inspection and sounded dog-tired.

"All right, all right," he said wearily. "They've mucked things up. The department is right about having to be extra careful about females; they're our breeding stock. But one more or less won't make any difference, and we promised you a pair. Tell that ranger I want to talk to him."

When I got back to the corral, Mercia was still clinging to the bars like an octopus, surrounded by a ring of cursing policemen and the furious ranger. I gave him Pat's message and he departed sullenly. He returned and gave angry permission to remove the rhinos.

By now, a large crowd had collected, whispering excitedly.

"He has rhinos!"

"Do they have horns?"

"Of course, you fool; otherwise why should he bother with them?"

"A piece of those horns would make me a rich man for life!"

"Why is this white man stealing our rhinos? Cut off the horns! The animals belong to Assam. We are no longer slaves to the white man!"

Mercia said to me quietly, "Get the lorry going at once. This means trouble."

A man with a long knife in his hand pushed his way through the crowd. His eyes were fastened on the rhino cages with a fixed, unblinking stare and saliva ran from his partly open mouth. He was an old man and probably impotent. He had to have those horns. I grabbed his wrist and the crowd began to shout and push forward. The police came to my help, swinging their clubs.

One of the policemen panted, "Let them have the horns! We can't hold them any longer!"

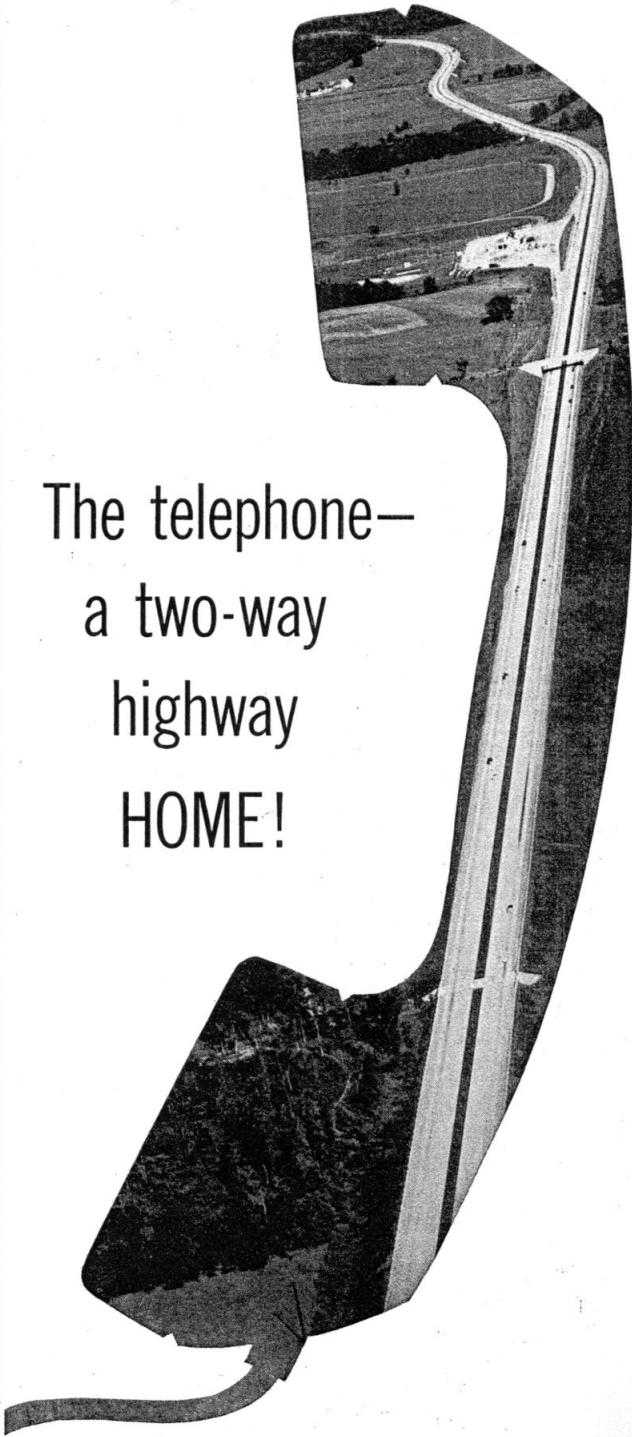
The horns were only tiny stumps, and if they were gouged out, the baby rhinos would die. One of the policemen went down and was tramped on by the shouting crowd. A stone hit another man beside me. He dropped his club and fell back against the lorry, half senseless. The man with the knife was still fighting with insane desperation to reach the cages.

The lorry began to move. Mercia had jumped into the driver's seat and started the engine. I pulled myself up on the side as it lurched forward. The car bumped over the rough road, steadily gathering speed while the mob pursued us, throwing stones and screaming insults until we were out of range.

We went directly to the loading ghat on the Brahmaputra and got the cages on the flatboat without further trouble.

The three weeks' trip down the river was a mixture of long, peaceful days and sudden, blood-curdling crises. Once the paddle-wheel boat ran aground, the cable towing the flatboat parted, and we saw our precious babies go floating off down the river.

(Continued on Page 55)



The telephone—
a two-way
highway
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These rates apply nights after 6 o'clock and all day Sunday. Add the 10% federal excise tax.

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(Continued from Page 53) Luckily, we were able to get the boat off the mud—Mercia and I jumping into the river, helping to push with the crew—and overtook the flatboat before it reached rapids. One evening we were attacked by a horde of natives who'd seen the rhinos and were determined to get the horns. The captain cut the cable and we escaped with the loss of the anchor.

We managed to make connections with the Alcione and sailed for Europe. News of the rhinos had been radioed ahead and when we arrived in Genoa, the pier was black with reporters, photographers, radio men and representatives from the zoo. Mercia, with her stunning exotic beauty, made even a greater hit than the rhinos. She was photographed with the babies, with me, looking at Europe for the first time, and in virtually every change of clothes she possessed. Used to being snubbed by the English in Singapore, she could not understand why here no one cared that she was a Eurasian. She was still in a trance when we loaded the rhinos on a luggage car and left for Basel.

An hour or so later, a sharp reaction set in. Mercia wept, "People are just curious about me because I'm brown!" Nothing I could say affected her. Before we reached Basel, she insisted on covering her face with a very light make-up.

When I protested, she shouted, "They won't let me into a hotel or a restaurant if they know what I am! They may even send me back to Singapore!"

When the train arrived at Basel, I went out to face the army of newspaper and camera men. Flash bulbs were exploding on all sides and I couldn't think of a word to say. While I stood stammering and sick with embarrassment, someone pushed me aside. It was Mercia, radiantly lovely in an Indian sari and without the make-up. At the last moment, she'd decided to play up her Oriental background instead of trying to conceal it. She spoke for ten minutes, making jokes, describing our adventures and saying how she'd looked forward to seeing Switzerland, which was even more beautiful than she'd imagined. The crowd loved her. Meanwhile, I stood in the background, scraping the side of the platform with my shoe.

Doctor Hediger had insisted that the zoo be cleared during the unloading of the rhinos, as he was afraid a crowd might bother them. The crates were carefully slid down the tailgate of the truck and the cage doors lifted. The rhinos refused to come out. The elaborately designed pen was foreign to them and they clung to the familiar safety of their old cages.

"I'll get them out," I said. I went into the house that connected with the pen and gave a special whistle that the babies had learned to know. All during the long trip, Mercia and I had checked the babies, day and night, at regular three-hour intervals, and we always gave that whistle as we came toward the cages. At once there were excited squeaks and my two babies rushed into the pen and began looking for me.

Except that they weren't my babies any longer. I'd sold them. I turned and ran out of the house by another gate, so they wouldn't see me. If they saw me again, they'd expect me to continue feeding and playing with them in this new home, and that couldn't be. I had to make a clean break.

I went to our hotel and found Mercia in our room, prancing with excitement. "We're asked to a big dinner to meet a lot of prominent people," she exclaimed. "Everyone is delighted with me. They don't seem to care if I'm a Eurasian or not. And look at this!" She flourished a sheaf of letters, telegrams and cablegrams over her head.

We tore them open. There were orders from Rome, from Paris, from New York, from Buenos Aires, from Sydney, from Tokyo. Everyone wanted to commission me to get them animals. We were asked to dinners, receptions, conferences, and heaven knows what else. Mercia snatched up the letters, ripped them open, dropped them half read, and grabbed for another, like a child opening Christmas presents.

Finally she said, while still poring over the wonderful mail, "Hurry and get dressed. We haven't much time."

"I'm not going," I said heavily.

She stared at me. "Why not?"

"Mercia, I called the babies to get them into the pen. They ran out looking for me and I had to leave them there. We'll never see Gadadahar and Joymothi again."

I called room service and told them to bring me a bottle of schnapps. The schnapps arrived and I started drinking. Mercia watched me for a while. Then she got up and started dressing, still not speaking. She put on her evening gown and a stole of snow lynx I'd got for her in Calcutta. Then she walked over and stood frowning at me.

"I've waited all my life to go to a big party and be received by Europeans," she said levelly. "This is my chance. I'm not going to give it up for you and those rhinos. Are you coming?"

I couldn't. I couldn't talk to people tonight with the babies locked up in the Basel Zoo, all alone and frightened. I shook my head.

"Then I'm going alone," said Mercia, and walked out. I heard her high-heeled shoes tapping off down the corridor. I was glad that she was gone. Now I could start drinking seriously.

I drank myself into a stupor and passed out within an hour. But no matter how drunk I became, I got up all night at the prescribed periods to look for the babies and give them their palm sugar and salt. I wandered around the corridors of the hotel whistling for them, and it was only when I didn't hear their funny little squeaks that I knew they were gone. Then I'd go back to my room and drink some more schnapps until I could sleep again.

I swore over and over that I'd never again make a pet out of an animal, but,

of course, I broke my word. If you're fond of animals, you can't help making pets out of them.

Overnight, I found myself suddenly transformed from an unknown animal collector to an international figure—at least in zoological circles. Mercia and I made a trip to Indonesia, where we collected orangutans, leopards, pythons and tigers. Then we returned to Assam, where we obtained another pair of rhinos—this time for the Philadelphia Zoo in the U. S. A. I had intended turning these animals over to a dealer who would arrange for import permits and the other innumerable details involved in importing animals, but Mercia had a different idea.

"Peter, we must deliver this cargo to the United States ourselves," she urged me. "People there have got to know about you. We'll sell all the animals direct to the American zoos, without going through a dealer."

I tried to explain to Mercia how impractical it was to arrive in a strange country with a cargo of animals, but she was so determined that, against my better judgment, I agreed. In addition to the larger animals, we had several hundred cranes, storks, small birds and monkeys. All our savings were invested in the cargo, and as we entered Boston harbor I was shaking from nervousness.

Mercia tried to buck me up, "You know that all the animals we have are in big demand in America. Don't worry about the customs officials. We can always bribe them."

"You can't bribe American customs officials," I told her miserably.

Mercia stared at me in astonishment. "Can't bribe the customs officials? What a terrible country! Why did you ever bring me here?" And the poor girl burst into tears.

As the ship docked, an automobile half a block long came tearing up and stopped with a scream of brakes. Two men jumped out, and one of them shouted, "Have you any animals besides the rhinos?"

"Plenty!" yelled Mercia. "We have —"

"We don't care what you have; we'll buy the whole consignment!" the man shouted back.

Mercia sat down weakly on the deck, gasping, "See, what did I tell you? I knew America would be like this!"

The two men were from the North Atlantic Fertilizer and Chemical Company, one of the biggest wholesale houses for animals in the United States. This seemed a curious title for an animal import firm, but we asked no questions. Mercia asked double what we had hoped to get for the cargo, and the men instantly consented. Mercia was heartbroken. "I knew I should have asked three times as much," she whispered to me bitterly. We had one big leopard that was very tame and Mercia tried to correct her mistake by saying that he wasn't included with the other animals, but that she'd let him go for a very special figure. The men paid without question. The pythons we sold by the foot—five dollars per foot of snake. After glancing at the snakes, one of the men remarked, "They seem to average about fifteen feet each. Shall we settle for that?"

"Oh, no, you don't!" snapped Mercia. "We'll measure them right here on deck!"

All the pythons were taken out and measured with a yardstick. Handling an eighteen- or twenty-foot python is quite a problem, but Mercia held their tails and I took their heads, Mercia stretching them until their backbones almost cracked.

We were swamped by TV cameramen, newsreel men and press photographers, and Mercia posed in a sarong; in a special "jungle costume," with shorts designed to show her pretty legs; and in her European gowns. The next day, her picture, with or without the animals, was plastered over the front pages of the newspapers. We began to get letters, phone calls and telegrams from zoos, animal dealers and lecture agencies all over the country. Then we were called into the office of Mr. Fred Zeehandelaar, the head of the animal-dealing department of the fertilizer company, which, it turned out, has many interests. Mr. Zeehandelaar had made a careful study of the animal market and told us that there was a big demand for young female Indian elephants less than five feet at the shoulder. He wanted ten such elephants and would pay \$2200 each for them landed in the U.S.A. before May first. It was then autumn.

I told him that it would be impossible. To make sure of fulfilling the contract, we would have to go on *shikar*—that is, hunting—in the Garo Hills in Northern India, which was a fabulous undertaking. Also, the problems involved in bringing back such young elephants were almost insurmountable, because the calves would hardly be weaned. Mr. Zeehandelaar admitted that other collectors had told him the same story, but he'd hoped that I'd undertake the assignment.

Mercia and I went to a restaurant for a cup of coffee. While I drank my coffee, Mercia was busy figuring with a pencil on the back of an envelope. She finally announced, "Peter, with the profit on the elephants alone, we could clear twenty thousand dollars. Then there's the profit on any other animals we bring—and now we know the American market. It's too good a chance to miss. We'll pull it off someday."

Mercia could always talk me into anything, even against my better judgment. We left the United States the next day by plane. We flew direct to Karachi and then took a local plane to a small landing field in the Garo area. Here we made arrangements to get pad elephants, mahouts and *phundis*—professional elephant catchers—and spend the winter in the heart of the wild Garo jungles.



"Marry me, honey—and help me pay for it."

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

Editors' Note: The concluding article in this series will appear in next week's issue.