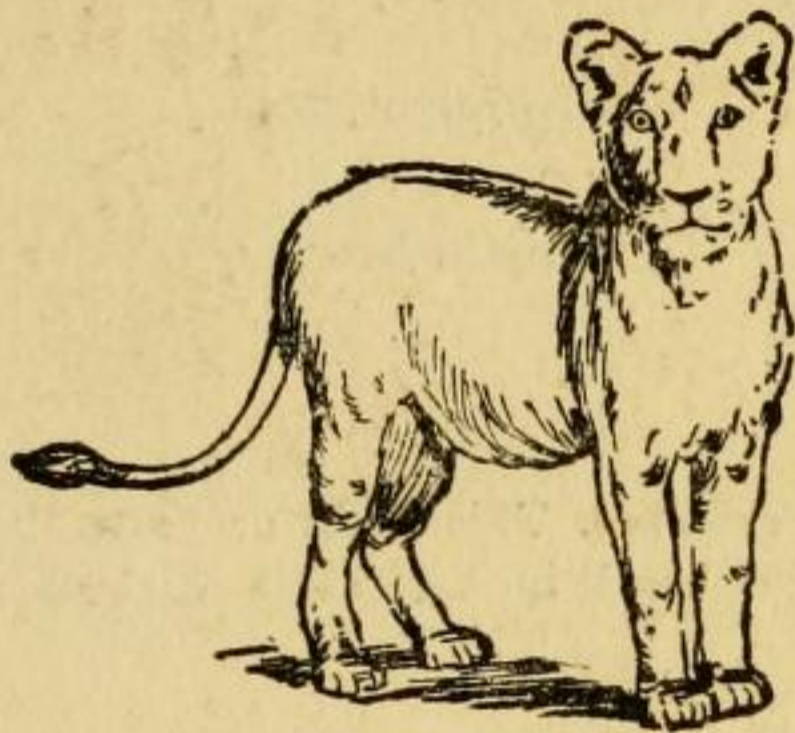


SAFARI

A SAGA OF THE AFRICAN BLUE

By

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With 66 Illustrations

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CHAPTER VIII

ATTACKED BY RHINOS

NATURALLY there were some serious adventures with the wild animals we met. No circular letter had reached the game to say that we were not out to harm them. We were not aggressive, but we were bold. And in our constant intrusions we often took chances.

There were almost no tragedies, though we had many narrow escapes. There was the case of Rattray who was badly mauled by a leopard when helping Osa.

In view of what happened later, it was strange that about this time Saunderson, my young assistant, got word that two of his friends had been killed by a rhino. It seemed that a young lady was staying with friends near Nanyuki. She went out with a Meru boy armed with a .303 Army rifle. The pair came on a rhino which charged and killed her despite the fact that she bravely fired six shots into it.

About the same time a settler and his wife were returning from Meru in a Ford. They saw the same wounded rhino on the road. Unluckily the gun was lashed to the seat. While the wife was untying it her

husband jumped out and tried to frighten the rhino away by yelling at it and waving his coat. But the animal charged and killed the man right before the poor woman's eyes.

Soon after this I came out of my tent one morning and saw three rhino coming towards camp. They were fighting and running at the same time. There was also a baby rhino along which kept whining as it tried to keep up with the older ones. It seemed tired and was no doubt frightened at the rumpus its choleric elders were kicking up. Then the whole crowd disappeared in some bushes.

After breakfast, Osa, Furber, Saunderson and myself went to the place where we had last seen the rhinos. Saunderson and Furber went into the bushes to look for tracks. All of a sudden I heard a scream. Then two shots, then more screams; then another shot and more screams.

Osa and I dashed over as fast as we could go and entered the bushes. Saunderson was stretched out on the ground with his clothing torn and a mass of blood. At first I thought he was dead. But we raised him up and found the rhino had got him in the legs. He was badly cut up on his upper right thigh where a horn had torn to the bone. We quickly carried him into camp where luckily the cook had plenty of hot water. I washed all the gashes and put permanganate on them.

When the injured man could talk he told me that he had nearly stepped on the old female. She came for him instantly. He got in two quick shots but they glazed off her horn and thick skull. She kept coming and knocked the gun out of his hands and gored him.

Saunderson died a few weeks later of pneumonia.

In one way or another we came to know a good deal about the rhinoceros. The distribution of this animal is rather general over East Africa. We found them both on the plains and in the forests. The latter species have a larger and more tapering horn. Possibly this is the result of the plains animals going to live in the wooded sections where use of their horn against trees is common.

It is interesting that the difference between the horns of the plains and forest rhinos is said now to be less marked than formerly. Probably the plains animals are taking to cover as a result of the advance of civilization.

We found young rhinos with their parents at all seasons of the year. The family sticks together until the young one is nearly as large as the adult. Percival tells me that the rhino's reputation for viciousness comes largely from the fact that he tends to doze during the day time. When man disturbs him he wakes up half frightened, half angry and full of resentment.

Warning of the approach of danger is given the rhino by the tick-birds that forever are roosting on top of his back. The birds fly up in alarm at the slightest provocation and the host comes to enough to find out whether it's worthwhile waking up. If the birds seem really frightened the rhino also becomes very much excited, and does not calm down until he is positive that everything is all right. The intelligent instincts of these guardians is noted from the fact that they do not seem to mind the presence of man when on domestic cattle; it is only on wild game like the rhino that they flutter away when the hunter approaches.

The next day after Saunderson's scrape we had another brush with rhino. At daybreak I was on a small hill with my camera watching a herd of buffalo in the grass below me. As Bukhari was ill my second headman was acting as chief. I told him to reconnoitre while I went back to camp. On the way I saw coming toward me full tilt one of the boys.

"Humadi killed by rhino!" he gasped out.

With my heart jumping I ran after the fellow not knowing what horror I was about to see. He led me to Humadi, one of the porters, who was lying on the ground close to camp pretty badly, though not fatally smashed up. I carried him into the camp where he was roundly jeered by his fellow tribesmen. It seems that he had walked head on into the young

rhino whose mother had gored Saunderson. The baby was so scared it charged the black, knocked him down and stamped on him.

Next morning it rained in small showers and I thought the day would be a washout altogether. But Boculy said that we should find rhino before noon; and we did. It rained like the devil for fifteen minutes, then the sun came blazing out in all its African glory.

Right ahead of us was a herd of twenty-seven giraffe. A few minutes later Boculy pointed out a rhino across a deep valley. I had to take my glass to see it. But before I could focus on it the native announced there was a "toto" or baby rhino with it. I wish I had eyesight like that. It took us an hour to get to the animals, with the bad going and our heavy cameras. And when we got there the big mother had gone to sleep under a wide bush. We could not see the toto so we sat down to wait for her to wake up.

About three o'clock the old woman came to and let her baby have dinner. We did not dare move or she would have seen us. A mother rhino and baby are a dangerous proposition. We were right out in the open. In a short time she decided to ramble on and started toward us. She was about the size of a coal truck, and roughly the same color.

The instant she got our wind she snorted and ducked

her big horned head. Boculy and Bukhari stood by with their guns ready in case she came for us. There was no assurance that a rifle shot would stop the beast had she taken it into her head to charge our way. But the two black lads stood bravely by waiting our call for their assistance.

Just when the rhino was about to charge we set about shouting and waving our arms and were able to head her off before we had to shoot. I might add that I think this sort of thing usually meant that the animals were only half-hearted in their attack. For when either lion, rhino or elephant really took it into its head to vent its anger on us we usually had to climb a tree or shoot.

In angry dignity the mother rhino went down through some rocks slowly enough for her baby to follow. She snorted away at the comical little fellow from time to time because it waddled too slowly to suit her. We heaved a sigh of relief when she passed out of sight.

Another time we had been watching a rhino go up and around the cliffs near the lake with a sureness that seemed impossible in such lumbering brutes, and a little later a big rhino mother with a little toto came down to the pool. This baby too was not over a week old, and was still unsteady on its feet but frisky as a kitten. It ran under its mother's belly, as she drank, butted her playfully, then ran away for a few steps

and then back again. But every time she tried to get it to drink it would shy off.

Fascinated, we were watching it, and commenting to each other in whispers about the timidity of rhino young, which often stick by their mothers until as big as they. And I had arisen from the ferns and was cranking my camera—as the little one ran off from the pool, then, frightened by some leaf or bird, ran back again—when Osa gave me a nudge. I turned quicker than a shot and there, coming for me, was a big buck rhino, his two horns straight in a line with the camera—and me. Osa already had her rifle—they were always across our laps, by our bedside, somewhere near at hand—at her shoulder, the .405 Winchester; and I called to her to try and turn him with a shot rather than shoot to kill, for I was making a good film of him and I thought this might be one of his everlasting false charges. Evidently Osa didn't think so, for as he came within thirty feet, she shot for the brain and he fell; the bullet, we later found, lodging right by his horn.

It is easy to imagine my anxiety when, after such incidents as these, Osa disappeared one day. She had ridden out a little way from camp on a mule; with her was one of the gun-bearers who reported that somehow or other he had got separated from her. My fury at the man's being so casual was tempered when I saw how really frightened he was.

At once I organized a search party. Not only were there rhinos in the vicinity, but leopards and other carnivorous beasts. If Osa was hurt and unable to defend herself there was no telling what ghastly fate might be hers.

Of course it was not unusual for her to be treed by a wild animal. I knew she would climb out of harm's way rather than shoot game unnecessarily. But I gathered from the man who had seen her last that there were no climbable trees within several miles of the desert trail they were on when he lost her.

From a rocky elevation I searched the plain with my glasses. To my intense relief I suddenly saw Osa sitting alone on the ground at least a mile from me. As I looked she rose slowly and started to walk in faltering steps our way. We rushed out to meet her.

"The mule shied at a snake," she explained. "I fell off, and lost consciousness. I think I must have struck my head on a stone."

It was a good lesson in the danger of going alone through such country.

I think we found the rhinos mostly feeding on the unpleasant thornbush. Sometimes they would turn up under a solitary tree on the plains which they had selected for their daytime rest. Despite their choleric temperaments we found them regular in their habits, and tending to stay in the same neigh-

borhood. From this we learned not to pitch our tents on a rhino trail as the animals were as likely as not to come trotting carelessly along down wind and blunder squarely into camp. During the day the rhinoceros does not drink much, putting in more time dozing or fighting. About 4 P.M. he feels the need of a drink after the torrid heat and begins to wander toward his neighborhood waterhole, feeding as he goes. After a drink he will play by wallowing around in the mud, or pick a choice fight with some worthy antagonist. He spends a good deal of the night wandering restlessly about, grunting and squealing in marked contrast to his silence during the day.

It is probable that few animals suffer so much from native hunters as does the rhino.

I remember one exciting evening when Osa and her guide, Bukhari, climbed a ten foot rock some distance back of our camp. I wanted to get some photographs of rhinos as they went down to the waterhole for a drink. We agreed on signals in advance. One whistle, repeated at intervals, meant a rhino was coming in front of us; two that he came from the left; and three from the right. If Osa saw one coming up behind us she was to give four blasts.

With one other man I lay down in the sand about twelve feet from the flashlight lamps which were set up by the trail to the water.

About ten o'clock Osa gave one whistle. It was

pretty dark and the fact that a big brute weighing several tons was headed in our direction was not altogether reassuring. I later asked Osa how she felt. "I was too excited to feel," she said.

In a few minutes we could see the monster coming right down the path for us. Osa had considerable responsibility on her hands at the moment. For not only did she know her husband was in line with the animal, but she sighted another at almost the same moment. Furthermore she had no way of telling whether or not we had heard her first whistle.

The heavy thud of footsteps soon revealed the whereabouts of the oncoming rhino. When he was within a few feet I set off the flash. He went galloping back in Osa's direction.

In a few minutes another rhino came along. More whistling and a flashlight. This went on until about midnight. Osa kept busy whistling until she stopped in despair. There were so many rhinos coming and going that she could not keep track of them. Finally we had to throw stones at them to keep them away from us. As for poor Osa she was held a prisoner until after 2 A.M. when she found it safe to join us in camp for a well-deserved night's rest.

Once at one of our waterholes we dined well in the evening, for Osa took her Ithaca twenty, a shot gun with which she accomplished marvels, and came back with two dozen sand grouse. Contented and

full, we slept well, only to be awakened about midnight by that chorus of snorts which always betrays the rhino. There, just beyond our makeshift boma, two rhinos were at it, snout to snout, quarreling over some fat-rumped dark leather-covered belle who stood watching the proceedings. Like the baboons in our forest, who are constantly threatening and pursuing each other, but rarely coming to actual fisticuffs, they did not give us a run for our money. They kept circling about, made lumbering sorties at each other; stood, heads lowered, tails in air, snorting away, and pawing the ground like enraged bulls; then seemed to kiss and make up. Possibly the presence of unseen white men acted on their subconscious minds, taking the fight out of them; or else they were staging a sham battle for our entertainment as we lay there in the moonlight. At any rate, that was the end of the affair. The peculiar thing about their exit was that they left the trail and gave our camouflaged blinds a wide berth though the wind was all right. On the way they met two other rhinos coming in, conversed with them a moment, snout to snout, and then the two newcomers repeated the same maneuver, leaving the trail so as to avoid our concealed cameras. Evidently they had been warned by the others that there was a queer looking structure down there by the water.

Next morning I went out alone with the boys as



A RHINO THAT CLAIMED THE RIGHT OF WAY.

Enlargement from movie film. This rhino was on his way to water, but as we were set up on his trail, he could not help noticing us and charged full tilt.



STOPPED BY OSA'S BULLET.

This is the same rhino, the picture being made at the instant Osa shot him at a distance of thirteen feet from the camera.



A FOREST RHINO ON THE PLAINS OUTSIDE LAKE PARADISE.

He has just been informed by the flight of the tick birds that there is danger about, and he is whirling around trying to get the scent. A minute later he got our wind and charged, but we went up trees and he passed under us and went off into the forest.

Osa felt she should fish; she was very conscientious about this as she said we needed fish for every camp in which we could get them. We left camp about the same time and walked about a mile together before she branched down to the river, riding on her mule. Ndundu and Butoto were with her. She had perhaps gone a quarter of a mile when I saw her and the boys running, a rhino after them full tilt. Ndundu fired twice but missed. Butoto scrambled to the top of a big ant hill.

Although I was afoot I started off at a run to the rescue, my boys following. But of course I was too far away to avert disaster. Anyway the mule was so terrified that the rhino had no chance to catch him. The chief danger lay in the chance that Osa might lose her seat and fall off. About this time Osa saw me coming and the rhino apparently heard us. It wheeled and disappeared in the long grass near the river.

No wonder Osa hated rhino. She was always having encounters of this sort with them. When she came up to me she was so angry that she wanted me to go right back with her and shoot the beast; but in a few moments she cooled off and laughed about it.

Here I discovered a small matter that might have led to serious consequences besides the fight it led to between Osa and Ndundu. It seemed that he had placed only four cartridges in the gun that morning

instead of the regular charge of five. Osa wanted me to discharge the boy, but Ndundu was nowhere to be found. He did not show up that night. Next morning I found him waiting for me outside my tent. He was so sorry he actually cried, so of course Osa forgave him and all was bright again.

Some of the intensity of desire with which we searched for rhinos at this time was gradually communicated to our boys. One day, while we were out near one of the mountain waterholes, two of them went to the pool for water. On their return they reported they had seen rhino which that particular morning we very much wanted.

“Did you see them?” I asked.

“Yes, Bwana Piccer.”

“Good rhino?”

“Yes, Bwana, very fine!”

So off to the waterhole we went. There had been no rhino there for twenty-four hours, so Bukhari declared, and we knew enough now of the signs of the trail to realize that he was right.

“Why in the devil,” I said to the luckless boys, “did you say there were rhino? Why did you lie to me?”

“But, Bwana, there were tracks.”

“They were old and you did not tell me that.”

“Yes, Bwana, that is so. We knew that; but two

rhino had been there. Had we been there yesterday, there would have been rhino."

"I suppose they were beautiful rhino then."

"Ah, Bwana, fine rhino, the biggest you ever saw," so expostulated the rascals, though the game may have been quite ordinary; then,—“Do not be angry with us. You want good rhino and we only want to help you see good rhino.”

With such childlike good nature and naïve philosophy we had constantly to contend and it all added much to the countless other difficulties of the expedition. However, it afforded some amusement, on calmer reflection, and relieved the tedium of some of our journeys. And often I tried to sound the boys out, to delve into the dark chambers of the brains of these people, who have been sunbaked for centuries into indolence and stupidity and who have been rendered hopeless by constant oppression from Northern tribes and too often from the white traders, to say nothing of generations of slave hunters before them. It is not all their fault.

At times I think the rhino work got a bit on my nerves. The creatures themselves were stupid. The heat was often terrific. And the boys, like children, had their temperamental ups and downs in the most unexpected fashion.

I recall one morning in rhino country when I especially instructed the boys to remain together as

they followed us with our gear. They tended to straggle along and string out all over the landscape until our chances for rhino became practically nil. About 9 A.M. we sighted a rhino ahead in some volcanic slag. We halted the safari and taking the camera boys told the others to remain behind until we called.

Now we located the rhino again and got very close to him by going carefully. I set up my camera and was patiently waiting for him behind a bush. Suddenly he snorted and ran. On looking for the cause I discovered my safari going around a hill a quarter of a mile ahead. The boys had disobeyed and thought they would go on. As a result they gave the rhino their scent and my two precious hours went for naught.

This was a bad day altogether. About eleven we came upon another rhino and this time you may be sure the boys remained behind. Osa and I with the cameras managed to get up close enough for a few scenes, when the sun went under a cloud and the party was off for the moment. Then a pest of flies descended on us and bit our flesh until we nearly went insane. Also dust and heat waves made photography almost impossible.

The last straw came when the rhino found we were after him. There was only one small thorn tree near the camera, up which I put Osa when the beast

began to graze in our direction. Suddenly he got our scent and came for us in short goose-like jumps. Then when his little near-sighted eyes focussed on our party he stopped and pawed up the ground as if to say, "Come on, I dare you to fight." Then he charged. It was funny to see nine boys and myself trying to climb that miserable little thorn tree after Osa when there certainly wasn't room for more than three of us. Fortunately Mr. Rhino decided that he had taught us a lesson. He circled the tree with his little tail stuck straight out and then dashed off.

A somewhat appropriate accident happened just when we were working back from our base and were passing through some of the plains country inhabited by the irritable old rhino. We had left several cars at a place called Merille. Millions of bees had colonized our camera boxes built into the bodies of the machines. We tried every way we could think of to drive the insects out but they went right back. I tied mosquito nets over myself and went in with sticks and scraped the boxes clean of bees. The angry creatures swarmed about me until I could not see. Then they got inside the netting. In a frenzy I ran away tearing off the netting as I went. Osa and the boys came to my assistance, as a result of which everybody got stung. Boculy had one eye shut; both my ears were swelled to twice their normal size; and the bees were back in the cars.

Then I tried tying the netting about me and driving one of the cars up and down the road as fast as I could go with one hand, while I scraped out the bees with the other. This worked. But the minute I stopped the bees came back. Finally we simply had to burn them out, which played hob with the cars but left us 400 lbs. of beautiful honey.