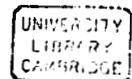


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EPIC FAILURE



"An elephant under your bed."



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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E P I C F A I L U R E

solicitors in grey tails and morning trousers ; they encircled the vulgar noisy rabble, and one was quite shocked to see them forget themselves —their immaculate garb—and their worthy calling, and dart in with considerable vigour to grab nauseating tit-bits from the ruffled and indignant vultures.

When there was nothing left but the clean-picked raffish ribs standing up in the morning light, the birds lifted heavily off on their way to the upper atmosphere in search of more refuse to clear up. They have a high sense of duty and tidy minds, these dustmen of the bush, and no dead thing escapes their discerning eye ; not for nothing are they protected by the Government and classed, out of their station, as Royal Game.

C H A P T E R V I.

L A K E M A N Y A R A .

It was a long and strenuous day's work moving camp back to the shore of the lake ; we had to unload the lorry at the bridge and porter all the stuff over. The skinner had gone sick and sat in a miserable heap, weaving his long limbs about him on the bank of the river. 'Boiling stomach' was no good for anything because he had a pain again ; he never was good for much anyway, as he was wrong in the head as well as the stomach.

The boys always hated unloading, as they took an immovably sanguine view on transport matters and thought we were being quite absurdly fussy in lightening a load when we had not actually sunk, stuck, or smashed something.

It was lunch-time before we had got everything across, and we sat down at the edge of the high green forest and had some food before embarking upon the second stage of our removal. The boys were inclined to sulk because the lorry had crossed the bridge quite easily when it was unloaded, and therefore might have been

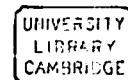
EPIC FAILURE

taken over without unloading, thereby saving the boys a lot of trouble.

We crashed on, dodging trees and running over bushes, taking everything in our stride until we reached a second bridge, and then we had to unload the cars all over again.

Not the most hopeful view or the most reckless spirit could have got us across this one, burdened as we were. One tentative wheel dropped through the rotten wood and stuck, and we had to jack up and rebuild before rushing over in an angry clatter of flying logs. One of the boiled-crab spiders went sickeningly down the neck of my shirt as I salvaged two chairs and a bunch of bananas from the river, where they had been flung with gay abandon by the bucketing car. More forest, with vagrant monkeys swinging nonchalantly from branch to branch, and then we reached the palm trees and the swamp.

The most complete unloading, coupled with optimism, skill, energy and chains, failed to get the lorry through the water-logged reeds; the wheels spun round and a shower of water, freely interspersed with black mud, sprayed us with a bountiful stream. The lorry stayed just where it was, except that it sank. Even the jack disappeared in the mud when we tried to lift the back wheels out of their cavernous hole. We coaxed it out backwards and on to dry land again at last, and left it in charge of the sick





"At the foot of a rocky kopje."



"His nose glued to the ground."

L A K E M A N Y A R A

skinner while we plunged on in a fountain of spray in the two light cars.

The shrill menace of mosquitoes met us at our projected camp site at the edge of the lake. A legion of duck, teal, and geese were floating and feeding at the water's brim. We shot a small blue-billed duck with the .22 when it was upside down looking for something with its head under water, but the geese all rose with derisive cackles just out of range, and as the sun was sinking we went back to help to pitch camp.

Happening to look up to see if the geese had returned yet our eyes were met by the remarkable spectacle of a rhino, his nose glued to the ground like a steady, reliable spaniel well on in middle life tracking up a runner, following our trail across the plain. Fascinated, we watched him sniffing his way down to the lake where we had shot the duck, then turn and, not at fault for a moment, continue the trailing process straight in our direction.

Realising that he was not looking where he was going, and that his nose would lead him right into camp, we climbed trees with universal celerity, I with a camera held between my teeth. Although the light was poor and failing, I took a snapshot of him as he approached. It is perhaps more tree than rhino, but it is a very good likeness for all that.

Our rhino tracker came right up the slope and paused under Alan's tree, standing *vis-à-vis*

EPIC FAILURE

to our half-erected and abandoned tent. Then he looked up. "What is this I see before me?" he seemed to think to himself, his ears and lip wiggling in wonderment. Three paces forward and we became concerned for the safety of our cars, which were standing alone and unprotected at a distance of a few yards from him. For three tons of rhino with a spike in front, propelled with considerable speed and agility, to come in sudden impact with a car is the poorest kind of fun for any vehicle.

Three more paces and he got our wind, and with a snort like a sudden outlet of steam from a boiler, his tail stuck stiffly up like an undersized flag on the stern of a battleship, he wheeled in his tracks and disappeared in a cloud of dust. It made one rather ashamed of one's smell, which must surely be of the most nauseating variety to have this effect on a full-grown unfastidious rhino.

Later in the night we were visited by hippo; they rose like monstrous nereids from the lake to the accompaniment of deep-throated grunts, and cropped their slow way up our hill. Something kicked over an empty debbi outside our tent, but the lamp had burned low and we could not see what it was.

Several hours before dawn the supercilious geese came honking over us; most restless birds, they were always honking from one place to another with a great show of apparent purpose.

LAKE MANYARA

Dawn touched the lake with gold and the blue distant forest on the other side with deep shadow, as we set off along the shore next morning. The rhino was still out wandering on the plain, obsessed as ever by an overweening perplexity as to our personnel and intention. The hippos had waddled off and submerged themselves in the lake again, and the shore was made dazzling by a vast flock of pelicans, fishing in the mud and standing on tiptoe to stretch their wings. Geese, ducks, and water birds kept up a constant sad crescendo, and Kavirondo cranes spread their wings and danced flirtatiously in pairs in the shallows.

We came at last to a wide dry river, filled with the fresh tracks of elephants who had been digging for water in the sand; their smell, mixed with the pungent odour of pelican, made a complicated effluvium that filled the air about us. As we were far from camp and the elephants far up in the forest by this time, we retraced our footsteps.

The lake was ruffled with little waves and a drift of white birds lay like sunlit surf across the water. We succeeded in shooting a black spur-wing goose on the way back; it was a very large bird and tamer than the brown-and-white Egyptian variety.

In our absence an Mbulu boy arrived and offered his services in exchange for meat. He was immediately adopted with joy and thanks-