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One Happy Hunter

by

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SAFARI PRESS, Inc.

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He was in no hurry but drifting closer to us. He walked around a bush and exposed his whole body. I whispered, "Charles, move over a bit for a clear shot and get him right behind the shoulder." The bullet pushed the kudu over, and Charles had his second trophy.

After Anne's boisterous chair ride, she elected to sit in the mess tent rather than near the fire. Charles fixed three small drinks and toasted Anne solemnly. He fixed a second round of drinks and passed me two glasses of scotch. "George, the first glass is for giving us that extra hour of sleep after lunch! The second is to let you know we think you really are an extremely fine fellow."

"Thank you! Cheers!" We drank in companionable silence for a while, and then I said, "I know what game licenses you both have as well as what you both want to get. The big stuff first. Anne, you have one more buff and an elephant. Charles, you have just a rhino left. If you wish, I can get you extra licenses, via radio, maybe for the cats. I do not recommend lion for this area. There are very few here, but a leopard, or perhaps two, would not be difficult."

"No," stated Anne emphatically. "I love those animals so much that I could not bring myself to destroy one."

"Charles, what about you?" I asked.

"No. No more specials. If we are lucky enough to bag an oryx or two, that is the end. Anne definitely doesn't want a rhino. The only reason she wants two buffalo is that she intends to give one to her sister as a surprise. The others, like zebra, impala, and Grant's gazelle, we won't shoot. The fact is, our home cannot take another thing."

During breakfast the next morning, I asked Charles and Anne whether in a pinch they would be prepared to drive the Land Rover.

"That's no problem, but I hope you will give us someone to direct us. Why do you ask?"

"I hope it won't be necessary, but today I want Salim to go with the truck for the rest of Anne's buffalo. The elephant has already been divided up and delivered. Normally, I would have the truck follow us, but we are short of water. When we leave camp, the truck must first fetch a couple of drums of water, deliver it here to camp, and then go out again for the buffalo. Before the end of this safari, we will have left tracks all over the place."

After our first stop, which was purely routine to spot around, I asked Charles to drive for a couple of miles, then stop and let Anne have a short turn. They were both experienced drivers. I had no hesitation to let either of them use the Land Rover if necessary. Finally, we reached the remains

Wait-a-Bit



Rhino can whistle a peculiar sound, rather like a human practicing a whistle but far more loudly.

of the buffalo. Three bloated hyenas were standing beside the carcass. I chased them off with the Land Rover. They were so full they could hardly move. The bush they had removed was quickly replaced, and so were the two beer cans they had pushed over. The buffalo was safe from vultures until the truck arrived.

We were trying to drive to the large water hole that Malele had spotted from the tree he had climbed, but the ground was very stony and uneven. It was getting very difficult to drive. I was concerned about the Land Rover, which could easily get hooked up on some of the larger boulders we had to drive over. Finally, I climbed onto the roof and had a good look around. It appeared that to the left about forty-five degrees, the ground was less cluttered with stones, but then there was a lot of wait-a-bit thorn there. Some of the patches were a solid mass, a good acre or so in extent. We pressed on slowly. The whole area looked totally uninviting. Not far ahead, a few mimosa trees dotted the bush. Things might get better. We entered a small open area and there to my joy was a large male rhino. We stopped; thoughts of reversing

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Rhino . . . Alan's estimate was closer than mine . . . 25 inches and the thickest base I have yet seen.

vanished than about twenty elephant appeared, of all sizes and sexes. One bull carried at least sixty-five pounds of ivory on each side. They walked fairly close, maybe fifty yards off. I had to marvel at the absence of noise, even when they walked through thick clumps of bush. Finally, the dense bush hid the elephant too. Glancing at my watch, I was surprised to find that it was two o'clock. We walked to the Land Rover, now in the shade, and had a hearty lunch. "It is unusual to find elephant roaming around in the hot sun, but I suppose they were heading for some deeper shade that only they know about. Alan, let's go back to our hideout. If our rhino has not shown by four o'clock, we can go back to the big plain."

"Fine, but I am just beginning to get attached to this spot."

We settled down and continued with our glassing. I felt as though I knew every bush in the area. Soon, I would be giving them individual names. Taking a long, casual swing with the glasses, I stopped near the spot where the elephant had appeared. I tensed; there, mainly concealed

Early Safari

by bush, was a rhino. Realizing there was no threatening danger, he started a slow walk toward us. If he continued on his present course, he would walk past broadside, at about forty-five to fifty yards. Alerting Alan, I merely said, "Get ready. Can you see him?"

"It's hard not to," smiled Alan. "His horn looks thirty inches long."

"Maybe twenty, more like nineteen. Regardless, he's yours, and he's within our size bracket. Thank goodness, we are all well concealed." His advance was monotonously steady. Now he was within shooting range, but he would come closer. Unless evil spirits upset him, he would walk past at thirty yards. I whispered to Alan, "When you are ready, take him. Don't wait for the tail shot."

The nasty bellow of a heavy rifle drowned the silence. The rhino rushed forward. Alan, now in the open, gave him the tail-end shot, which put the rhino off-balance. He swerved sharply, crashed into a very thick bush, and stopped with only his rump visible. Apparently to save time, Alan snatched the .375 from a gunbearer and fired two shots rapidly into the animal's back.

"Shall I shoot again?" Alan asked in a rush.

"No. It's all over," said I.

Then a strange thing happened. With a loud crash, the bush gave way, and the rhino fell on his side. A good five minutes of laughter, handshakes, and mutual thanks ensued. Alan asked, "How are we going to handle this baby?"

"The easy way. We are off to camp. I will send all but two men back here with the truck. I intend to relax."

"Lake Magadi, here we come. . . ."