HUNTER

by J. A. HUNTER

with an Introductory Note by
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The Great Makueni Rhino Hunt

I devote this chapter to one hunt which will doubtless rank as the greatest big game hunt that was ever undertaken by me—or for that matter anyone else.

The work involved was carried out at the urgent request of the Wakamba tribe to the Machakos District Commissioner, George Brown. Its principal object was to make extra land available for settlement. Under British protection the population of the Wakamba tribe had increased at least sixfold, and even in the settled areas, rhinos had simultaneously increased to an alarming extent, so much so that the rhinos disputed the natives' existing huts and crops. Natives were afraid to wander out after nightfall. The rhinos had become a genuine menace.

Had Wakamba bowmen been let loose with arrows, the place would have been a living hell—complete with numbers of wounded rhinos at large.

The thorn bush where the rhinos had refuge was of the densest and contact extremely difficult. Hunting them successfully in the inhospitable undergrowth became a game of cunning. I learned many tips from the rhinos. Ear work, I mean listening, was even more important than footwork. A silent approach was necessary to make the grand finale possible. Many times I was sorely taxed; the wind and the birds (feathered spies) communicated my presence; the results were frequently disappointing. Fortunately the rhinos,

like myself, seemed at times to get properly confused. A method was born within me by sheer luck. I used to get as close to a beast as circumstances would permit, then sway my shoulders from side to side without moving stance. Believe it or not, the rhinos, aware of my presence, would not stand for this, but would come for me boldly, charging at their best speed, and in this way played into my shot. This was indeed exciting work.

It was Captain Ritchie who sent me on this undertaking, but before doing so he had thought long and hard. An ardent naturalist, Captain Ritchie has done more than anyone else to conserve African game. But there was the added problem of tsetse fly control. There are two types of these flies in the Machakos district . . . pawlipides and longipennis. These insects are about the size of a large horsefly and their bite feels like the sudden stab of a red-hot needle. Fortunately, these flies were not infected with the deadly sleeping sickness that is so fatal to man. But they did transmit a virus that killed domestic animals, especially cattle. The wild game in the district was immune to their poison but even today scientists have still to discover a practical serum that will protect cattle from them.

So far, scientists know of only one way of eliminating the insects. Tsetse fly live in bush and when the bush is destroyed, the flies are deprived of a breeding place. But to destroy the bush, you must first destroy the rhino. Labor gangs cannot work in bush where there are rhino. For seven years, Captain Ritchie had tried every device possible to avoid a wholesale wiping out of the rhino near the native area. The Makueni area of the Machakos district is the greatest rhino country in Africa so this would be the biggest rhino hunt in history.

Although I had often guided clients who shot rhino and had done considerable rhino hunting myself, I realized that this would be a very different state of affairs. I cannot too greatly emphasize the vast difference between trophy hunting and having to go into bush after animals. Trophy hunting is virtually always conducted in semi-open land where you can see the animals from a distance and select a good specimen. If the animal turns and bolts back into cover, you

let him go. No sportsman wants to hunt in brush for he will almost surely end up by having to kill beasts in self-defense and thus obtain poor trophies.

I had three native scouts to act as trackers—men who had spent most of their lives in jail for poaching. One of them was in his early forties. It took me only a few minutes to become convinced that he was an expert bushcraftsman and thoroughly understood the business of tracking down game. The second man was somewhat younger and particularly proud of his ability as a tree climber—a very valuable asset in bush country where it is often necessary to send a man up a tall tree to locate game. "It makes no difference to me whether a tree is thick with thorns or as smooth as a reed, bwana," this man proudly assured me. "I can climb it as easily as you can walk down a road. Baboons watch me with envy." The third man was little more than a boy, but very keen. Although he obviously did not have as much experience as the other two, I suspected that he would be more amenable to instruction.

All three men had volunteered for this hunt, even though they fully appreciated the danger. By native standards, they would be well paid, but money was not the inducement. For the first time in their lives, they would be trained to shoot and would assist me when necessary. I could see their eyes shine and happy smiles break across their dark faces whenever they mentioned this miracle. Like me, these men had devoted their lives to hunting. Home, family, financial rewards, and personal safety were all secondary considerations. To them, nothing life had to offer could equal the excitement of tracking some great animal through the bush.

As time went on I felt my heart sink as I listened to these boys talk eagerly of what they would do with their guns. They were intelligent men. I had no doubt that the two older scouts were greatly my superiors in bushcraft. But it is almost impossible for a native to learn how to use a rifle except after long months of painful experience. In the back of the native mind is always a belief that the wonderful loud noise of a rifle kills the quarry rather than the bullet. To them, a rifle is such a marvelous piece of equipment

that they cannot believe this glorious object has to be guided before it can kill. These men were expert with bow and arrow, but I can only say that the fundamental psychological approach to the piece of machinery that we call a gun is completely different from the mental attitude of an archer. A native archer uses his bow as a musician uses his violin, shooting by the "feel" of the instrument. Handling a gun requires a different type of mind.

There was a road from Nairobi to Makueni so we made the first part of our trip by lorry. Arriving there, we left the lorry and started off into the bush.

The East African bush is unique. I have never seen anything like it in Scotland and I doubt if similar country occurs in any other part of the world. The bush is neither forest nor open plains. There are few tall trees. The growth is mainly low thorn trees, growing ten or fifteen feet high. Sometimes these thorn trees, or "thorn bushes" they might well be called, grow in great clumps of an acre or more in extent. More often they are scattered about and a man can walk easily between them. The soil is mixed sand and reddish earth. Generally this soil takes impressions easily and makes tracking fairly simple. But there are many patches of tough elephant grass where tracks do not show. In some places, the grass grows in tufts, leaving open stretches of sandy soil between. But often the hunter comes on stretches of bush where the grass grows knee high, making a heavy carpet under the thorn trees. Here a tracker is really put to it to follow a spoor.

In some districts, there is a special type of soil which, when exposed to the full force of the sun, becomes almost as hard as brick; an animal walking over it leaves almost no impression whatever. In fact, this type of soil is used in Kenya to make highways and it stands up nearly as well as bitumen. However, even this soil remains soft under the shade of the thorn bushes and it is here that an experienced tracker looks for spoor.

The district commissioner in Machakos had been receiving many complaints about raiding rhinos from a small Wakamba village in

the bush, presided over by a chief named Mutuku. This was the place we headed for first.

The Wakamba are a very different people from the Masai although the edges of their territories touch. In height, they are somewhat shorter than the average European whereas the Masai are considerably taller. Although the Wakamba do not have the pronounced negroid features of some tribes, neither do they have the thin lips and nostrils of the Masai. Instead of being a nation of warriors, they are a nation of hunters. Traditionally, the men did the hunting while the women attended to the shambas. I noticed several of the men carrying bows with quivers of poisoned arrows slung over their shoulders. Being much interested in weapons of all sorts, I asked to examine these deadly instruments and several were promptly offered me.

The bows were beautifully finished and came to sharp points at the ends. I should judge that they pulled about seventy-five pounds. They are made from a tree called the mutuba and are a dark mahogany color. I was interested to see that there were no notches to hold the bow string. Instead, the Wakamba wrap strips of rawhide around the bow to keep the string from slipping.

The arrows were excellent, the most ingenious part being the special construction of the head. The head had a stem about as thick as a knitting needle and some six inches long. An inch or so of this stem was inserted in the hollow end of the reed shaft and held in place with tree gum. The poison was smeared on the remaining five inches of stem. No poison was put on the head itself—not enough could be put there to do any damage unless the archer was after comparatively small game. Because the poison, though terribly efficient when fresh, rapidly deteriorates if wet or if exposed to sunlight, the Wakamba carefully wrap the poison stems with bandages made of soft antelope hide. These bandages are left in place until the last possible moment.

My scouts and I spent several days with Chief Mutuku before starting out on the rhino hunt. I spent the time teaching my scouts how to assemble a rifle and learning something of the Wakamba

language and customs. I liked the Wakamba. They are a frank, honest people. The women work hard. In addition to their labor in the shambas, they also cook the meals and carry the wood for the fires. It is amazing what loads these women can carry. As soon as a baby girl can toddle, she goes with her mother into the bush to collect wood. On the way home, the mother solemnly ties a few twigs on the child's back as her portion of the load. As the child grows older, the amount of the load is increased until she is carrying a pile of wood weighing well over 150 pounds.

In spite of their low standard of living, I never saw a trace of the "oldest profession" among the women—except, of course, when they become corrupted by civilization. When a young girl reaches puberty, her suitor pays an agreed-on marriage portion for her. To the girls, the payment of this portion serves the same purpose as does the marriage ceremony with us—it is the only "Open sesame" which can command her surrender. She then goes to live with her husband and works hard to raise enough money so he can afford a second wife to help her with the housework.

Now that Kirakangano was no longer with me, I needed a man to act as my major domo—to run my camp and attend to the innumerable small details necessary on a safari. My scouts would be out in the bush with me after game and also I doubted if any of them had the qualities needed for a first-class head boy. But I was fortunate in finding a Wakamba hunter named Mulumbe who was an older man and absolutely reliable. Mulumbe and I got along so well together that he is still with me, handling my domestic staff and acting as my personal gunbearer when I go hunting.

One night I was awakened by the sound of the village dogs barking furiously. I did not connect the sound with the presence of rhinos. Dogs are cowed by the odor of lions and I had supposed that the scent of rhinos would affect them in the same way. Later, I found that rhino scent merely infuriates dogs. When dawn came, Chief Mutuku told me that the rhinos had been at the shambas. He was right. The huge tracks of the beasts were everywhere. My scouts and I instantly set about trailing them into the bush.

At first the bush was quite respectable, but it soon turned into a tangled growth of thorn and saplings. Fortunately, it was the dry season and there was almost no foliage. The few leaves remaining were dry and yellow, a sharp contrast to the rhinos' grayish hides. As we pressed on, the only game we saw was the little dik-dik antelope that compares in size with a Scottish hare. The little animals bolted out of the scrub like rabbits, always making one's heart give a leap at the sudden noise.

We hit a patch of almost impenetrable thorny scrub. The only way through the stuff was to follow the twisting rhino trails. I sincerely hoped we would not suddenly meet a rhino on one of these narrow paths. The trails restricted our movements so we could not get upwind of the animals. A feeding rhino generally moves upwind and knowing this, a hunter can often come in at an angle and take him by surprise. Here we could do nothing but hope for the best.

I give those ex-poachers of mine full marks as expert trackers. Several times my eyes became dizzy with strain as I tried to follow the faint footprints of the rhinos on hard or stony ground, only to find that my scouts were following the spoor as though it were a well-marked road. One scout would go ahead, following the spoor while I covered him with my rifle. When he grew tired of tracking, he would fall back and another scout would take his place. Thus they avoid undue eyestrain.

Suddenly the scout who was tracking stopped and held up his head in the act of listening. For a few seconds I could hear nothing. Then I caught the faint crunching of the rhino's molars as he chewed some twigs. He was grazing in the bush on our left. We moved forward as quietly as possible. One of the scouts constantly tested the wind by picking up bits of hard soil between his fingers and crumbling it into a fine powder that drifted with the slightest breeze. Although the wind is of vital importance, I was particularly careful to make no unnecessary noise. I believe a rhino has the most acute hearing of any big game and can pick up the sound of a human tread at an astonishing distance. I was wearing American moccasins which I have found excellent for stalking. If you step on a twig with these shoes, you can feel it beginning to break and can stop yourself in time. My barefooted scouts moved even more quietly. They had the additional advantage of being naked except for a wisp of gun-cleaning cloth around their middles and the scrub made no sound rubbing against their bare skins. But how they stood the torture of the wait-a-bit thorns that left whitish scratches on their bare bodies I cannot imagine.

We stopped continually to listen to the sound of the rhino's chewing. As long as that noise continued, the rhino did not suspect our presence. Suddenly the sound stopped. Then one of my scouts pointed ahead. I could see the rhino standing motionless in the bush, his head raised and his ears twitching back and forth as they strove to pick up the slight sound that had disturbed him. A rhino's ears work independently of each other; he can incline one ear forward and at the same time twist the other one backward to pick up sounds from both front and rear.

I stood waiting for the animal to move into position for a shot. My scouts began to grow restless as natives often do when the quarry is in sight and there is still no shooting. There were several tick birds riding on the rhino's back and keeping their usual sharp lookout. Rhinos have poor eyesight, but these amazing little birds serve as eyes for them. The birds live on the ticks that get under the rhinos' great folds of skin and, to preserve their patron, act as sentinels for him. When my scouts began to fidget about, the birds spotted them. Promptly the little creatures took wing, uttering their warning *chur-chur* call, and flew toward us. The rhino was instantly on the alert. He swung around to face the direction of the birds' flight, both his ears flipping forward to catch the slightest sound. Then he began to trot past us, holding his tail straight up in the air. He had hardly gone ten yards when he sighted our motionless figures. He walked slowly toward us, resembling a great, horned tank with a brain in the engine. It is hard to know what goes on in an animal's mind at such moments. I believe a rhino might be compared to an irritable, shortsighted old colonel who suddenly finds a trespasser in his garden. His first impulse is to drive the stranger

away. Then he realizes that the man may be dangerous so he hesitates. If he can do so with honor, he may withdraw. But if his stomach is bothering him or he is naturally cross-grained, he may decide to cause trouble.

The scouts were twitching with excitement. Their slight movements were enough to provoke a charge. Down went the old fellow's head and he plunged through the bush for us. At my shot, he went down on his knees. In a moment he was up again, and swung away from us. My second shot hit him in the shoulder and he went down for good.

The sound of my shots had scarcely died away when we could hear the sound of exultant shouting from our rear. Soon a long procession of scantily clad natives came winding along the game trail through the bush. They were carrying every conceivable kind of container, from woven straw baskets to fiber bags slung over their bare shoulders. All of them had some kind of home-made knives clutched in their hands. Partly because of the depredations made by the rhinos on their shambas, these natives were in a condition close to starvation. They swarmed around the rhino like ants and I had difficulty holding them off while the animal was skinned. Once that job was done the carcass was completely hidden by a squirming mass of black bodies. Knives were rising and falling in such numbers that I am sure the desperate people must have often seriously slashed each other. In the excitement, no one seemed to care. Brown-plumaged kites dipped and dived over the crowd, occasionally even grabbing a piece of meat from a native's hand and flying off with it. The birds moved so rapidly that the native frequently did not know what had happened and would stand staring at his empty hand, wondering where his meat had gone.

I had reserved the horns and hide for the government. Rhino hide is worth tenpence a pound and can be used to make table tops, kiboko whips, and chair seats. When well oiled, it takes on a soft, deep amber color that is most handsome. The horns are worth thirty shillings a pound or more—ten shillings more than the finest grade of ivory. These horns are sold for a curious purpose. Orientals

consider them a powerful aphrodisiac and there is an unlimited demand for them in India and Arabia. No doubt any man who has a harem of thirty or more beautiful women occasionally feels the need for a little artificial stimulant.

Except for this one purpose, rhino horn is worthless. It is not true horn at all but simply solidified hair and cannot be carved like ivory for it crumbles under the knife.

When we returned to camp, I tried some of the horn myself to test its powers. I closely followed a recipe given me by an Indian trader: take about one square inch of rhino horn, file it into a powder form, put it into a muslin bag like a tea bag, and boil it in a cup of water until the water turns dark brown. I took several doses of the concoction but regret to report I felt no effects. Possibly I lacked faith. It is also possible that a man in the bush, surrounded by nothing but rhinos and native scouts, does not receive the proper inspiration to make the dose effective.

I shot twelve rhinos in this section, none of them presenting any serious difficulty. Then I was joined by Mr. Beverly, of the Agriculture Department, who arrived with a large gang of laborers to begin the work of clearing out the bush. Mr. Beverly and I had a long conference during which we mapped out our campaign.

"Before I can send my boys into the bush, I must be sure that all the rhino in the district ahead of them have been cleared out," Mr. Beverly explained to me. "If one or two men get gored, the rest will refuse to work—and you can hardly blame them. My idea is for you and your scouts to keep constantly ahead of us. When you send me word that a district is clear, we'll move forward into it."

This was a sound idea, although it meant that my scouts and I would be constantly in the densest cover and must be sure of getting every rhino. But that was what we were being paid for.

The next day my boys and I started out. As we vanished into the bush, I could hear behind us the sound of Mr. Beverly's gang as they attacked the bush around the native shambas with their pangas.

The country we were in soon changed from level flats to low foothills cut up by narrow valleys. In such places wind is a constant

problem, first blowing steadily in one direction and then, as you go over a ridge, shifting to quite another angle due to down drafts and cross currents. Hunting under such conditions is a constant series of disappointments, for after an elaborate stalk, you suddenly find the breeze blowing from you to the animal. It might have been my imagination, but it seemed to me as though the ground in this section magnified every footfall. Much of the district is volcanic, and the hard, porous substance gave off a hollow "bonk" at every step as though we were walking over the roof of a great cave.

The first day in this country, the youngest of my scouts was nearly killed. The boy had learned the rudiments of handling a rifle and was eager to try out his new-found skill. He spotted a rhino sidling along a belt of bush and promptly headed for him. The rhino disappeared in the bush and the scout followed through a partly opened gap in the undergrowth made by the animal's passing. The wind was in the scout's favor, but the rhino must have heard his footsteps on the hard earth. Suddenly he spun around and charged.

The boy had enough presence of mind mind to leap into the air with his legs apart. This quick action saved him from being rammed in the crotch by the rhino's horns as the beast rushed under him. Rhinos have two horns, one behind the other. The boy cleared the first horn but touched the second. Immediately the rhino jabbed upward. The scout went up in the air, his unfired rifle whizzing off in another direction. When he hit the ground, he lay there half stunned. I rushed over to him, thinking he was dead, but except for some bruises and losing a certain amount of skin from between his legs, he was unhurt.

When I lifted him up, the boy said apologetically, "Bwana, I did not have time to shoot. That rhino came as fast as a train. He seemed to fill all space and was on me before I could even think of getting my rifle up."

I knew well how the youngster felt. In spite of their great bulk, rhinos can put up a surprising burst of speed. They can turn within their own length, even when going at full run, and their ability to wheel and twist would do credit to the best of polo ponies. They

have an utter disregard for bush and can crash through the densest thorn tangles as though it were so much greenery.

Every animal in the bush gives way to a rhino. I have twice seen elephants decline an encounter with one of these bad-tempered beasts. In both cases the two animals were coming toward each other on a narrow trail. Both seemed aware of the other's presence at about the same instant. The rhino stood his ground and waited imperturbably while the elephant, after nervously scenting the air, left the trail and made a careful detour around the rhino.

I have no idea why these animals are so ill-natured although a client of mine once had an interesting theory. This man had an unfortunate brush with an infuriated cow rhino and, as the beast attacked him without any provocation, the man considered her conduct most unreasonable. Afterward I noticed him carefully examining all the rhino droppings we passed. At last he said solemnly to me, "Hunter, do you know why these beasts are so irritable? It's because they are always constipated." I never forgot this remark and indeed there may be something to it as rhinos swallow their food partly chewed, leaving large quantities of undigested matter in their droppings.

I found it impossible to move steadily through the bush with my scouts, systematically killing all rhino that might prove a menace to Mr. Beverly and his labor gangs. I was constantly receiving so many distress calls from different native villages where the inhabitants were being menaced by a particularly aggressive rhino that it would have been inhuman to ignore them. By good fortune, the progress of the labor gangs was necessarily slow, leaving me time to handle emergency calls. Yet even so I was forced to work out a system of "priority" and "top priority." Chief Mutuku had called me in several times to shoot rhino that were destroying his shambas. Some of the other native chiefs grew impatient, feeling that I was spending too much time in Mutuku's district. A chief named Machoka came to me with his retinue and implored my aid in killing a particularly vicious rhino that was attacking his people. I told the man in some irritation that I could not be everywhere at once and that as

soon as I had finished with Mutuku's district, I would come to him. The chief left me very crestfallen, although he had my promise to come to his district within the next two days.

Later that same afternoon, I was astonished to see Machoka hurrying back to my camp with his followers. He had returned to his village and found that in his absence the rhino had killed a woman who was gathering firewood. The natives were saving the dead body to show me.

I need hardly say what my emotions were on receiving this terrible information. Under the circumstances, of course, Chief Machoka's plea promptly received "top priority." I told Chief Mutuku that his rhinos would have to wait and left at once with Machoka and his men.

We found the woman lying on the pebbly slope of a ridge with bits of firewood she had been gathering scattered around her. A well-worn path, patted smooth by generations of naked feet, ran down the slope. The woman had obviously been walking down this path when she met the rhino coming up. The rhino must have charged on sight, killing her on the first pass.

From the spoor, I saw the animal was a female. A few seconds later, I found the track of a calf beside her. The presence of the baby undoubtedly accounted for the mother's unusual ferocity. No one likes to kill a female animal with young and I went about the business with considerable distaste.

A professional trapper named Mr. Sauvage had asked if he could send two of his native boys with me in case we happened to obtain any baby rhino, as these little animals are in great demand by zoos. I now told these boys to be on the alert. Then with two of my scouts, I prepared to start off on the spoor of the cow.

From the ridge where the woman had been killed, we could look out over a great valley completely covered with high scrub. Into this valley the cow and her calf had vanished. From our elevation, the cover did not look particularly dense. Scores of the local natives had been rapidly collecting to witness the death of the animal that had killed the unfortunate woman and also, incidentally, to get

some fresh rhino meat. These locals spread out along the ridge for hundreds of yards in each direction and, squatting down on their haunches, kept a careful lookout for some sign of the cow moving through the scrub below us. This was a better way of locating her than trying to track her through the bush, so I sat down with my scouts to wait.

Half an hour passed. Then an excited cry went up. Several fingers were pointing to a spot far out in the valley. For a few minutes I could see nothing. Then I caught a glimpse of a slate-colored object that might easily have been a slab of granite except that it gradually appeared and disappeared as the animal slowly drifted through the cover.

In a straight line the cow was not more than half a mile away. The wind was in our favor and I felt confident of coming up with her very quickly. Taking one scout with me and telling the other to remain on the ridge and keep his eye on the cow's movements I started down into the valley.

I soon found that our hilltop view of the valley had been cruelly deceptive and the bush was far worse than I had realized. Within a few yards we lost all sight of the ridge we had just left. We had covered about half the distance to the place where the rhino had been sighted when we came on the cow's lie-up place. The signs were unmistakable—the large footprints of the cow and the small ones of her calf. Rhinos have a special bed, usually located in the shadiest part of the bush, where they go to rest during the heat of the day. As it was nearly noon, I knew the animal would soon wander over to her lie-up. I decided to wait.

We had been waiting about half an hour when the scout pointed a finger in front of him and then bent the finger my way. He had heard the cow and she was headed our way. Several minutes went by before I saw the cow coming toward us with the calf trotting after her. I could see the native woman's dried blood still on the rhino's horn as the two animals moved toward their lie-up. Then the cow stopped for a moment and the baby ambled up and began nursing. The wind was steady but somehow the mother sensed our

presence and became fidgety. She turned around with the baby still sucking and stood studying us with her little pig eyes. We could hear the natives' voices on the ridge and I knew the sound made her nervous. She was prepared either to charge or bolt. It was hard but it had to be. I shot her. She slumped heavily to earth without effort or pain and the youngster remained beside her. At the sound of the shot, I heard the native voices stop for a moment and then change to an excited babble as the crowd ran down the hill slope toward the brush to see the dead animal.

When the baby rhino heard the mob coming, he started butting his dead mother to make her get up. When he found that was useless, he bravely turned to face the natives. There is no doubt that a baby rhino has pluck. When the crowd began to form around the dead cow, the baby charged the natives time and again, evidently thinking that he was defending his mother. He was not much bigger than a large domestic pig; his front horn was just budding and there was a well defined circle behind it that showed where his second horn would some day grow. Although he could not hurt them, the natives ran from his attacks like rabbits. My scout and I tried to catch the youngster but he was hard to handle. I was beginning to fear we could not secure him without hurting him when the two native trappers came up.

Their method of catching the calf was efficient but pathetic. One man crawled along the dead cow's back and, reaching over her body, took hold of her teat and waved it enticingly. The baby, tired and hungry, could not resist the familiar organ that had long meant food and comfort to him. He came in to suckle. The native deftly grabbed him by the left ear and the other trapper sprang in and seized him by the right. The baby squealed like a young pig but was soon tied up.

We transported him back to camp by making a sling out of gunny sacks and carrying him between two long poles. Six natives were needed to support his weight. In camp, we tethered the baby under a large, shady tree and fed him goat's milk from a bottle. For the first two days he was very aggressive, promptly charging anyone

who came near him. He gave the same threatening sounds as a full-grown rhino—a "pruff"-like noise made by his top lip vibrating while he blew out air. I am happy to say that on the third day he began to grow more gentle. He would suck our hands like a young calf and his buttings were playful, all part of a game like the pretend growls of a puppy. I often fed the little fellow myself and he soon got to know me and the two native trappers. He would follow us everywhere, but if strange natives came near him, down would go his little head to a tilting angle and with a series of angry "pruffs" he would charge like a good one.

We had been in the bush several weeks now and had shot seventy-five rhino. I decided to take the skins and horns back to Machakos. My trophies were carried by a long line of scantily clad girls to a spot where they could be picked up by lorry. The afternoon was hot but the girls did not mind. Each carried a horn in either hand, and as they trotted through the brush in single file, each girl would prod the bare behind of the damsel in front, perfectly imitating the snorting and puffing noises of an angry rhino as she did so. So we advanced to the accompaniment of peals of laughter while beads of sweat ran off their dark bodies. When we stopped for lunch by the banks of an arid sand stream, I heard fresh outbursts of titters and giggles. I peered over the bank and found the girls had discovered a new game. One girl would lie on her back while another grabbed her by the bare legs and towed her around the sand. A herd of elephants had been digging in the sand for water and mounds of their great droppings were all over the place. The point of the game was to tow a girl over to a pile of these droppings and pelt her with the sunbaked dollops of dung.

I delivered my cargo of hides and horns in Machakos, and was frankly glad to get away from the continual shooting for even a few days, as my old hunting nightmares were recurring and keeping me awake at nights. In those terrible dreams I was always facing the same animals I had shot the day before except that now the animals were winning. I was standing with a jammed gun or had

missed with both barrels and the charging beast was on top of me. I would awake soaked with sweat from such encounters and dread going back to sleep for I knew the same dreams would come again.

My scouts were never bothered by these emotional hangovers. No matter what close shaves they had during the day, the natives could sleep like hibernating animals at night.

My boys had ample opportunity to test their nerve in the next few weeks, for the hunting we had gone through was as nothing compared to the troubles that now beset us. Before I fairly had a chance to unload my trophies, I started getting more desperate messages from the natives. Confident that the white man would protect them, the natives were constantly extending their shambas into fresh areas and were running foul of rhinos. But even allowing for this, the rhinos seemed to have suddenly become uncommonly aggressive and I could see no reason for it.

My scouts and I returned posthaste to the bush. Chief Machoka took me out to the shambas of his village so I could inspect the damage. There was no doubt he was fully justified in his complaints. He said many of his people had been chased by the beasts and it was only due to their remarkable agility that none had been killed.

Although evening was coming on, I set out at once with two of my scouts on the spoor. After a long walk, I was almost ready to give up—crawling through brush in a bent-over position is hard on the back. Then one of the scouts called my attention to gruff squeals that were coming from our right. We followed the sounds. By the side of a water hole were two rhinos in courtship, the first time I had ever witnessed this process.

The two animals stood smelling each other's snouts and emitting gurgling grunts. Apparently the bull was not rapid enough in his love-making to suit the cow. She lost her temper and began to butt his sides savagely. There was nothing playful in these attacks; she was goring her partner severely. The bull did not retaliate although the blows caused him to belch heavily.

I could not imagine the cow's motives, but after a few minutes of this rough treatment, the bull began to show signs of becoming

more passionate. He swung around the cow and prepared to mount her.

While we were watching, one of the natives nudged me. Another animal was coming through the bush. It was a second bull, obviously attracted by the odor of a cow in season. This newcomer pranced clumsily around the couple which had not yet begun to mate, spurting around, charging at nothing, and evidently showing off to the cow how dazzling he was. From time to time he would start off into the bush and then return when he found the cow was not following him. One of the scouts said to me in his own language, "He hopes to cut out the other man and get the woman."

The cow made the first move. She started off toward the bush followed by the first bull—her chosen mate. The rejected bull stood looking after them. I raised my rifle but the scouts vigorously shook their heads. It went against the grain with them to kill the animals at such a time and I sympathized with their rude sense of chivalry, although I knew that it was better to shoot now rather than wait until the cow had a suckling calf running with her.

As so often happens in the bush, the decision was taken out of our hands. The rejected bull either saw or scented us standing there. Instantly he charged. I shot, and at the sound the other two rhino went wild. They tore around in circles, uttering their "pruff-pruff" war cries. Then they saw us and charged.

I had had time to reload my rifle. The cow was coming first, the top of her shoulders covered with frothy slaver. I fired and she fell heavily, raising a cloud of reddish dust. The bull veered off, plunging into the bush.

The unusual ferocity of the rhinos in the district was now explained. The animals had begun to mate and were nervous and aggressive. I found that their mating season ran from September to November. Pairing is wholly influenced by the smell of the cow coming into use. The scent of a cow could be picked up by bulls for miles around. Several of them would collect around her, not fighting with each other as many male animals do, but allowing her to make her selection. The cow would finally choose one bull and

go off with him. The other suitors would accept her decision and depart to look for other cows. A cow would mate with only one bull in a season, and as long as she had need of him, the two animals stayed together.

If the couple becomes separated, the cow will give voice to a mating call to bring her lover back. In my experience, only a cow that has been mated will use this call, although other hunters believe that any cow needing a mate will give the cry. Wakamba poachers are very clever in imitating this sound. They often take up a safe position in a tree with their bows and poisoned arrows, giving the call time after time until a bull rhino is lured into shooting range.

During rutting season, bull rhinos become restless. Instead of feeding slowly through the scrub as they do at other times, they roam about on the search for cows and, being constantly on the alert, their sense of hearing seems far more acute. This greatly added to our troubles.

I had been working hard to train my three scouts how to handle a gun. They still showed a strong tendency to blaze away at any exposed part of a rhino they saw. One day I started off with two of my boys, the youngest scout and the "tree climber." I told them that I expected them to do all the shooting. I would simply go along and watch. For the last time I cautioned them to hold their fire until they were sure of a killing shot.

We went through the bush until we hit some fresh rhino spoor. Then my tree climber mounted a tall acacia and signaled by his piping, birdlike whistles that he had located four rhinos. When he descended, we started out. The two boys went first. One was armed with a double-barreled Jeffery while the other had a magazine rifle. I had warned the boys that in case something went wrong, they were to leave me room to shoot, but they confidently assured me that nothing could go wrong. They were well equipped to handle any situation.

The brush was open and we had little trouble moving quietly. The scouts were listening intently for sounds of rhino feeding,

and knowing that the natives' senses were far more acute than mine, I had no doubt about this part of the hunt. We went forward rapidly and I knew we must soon be up to the feeding animals.

Suddenly some tick birds came from behind, making a wide circle over us and calling. The younger scout made a clicking sound with his tongue as if to say, "Those little devils!" A moment later we heard the distinctive noise of rhinos ahead—those sounds that tingle the blood. Your rifle then feels like a toy. The scouts crept forward and I followed more slowly to give them a chance to show what they could do.

The rhinos were feeding in a patch of bush. For the life of me, I could not tell head from tail. Then one of the animals began to move. I saw he was going to pass by an open spot in the bush about five yards in diameter. The older scout saw it too. He turned over the safety catch on his gun and at the metallic click, both beasts swung toward us. There was a long pause while the tick birds chur-churred around us and the rhinos stood motionless.

Then the rhino began to move again. As he crossed the open space, I saw he was a bull. The scout lifted his rifle and took careful aim. It seemed as though the man would never shoot. The bull gradually passed through the open space until his neck and shoulders were obscured. The scout had waited too long to make a killing shot. Ordinarily, I would now have stopped the boy, but I waited to see what he would do. Suddenly he fired. Instantly the bull spun around and charged. After him came the second animal, his cow. The scout fired his second barrel and missed. Now the younger scout who had been eagerly waiting for his chance, lifted his magazine rifle, took quick aim, and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. The boy pulled again and again. There was no report.

With the charging animals only twenty yards away, the boy broke open his rifle and turned toward me, holding the open breech so I could see that the cartridge had not gone off and it wasn't his fault that the gun had misfired.

In another few seconds both scouts would have been gored.

Fortunately, the older man had enough presence of mind to throw himself face down on the ground, giving me a chance to fire over him. I pulled off two of the snappiest shots of my life, dropping both beasts with a quick left and right shot. The rhinos died with one's head across the other's neck.

When I came to examine the younger scout's rifle I found the cap of the cartridge still undented. He had not fully thrown over the bolt of the rifle when loading. When the boy realized his mistake, he began to cry. He was a brave fellow and a good scout, but too anxious to show me what he could do.

Our hunting was now delayed for several weeks because of the seasonal rains. During this period, we were fortunate enough to find an ideal camping spot. My tent was set up under a grove of branchy fig trees. The grass here was very fresh and green and there was a little stream nearby of clear water, the life line of any camp. Tell-tale feathers on the ground nearby showed that guinea fowl and francolin were not far distant. This was a particularly welcome sight to me for it meant a change of diet. As my food supplies dwindled, I had been discussing our meals with Mulumbe, my head boy, in much the same way the lady of a house would discuss matters with the cook. But the conversation became somewhat monotonous.

Myself: What soup do we have tonight, Mulumbe?

Mulumbe: Rhino soup, bwana.

Myself: What meat?

Mulumbe: Fillet of rhino, bwana.

Myself: What for tomorrow?

Mulumbe: Rhino heart, bwana.

Whatever part I ate, I still had visions of the charging animal that had died in defense of his heritage and this hardly aided digestion.

It was pleasant to lie in my tent and listen to the rain beating on the outside. It reminded me of the times in Scotland when I used to hear the storms from Solway Firth lashing the roof of my father's home.

When the rains stopped I found that they had altered the nature of the country considerably and not for the better. Insect life appeared as if the raindrops themselves had turned into flying ants and mosquitoes. Sausage-shaped beetles buzzed constantly around my lantern at night, falling heavily into the soup. Scorpions, centipedes and big hairy spiders were everywhere, driven out of their holes by the water.

The rains also made hunting more difficult. The scrub awoke into life, sending out green leaves that cut visibility to almost nothing. Great masses of giant stinging nettles sprang up, some of them an inch in diameter. Even elephants avoid these nettles and there are authentic cases of horses dying as a result of having rolled in a bed of the terrible plants. From a hunting point of view, the only advantage to the rains was that they made the ground softer, thus enabling a man to walk more quietly.

As a result of these handicaps, the work went more slowly. We had now killed 137 rhinos. As the animals became fewer, the survivors showed a tendency to be more alert. The local natives were very useful to us, going out to find rhino on their own and then sending runners back to my camp when they had spotted one.

When I felt we had virtually eliminated the rhino in that section, I told Chief Ndeeva, the head of a nearby village, that I was planning to return to Machakos. He was greatly distressed and sent scouting parties throughout the hills and valleys for miles around to find more troublesome rhino.

A day or so before our departure, two natives burst panting into my camp with the news that they had located three rhino a few miles off. They had wisely left another man in a tree near the spot so he could keep track of the animals. I left at once with one of my scouts. We found the lookout still in his tree, and he informed us that the rhinos had moved on into the brush but we could find their spoor by a large cactus he had marked down. The native was right and we picked up the spoor with no trouble.

The thorns were bad. That bugbear of the bush, the wait-a-bit, was ever present, its thorns in pairs like miniature pike bait hooks.

There was also plenty of low acacia with thorns facing back to back, like Stuart tackle. No matter how you tried to avoid them, you were caught from any angle. My scout who was following me had to keep pulling the barbs out of my shirt so I could go on. My ears smarted and burned from the constant jagging. Then we came to some very dense stuff through which ran a narrow rhino trail like a tunnel. We started through this opening bent nearly double.

We crawled along in single file. Then ahead of me I saw two earthy-colored shapes. The shadows cast by the leafy foliage made their outlines a mere jumble of light and shade. Try as I would I could not tell head from stern.

My scout pointed toward our left. He had seen the third rhino. From my position I could not see this animal so I concentrated on the two before us. Just ahead was an open space where we could stand. My scout and I reached it and straightened up with relief. Without taking my eyes off the two rhino, I motioned to the scout to keep an eye on the third animal. At my slight motion, the pair in front of me became suspicious and swung around to face us. They had been mating for I could see the foot dried mud marks of the bull on the back of the cow.

I fired at the cow. She slumped heavily to her knees. The bull tore around in a circle giving me a chance to reload. Then he charged. A bullet from my right barrel hit him above the brisket. He never flinched and came on with head down. Suddenly I heard crashing in the bush on our left. The third rhino was also charging us from that direction.

I did not dare to take my eyes off the oncoming bull. I fired again. The shot hit him fairly below the ear and he went down. At the same moment I heard the third rhino right at my side. He tore past me and I saw my scout hanging on his horns. I reloaded again quickly. From the angle where I was standing it was almost impossible to deliver a killing shot without hitting the boy. I waited a fraction of a second and then fired for the rhino's shoulder. The animal dropped and the boy shot off his head like a rider whose horse has refused at a jump. The boy lay motionless and I could

only think, "My God, I've shot them both." I was positive that my bullet had passed through the scout's body before hitting the rhino. I did not even have the courage to go over and examine the boy but stood there clutching my gun and staring at them.

Then I saw the boy move. I can think of no sight that has ever given me greater joy. I ran over to him, my first move being to examine his body for a bullet hole. There was none. I must have missed him by a fraction of an inch. The horns had not gone through his body. As the rhino lowered his head for the toss, the boy had been able to grab the foremost horn and hold himself clear of it while the animal carried him past me. I consider this one of the narrowest escapes I have seen in my years of hunting.

The next day, my scout was joking and laughing with his friends and seemed to have forgotten the incident completely.

By November, my work was finally finished. The rhinos had been dealt with in the districts that the government wished to have cleared of brush. I had killed 163. Such numbers may indeed appear incredible, but my records are on file with the game department in Nairobi, for the department received all hides and horns. I make no statements that cannot be substantiated by the government files.

My boys and I started back toward Machakos. We could walk freely through the brush now for there was little chance of meeting a rhino. Walking in a single file, we topped a little rise. I stopped in astonishment and I could hear the amazed boys gasping with surprise as they joined me.

Three months before we had crossed the same country that lay before us. Then it had been a maze of thorn bush and acacia, cut by a tangle of narrow rhino trails. Now it lay bare as a polished table. Mr. Beverly's labor gangs had been moving steadily behind us, cutting down the bush and clearing the land. What a short time before had been as wild a bit of Africa as God ever made was now farming country. Not a tree or bush remained. Now that the scrub was gone, I could see the white network of rhino trails criss-crossing over the whole land. Already the grass was beginning to obliterate them. The freakish beasts that had traveled those trails for centuries

were now dead and gone. Here and there on the plain I could see piles of their whitened bones. In other spots were great black rings, showing where the labor gangs had piled the brush into heaps and burnt it.

As though in a trance, my scouts and I walked easily across this open country. It seemed only yesterday that we had crawled along these dim, white trails on our hands and knees beneath a canopy of brush. Now native huts were beginning to appear and we passed women breaking ground for their shambas. Civilization had moved on another few miles into the jungle. In a few generations the rhinos that had killed women gathering brushwood and set the village dogs barking at night would be little more than a legend—a story to tell children around the fire at night as we tell our little ones tales of dragons in the long ago.

This was not my only rhino hunt. As more and more demands were made by the natives for fresh land, I was sent back time and time again. At the time of this writing I have shot over a thousand rhino. Is it worth killing off these strange and marvelous animals just to clear a few more acres for a people that are ever on the increase? I do not know. But I know this. The time will come when there is no more land to be cleared. What will be done then? In the meantime the inevitable clash between men and beasts presents a problem and a headache.

13

Game Ranger—a Variety of Rogues

I most certainly do not wish to give the impression that the game department's main interest was the elimination of marauding animals. Conservation was also of prime importance. Some eighty miles south of the Makueni district lay the Makindu area, which also was so heavily infested with tsetse fly that domestic cattle could not live there. However, in part of this district there was so much lava rock that it was calculated that the cost of uprooting bush among the stones would be prohibitive. This section was set aside as a game reserve, particularly to preserve the rhino.

I was appointed game ranger of this district, a position which I still hold. My duty was to protect the rhinos from poachers, both white and native. I had developed a great affection for these pugnacious beasts while I was hunting them, so I accepted the position gladly. However, several personal complications presented themselves.

If Hilda and I lived in Makindu, we would have to sell our house on the Ngong Road. This in itself was not too great a sacrifice. Now that the children were growing up, the house had become too large for us. Our two girls had married and moved away. One was living in England, and the other was traveling around the world with her husband, who was in the British Army. My eldest boy, Gordon, had also left us. Gordon had once planned to follow me as a professional hunter. He had shown great promise and I was most proud of the