

Rufus the Rhino

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AS TOLD BY
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Introduction by Bernhard Grzimek

Most people believe that rhinos are dangerous animals, savage and cunning. I have never agreed. I have known many rhinos in zoos and have found them no more aggressive or menacing than the cows I played with as a boy. Of course one must treat a cow with a calf, or a full-grown bull, with caution, for these can be most dangerous, but this does not mean that one should be afraid of all cows. In the same way, the fact that a rhino will turn upon the hunter does not mean that all rhinos are naturally vicious.

There are three or four zoos in Europe where the keepers permit visitors' children to ride on the backs of full-grown rhinos, which are perfectly tame. Rhinos in the wild are no more dangerous, provided that they are not hunted or wounded. Of course you can't go up and stroke them ; but you wouldn't do that with a strange dog. But though they are naturally suspicious of Man, as all wild animals are, many would willingly live in friendship

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with Man if they were allowed to do so, and were to come into close and regular contact with him.

This was the case with Rufus. As it happened I was one of the first to see him when he was a baby in Tsavo Park, and one of the first visitors to feed him his bottle. Even in Africa, people were amazed to find such an enormous animal so friendly and so tame. So it is an excellent thing that the people who brought Rufus up should write of their difficulties and successes in rearing and living with him.

This book is bound to help people to forget that they once believed rhinos were savage and untameable. Perhaps now the rhino will be less misunderstood.

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Preface

As a lover of animals, it was a tremendous piece of good fortune to live inside a National Game Park. This wonderful free life in the wild came about when I married. My husband Dennis was an Assistant Warden of the Tsavo National Park in Kenya. The bulk of this great Park lies about seventy miles inland from the Indian Ocean coastline of East Africa, and about 150 miles from the capital city of Nairobi. The area of the great Tsavo Park is some eight thousand square miles and is probably the largest in the world. One long river runs through the centre of the Park and another through almost half the Park. There are, besides, many rivers which are roaring torrents during the rains but as dry as the desert for the rest of the year.

My husband's headquarters were at a place called Voi in the district of the same name, but what's in a name? Voi is nothing and yet it is everything. We were surrounded on two sides by the Native Reserves and on the other by the great Tsavo Park, stretching as it would, from Liverpool to Southampton. The vast Yatta Plateau

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stretched as far as the eye could see in front of our house, and outlined against the sky to the west was the huge bulge of the sinister Wundanyi Rock. The little township of Voi sprawls at the foot of a 1,519 foot hill called Sagala. If there is ever rain, it comes from the direction of that hill, but for most of the year Sagala crouches menacingly over a town as hot and as dry as the dust track which runs through it.

To call Voi a town is flattering since it consists only of a handful of corrugated iron-roofed Indian trading stores. To enter any of these to do the daily shopping is like walking into an oven. There is a corrugated iron and cement affair called the Post Office, surrounded by mangy hens and dust but presided over by an Indian postmaster who has a flashing white smile.

There is a native hospital which smells strongly of disinfectant; outside in the torrid heat rows and rows of patients' relatives squat on wooden benches. The only remaining point of interest is the railway station which has the distinction of being the main junction between Kenya and Tanganyika.

On a rise, and above the dust and heat of the township, there are a few wooden huts on stilts put up originally to house the men who were building the now famous "Man-eaters of Tsavo" line. When the lion in the area got familiar with the presence of humans, a number of them turned man-eater and accounted for the lives of an appal-

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ling number of the workers. One lion actually jumped in through the window of a railway carriage, snatched up a victim in his jaws and tore through the other side taking the window-frame with him. These shacks now house the tiny European population, which consists of a Police Officer, a Water Engineer and sundry railway officials, in all not numbering more than a good picnic party.

The isolation is too much for some of their wives, and those with young children, constantly threatened with malaria and numerous other tropical ailments, find a posting to Voi something akin to a death sentence. Even some of the men, if they were ever willing to admit such a thing, would agree that it is a tough station.

Except for a very occasional film show at the Park Inn, there was little or no entertainment in Voi. I amused myself by making a terraced garden in front of our small house, by doing a certain amount of dressmaking, and by knitting garments for the baby I was then expecting. The house is hugged into the side of the hill called Mzinga which rises up immediately behind us and is topped by tremendous cliff-like rocks. These are punctuated by round black-mouthed caves where leopards lurk and where the baboons—their favourite food—are too frightened to sleep except in the tops of the trees on the fringe of the precipitous "cliffs" which are too slippery for the leopards' claws to climb. Beneath the "cliffs" the scrub and undergrowth starts; it is interspersed by tremendous

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rocky outcrops staggered here and there down the hillside like so many giant stone tables. Lower down still and right up to the back of our house, grow the blue-trunked thorn trees with their yellow-paper bark peeling off in square chequered patterns; and staggered in between are the dark-green clumps of the spiked sansevera cactus.

I

Rufus Arrives

The day it all happened started quite uneventfully. Dennis was away until late that afternoon. I first heard it early in the morning. A cross between a small bellow and the plaintive screech of an eagle.

It was almost continuous in its insistence and by the echo from the rocks behind, I could hear it getting nearer and nearer. All day it went on, this little voice crying in the wilderness of the hills. I had long since decided that the noise was nothing like the trumpeting of elephant, the barking of baboon or the grunting of buck which I heard daily, and I could hardly wait for Dennis to return to tell him about it. When he got back, his interest was no less than mine, but routine demanded that we go up to the Park offices first. These are situated in a long low building consisting of an armoury, a garage for all the Park vehicles, and a workshop, at the back of which there are stockades where the two tame elephants sleep out of harm's way at night.

Dennis had just supervised the stabling of this pair and

was checking their fodder when an African appeared peddling madly up the road. Dennis recognised our own cook, Kiaria. He was so breathless and excited that at first it was difficult to make out what he was jabbering about. It turned out that he was trying to convince us that there was, outside his house, a half-grown rhino: little wonder, if it was true, that he had jumped on his bicycle and raced for the nearest help.

We all three tore down the hill while Dennis tried to get a more accurate idea of the size of the beast from the cook, whose outstretched arms indicated anything from a half-grown to a full-grown rhino. Kiaria's house is only twenty yards from ours and I waited with bated breath around a corner while Dennis crept up to a place where he could see through the small hedge, while at the same time keeping it between himself and the possibility of a charging rhino. There was nothing to be seen, and my experience of the Africans' talent for exaggeration was helping to calm my racing heart, when suddenly Dennis pointed to the ground and there it was—a rhino footprint in miniature and leading in the direction of the front-door step. The door was ajar and there again was that unmistakable and haunting cry which I had heard all that day. We tiptoed in, Dennis in front for protection, and there he was, standing beside the cook's bed—a *tiny rhino*.

While Kiaria had bicycled frantically up to the office, the little chap, who was still groggy on his legs, had

managed to climb the foot-high step and must have butted the door open with his head and gone inside. He had even pushed all Kiaria's cooking pots around the room in search of a drink.

We stood and stared at the droll little figure, the cook not less impressed than either of us, for although it is his native country, I doubt if he had ever seen such a young baby rhino in his life and certainly not in his hut and standing by his bed.

His littleness was so appealing, and he was so obviously hungry, that Dennis gathered him up in his muscular arms and carried him just like any baby the short way down to our house. It did not seem necessary for me to suggest that the warm kitchen was the place to take him, but the far bigger problem was obvious to us both and that was what to feed him on?

While I was having a good think, Dennis had fetched a tape measure and on measuring him found that he was only eighteen inches at the shoulder, in fact about the size of a terrier. We guessed that he only weighed about fifty pounds. I racked my brains and remembered stories I had heard about people trying to rescue baby elephants and finding that even natural cow's milk was too rich, so I diluted one part of milk to two parts of water and poured this into two empty beer bottles.

Having no teats, nor indeed anything faintly resembling one big enough to fit the now urgently seeking mouth of

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the baby rhino, Dennis held his head, to which he didn't in the least object, while I poured very slowly so as not to choke him. Down it all went as if he had done this every day of his life. As soon as he had drunk the lot, the little creature lay down on some sacks that the cook had brought and went off fast asleep.

I stood gazing down at the tiny sleeping form lying so trustingly at my feet. He seemed no more than one day old. What had happened to his mother? Why was he on his own? Where had he come from and how far had he come? I was amazed that this tiny wild thing should have sought out and found not only food and drink but the safety of a human habitation, and in particular, mine.

I left him on his sacks in the kitchen and joined Dennis on the veranda. The excitement in the house was intense and although all the rest of that day we referred to him as the little rhino, he was soon to be known as "Rufus". When evening arrived, we had a consultation about him. As it was by then obvious that our guest had to have warmth to replace the warmth he should be getting from his mother, my kitchen was the ideal place; also it was the only place where he would be safe at night from the interest of lion or leopard, and the only place where I could warm his diluted cow's milk on the fire. From the very first meal I realised that as his chosen foster-mother, I must leave no stone unturned to preserve his health. So

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I conscientiously sterilised every one of his bottles before and after feeding him.

Kiaria insisted, however, that if even a small animal were to walk into a Kikuyu's hut it was a very bad omen, and now that the baby of one of the largest animals on earth had walked into his, Heaven alone knew what awful thing would happen. I dismissed his superstitions with a shrug and poor Kiaria had to get used to sharing our kitchen with a rhino. Rufus was to know no other stable until he was six months old.

The Birth-place

The day after Rufus arrived, Dennis organised a patrol to search the whole area around the hill in order to try and establish some reason for his extraordinary arrival. They set off in the early morning and it was only in the late afternoon that the corporal in charge returned to make his report to Dennis as to what they had found and seen. We were very thankful to hear that they had not found a dead mother rhino snared and torn to pieces by hyenas or wild dogs.

However, the story was so exciting and still such a mystery, that we lost no time in setting off to see for ourselves. The corporal who had made the report went in front, and starting from Kiaria's kitchen door, followed the tiny footprints which Rufus had made on his way down the day before.

In their ordinary wild state, rhino do a lot of climbing, often over very rocky ground. One day when Dennis and I were out for a walk at the back of our hill we had come upon a female and her calf. At that time I had never been

confronted while on foot by a wild animal. In my terror I found myself half-way up the nearest tree with my husband standing underneath before she ambled off with the calf. The tree was covered with thorns but although I was scratched and torn all over, I noticed nothing in my panic, until she had trotted off down the hill. The slender branch I was perched on would have been completely useless if she had decided to charge for the whole tree would have fallen and I would have been gored to death. Little did I guess, as I watched the pair go out of sight, that I would soon have a rhino calf of about the same age in my sitting-room.

In single file we climbed up the lap of the hill, the tracker in the lead, along the narrow bridle-path between the rocks. This was often obliterated by the great spoor of elephant, especially along the base of the huge rocky outcrop towering above us. We wove our way between the grey withered thorns, side-stepping the sharp points of the sansevera cactus, and brushing past the nodding mauve heads of the wild mallow. No one spoke and the only sounds were the occasional calls of the yellow-necked francolin or of the guinea-fowl in the valley far below.

Around every bend in the path we could see the gnawed roots of the *Ademium* whose pumpkin-like roots are such a favourite of the rhino. Our excitement rose when we saw that some of these were newly chewed and I fully expected that we should be charged at any moment. On and on we went, the tracker still following the little foot-

prints in the sand. Now we came upon the usual evidence of destruction by elephant, for some of the trees along the path had been stripped naked of bark. Here and there were what looked exactly like balls of string. These were the chewed-up and spat-out mouthfuls of the sisal-like 'sansevera which appeals to the elephant as chewing-gum to Americans.

The heat and excitement were becoming almost unbearable when suddenly the tracker stopped. He pointed to the ground. Dennis, whose jungle-craft is little less than that of any African tracker, translated the message of the footprints for me. "Up to this point, little Rufus walked alone," he said. Later we measured the distance and found it was over a mile from our house. "But here there are two lots of spoor. You can see the grown rhino ones coming from the opposite direction, together with the tiny ones, and here they separate, the big ones turning back along the way she had come with Rufus, while those of Rufus go on."

What had made her walk all this way with the little fellow, then turn and go back without him? What had made the baby go straight ahead alone instead of following his mother? How had he stumbled along on his groggy little legs a full mile, the prey to any lion, leopard or cheetah? Why, I wondered, had he sought out the comfort and safety of humans?

If there was any answer to the riddle then we should

only find it by continuing along the tracks to the end. As we went on I marvelled at his feat, for the normal female rhino is inseparable from her offspring and feeds it for the first five years.

A lilac-breasted roller flashed past and we all jumped. Out into the blue distance he flew and disappeared into the backdrop of row upon row of purple mountains stretching to the horizon. The two lots of footprints were still together, the mother in front and the baby behind when we rounded the corner of a huge rock. Two trees stood like sentinels on each side of the track as if on guard and here in a trampled-down circle of long grass, we came upon the birth-place of Rufus. The unmistakable signs were there.

The riddle as to why his mother had deserted him remained, and while Dennis and I returned the way we had come the rangers continued their search for the mother. Eventually they spotted a female rhino. From her tired appearance there was little doubt that she was Rufus's mother, who had wandered off in the opposite direction from him and lost him. She was much nearer to the house than any of us had expected, thus proving that during the two days she had not walked far from the birth-place. It was, however, no good being sentimental and wondering if she was looking for her baby, nor whether we should try to reunite them, since the possibility of her deserting Rufus a second time could not be risked.

Crisis

After a few days Rufus got attached to his new home in the warm kitchen but it was quite clear to both of us that he must have a day-time pen outside. After all, poor Kiaria, though now resigned to sharing our kitchen with a rhino baby, was entitled to a little peace in the day. The pen we built gave plenty of shade, but let in some sunshine too.

Kiaria was as delighted as Rufus with the additional stable, for he had to clear up after Rufus who could hardly be expected to be house-trained. Rufus was taking his food regularly and with relish and it was three whole days since he had walked into our lives.

On the fifth day, however, instead of prancing up and down his enclosure whenever it was near his feed time, Rufus just stood still. Normally he would know the time, and would run up and down the length of his pen making that strange little mooing noise which always reminded me of his first day with us, and only stop when the bottle was actually in his mouth.

To-day he didn't even want it.

I put the bottle on the grass to have a closer look at him. I called his name and made silly little encouraging noises and then I saw that his nose was running. Do rhinos get colds? I asked myself. No, but most of these young wild things die in captivity of pneumonia. I got him out of his pen and we slowly and very solemnly walked into the kitchen together.

As I placed his sacks nearer to the stove Dennis rushed down to the town to fetch the local doctor, a clever Indian. Needless to say, with all his medical knowledge, he knew nothing about rhinos, but enough to pronounce "pneumonia". My heart missed a beat. There was nothing to be done, he said, except to try an injection of penicillin. This, I knew, could kill an animal as easily as cure him and who on earth knew how much of the stuff to give a new-born rhino? The seconds passed with dragging feet while the doctor selected the largest needle he had. As he jabbed it into the little backside Rufus let out a shriek. I held him closer. The needle bent and turned like a safety-pin in too many layers of cloth. Even at his age the protective hide was too thick for the needle to pierce it, and I knew there was no other needle. As I struggled for self-control I noticed Dennis going out of the room. He drove up to the office where he knew of another thick needle which had been kept for the tame elephants.

All the time he was away, I hugged Rufus and made encouraging noises. He had known no mother but me and

now he was sick, perhaps dying. Whatever ghastliness was in store for both of us I must not fail him now.

When Dennis returned with the new needle, the performance had to start all over again. By this time, Rufus was shivering all over and in my ignorance I thought it must be with the anticipation of another jab from the doctor who had already refilled the syringe and inserted the new needle. This time Rufus didn't cry out half as loudly; in fact, he now appeared to be completely disinterested, but besides the terrible shivering he was breathing much too deeply. The doctor left saying he would come next day. Dennis carried the poor little chap nearer the stove while I fetched a thick blanket. I looked down at the comic figure in all its helplessness.

He was such a perfect pigmy of a rhino, and his calf-shaped ears already had a tiny fringed trimming of black hair around the edges. His completely out-of-proportion little eyes also had quite a deep fringe of eyelashes but he lay there with them closed. His feet were no bigger than my outspread palm and the middle of his three toenails, the biggest one, was no more than the circumference of a coffee cup: all three were a creamy colour. His mouth was slightly open and I could see the small pointed top lip which acted rather like a tiny trunk and which he would curl around the edge of his bottle. His stumpy fat little legs which supported the barrel body completed the picture.

I fetched a thick blanket and spread it over him. When I went back to the veranda I found a friend of ours waiting there and as I knew him to be very knowledgeable about animals, I was only too glad to pour out all my anxiety over Rufus, thinking he might produce something both helpful and hopeful. Instead, he said, "Let me have a look at him." I led him into the kitchen to find Rufus standing, but trembling all over. He took one look and said, "When they get like that, there's practically no hope." Knowing he had already tried in vain to rear at least two baby rhinos, the awful truth suddenly dawned. Rufus might die.

I decided to spend the night with him in the kitchen. I thought my presence might, in some way, comfort him. He drank very little milk and when I felt him he was icy cold all over except for his tiny barrel-shaped chest. This was boiling hot. The hours dragged by and there was no change in Rufus when the doctor returned next morning to give him another injection of penicillin.

The nightmare continued for another whole night and day and through a third injection. I stayed with Rufus through all his bad relapses for I knew rhinos to be very fretful animals and I felt that in some strange way I could impart to him my will for him to live. In the short time since he had entered our lives I had come to love him and it was unthinkable that we should lose him. As I sat on the floor next to his mound of blankets, he would, as if in

acknowledgment, raise his head now and then and look at me with his sad little eyes.

On the third day after his third injection, there was little I could do except to continue my vigil and pray.

Rufus was at death's door for a whole week and then, quite suddenly, on the seventh day he showed signs of wanting to live. By then I think I was almost as exhausted as he was but there was work to be done; he was now very thin, but once more interested in his bottle, so we decided to change his diet to something richer. Lactogen baby milk was a pure guess on my part, but he never looked back from the day he started on it.

Rufus Recovered

At three weeks old Rufus was quite enchanting, very frisky and a stickler for punctuality, especially as far as his feeding times were concerned. He would stump up and down his outside pen at almost exactly the same time each day and not more than ten minutes or so out by the clock. At six o'clock each evening his sacks would be put down in the kitchen, while he would wait impatiently for them to be arranged. Hardly had the last sack been laid when he would barge his way through the door and flop down on his couch, using the wall as a back rest. It was quite uncanny how good he was about not moving off his sacks, during all the time he inhabited the kitchen. The only time he got off them was almost exactly at eight o'clock each night which was the time for his last feed. He would then move on to the cement floor to stamp his feet up and down like a child, crying all the time until his feed arrived.

Rufus not only had the run of the garden, but of the house as well. It was not long before he decided on a new

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place to snooze during the heat of the day. This was on my veranda and as near to my chair as he could get his bulky little figure. From his kitchen, the shortest cut to this place was through my sitting-room. His entry was quite the nearest to a circus turn that he could produce for our amusement. The floor was so highly polished that his feet would slide out from under him in all directions. It was in vain that I tried to get him to go round by the front garden; as a result, no more polish was applied to our floor.

At two months old Rufus was so attached to me that he ran after me like Mary's little lamb. He followed me literally wherever I went and we had great fun in each other's company. Whenever I sat on the veranda, he would push his way towards me regardless. Chairs or tables which might be in his way went flying and as for the tea table laid for two, this would go crashing like the rest and everything else in his path, while he looked for something else he thought might amuse me.

His favourite moment—apart from feeding hours—was when it was time for his daily brushing, needless to say with my best hairbrush. He had no hair to brush but he enjoyed the sensation of being both tickled and scratched at one and the same time. As soon as he saw the brush he would lie down, roll over and shut his eyes in pure ecstasy. Even when my arm was too tired to go on, he would pretend not to notice that it was over for another



Rufus at two months





Rufus and Dennis

RUFUS RECOVERED

day and remain in this ridiculous pose until I walked away. Then he would reluctantly get up and follow.

Perhaps this was the beginning of his best trick, one which used to amaze his many visitors and admirers. He would lie down immediately I told him to.

Every day, while we were still in bed, Rufus would come in to say "Good morning" to us. We would hear him first, knocking his solid head against the outside of the bedroom door until it obligingly gave way to his pressure. Then he would stump in, advance straight to the end of our bed where he would start rubbing his head up and down until he was patted.

The morning rite over, he would saunter out to his usual snoozing-place and lie down using the step between the two rooms as a pillow. The fact that we had to step over this mound every time we went from the bedroom to the veranda meant nothing to Rufus.

Since he had now taken over the entire household and was completely accustomed to his regular routine, I decided that it would be safe to leave him for a few days while I went on safari to see something of the outside world.

He had had my undivided attention for over three months now and I knew I could trust an African in our employ, called Kulunda, to look after him well. I gave him strict instructions that he was not to leave Rufus night or day and was to sleep next door to him in the adjoining store-room.

Felix

Rufus was overjoyed when we came back from this safari. He greeted us with a long series of affectionate grunts and was much petted in return.

While I was away I had found three baby mongooses and had brought them back with me. I unloaded them and put them and their box on the kitchen table out of the way of our two house cats who were more than a little curious to know what I was doing. The eyes of our new pets, although not yet open, were watering and I knew this was a sign that they would be able to see in a few days. This meant constructing another pen outside so that they could play in the sun. For safety, we built it with covered top and sides, hoping that Gipsy, our Cairn terrier, would not, in a fit of jealousy, dig her way in under the wire.

I was right; within four days their eyes were open. They were enchanting, playing with each other and having games with their Insto bottle, throwing the bottle between their legs in exactly the same way that they break eggs when fully grown. Even at this stage, Dennis was able to identify

them as the pigmy or dwarf mongoose. These, when fully grown, are only about eight to nine inches long with an additional five inches or so of tail. There are, of course, three other species of mongoose, but they are all much bigger. I was glad mine were the miniature kind. They are much more appealing and are a rich burnt umber with brownish slate-coloured tones. As the mongooses were still only the size of a matchbox, it was rather like watching a miniature boxing match to see them standing on their hind legs sparring with each other. The female always won the match. Whenever a hawk swooped or a cat passed, they would all scuttle into the holes we had cut in the box, remaining there until the danger had passed, after which the game would continue.

Our afternoon drives into the great Park were something to which I looked forward. We usually went on a tour of the nearby water-holes where we saw elephant watering, rhino sparring, and the graceful long-necked gerenuk standing on their hind legs to reach some special titbit. There were also a number of different species of antelope, impala, Grant, eland, oryx, kudu and waterbuck. The birds we saw included the vulturine guinea-fowl singing away in some distant tree, where one would catch a glimpse of their bright cobalt-blue necks. Sometimes the iridescent glint of a superb starling with his peacock back would flash into the branches of a thorn, while the plaintive cry of hornbills was almost continuous.

We were sitting in the Land-Rover at one of these water-holes one afternoon, lulled by the haunting call of a purple-necked dove, when Dennis noticed the tell-tale wheel of great black wings over a spot in the bush. We drove nearer and when we were beneath the circle of vultures, Dennis got out to investigate. There were more vultures in a thorn-tree nearby, but no sign of the usual grisly spectacle which attracts them. Just as Dennis was about to return to me, there was a loud grunt from beneath a large bush to our left only about twenty yards distant. Dennis took to his heels and ran like a champion sprinter back to the Land-Rover as a large lioness charged out into the exact spot he had left. From my seat in the stalls, I could not help reminding him of all the lectures he had given me about walking slowly backwards if I ever met a lion face to face! We drove around the big bush and were rewarded by the comic sight of a woolly little lion cub tumbling out of the undergrowth. He was only a few weeks old. He took two steps and then toppled over; then another two steps and rolled in the dust, ending the right way up. As if showing off, he sat on his fat little hind legs and stared at us. Almost immediately there was another blood-curdling snarl and the lioness mother jumped out and nuzzled him back to the safety of the big bush, and towards the raw and bloody remains of their kill which we could now just see under the branches. We drove back, leaving them to their meal.

Besides the usual housekeeping, my days were very busy for now I was feeding one rhino and three mongooses every four hours. Little did I think that the menagerie was so soon to be enlarged. We were having tea on the lawn in front of the house and had been joined as usual by Rufus, whose main object was to get as near to me as possible, pushing the table over in his efforts, Gipsy, who is always in on everything, and the two cats, when we noticed an African walking up the drive carrying something black in his hands. "Oh, dear, here's another pet," said Dennis with emphasis. What was it? It looked more like a tiny black kitten than anything else, but its ears were far too long and its nose far too pointed for it to be even a cross between a wild and a domestic cat. "Certainly cat family," said Dennis, but that was as far as we could get.

We put him into a large teacup while the African told his story. He had been attracted to a bush in the Park by the attention of a large hawk which kept diving down again and again at this bush. When he went over to investigate, the hawk flew off and he saw this tiny black furry object. No mother came to claim it nor was there anything else in sight, so he picked it up rather than let the hawk have it, and then, I suppose, because of our reputation for keeping a small zoo on the premises, he thought our house the most suitable place to bring it to. The egg-box we had used for the mongooses was once more

brought into operation and was just as successful. The Insto bottle, full of diluted milk, was offered with immediate success. He even looked round for more when he had drained the last drop from his first bottle. He was, we guessed, only about two weeks old. We called him Felix.

He slept most of the first day, and we were able to examine him more closely. In a bright light we saw that he had spots all over that were blacker than his black coat. He could be none other than a melanistic serval cat and as such a very rare animal since the usual serval is cream with black spots all over. When they are full grown they measure eighteen inches at the shoulder, but as their main diet in the wild is birds, I was already starting to have doubts as to whether we would ever be able to rear him.

However, when he was still both feeding well and growing bigger after nearly two weeks, I felt that I had been over-pessimistic. After each meal he would get very playful. His favourite game was tapping a matchbox around the floor; when tired of this, he would roll on his back and wait for a screw of paper to be thrown for him to tear to pieces.

My fears, however, were realised all too soon, for one morning Felix was very off colour and had a runny nose. Hoping it was only a cold, I took him down to the local doctor for a penicillin injection, such as Rufus had had. The effects on Felix, however, were nearly fatal, for he immediately threw the most terrifying fit which lasted for

the whole of two anxious hours. The following day he was even worse. His pads started to peel and crack open and became so raw that he was quite unable to walk. Next his fur began to fall out, leaving great bare patches which then turned into angry blisters. His illness was diagnosed as cat distemper and every morning when I went to open his box, I steeled myself to finding my little Felix a small dead furry bundle.

But instead, he would always put his tiny head up in greeting and produce a brave little mew; his will to live his proverbial "nine lives" saw him through.

Although cat distemper is apparently quite common in the wild-cat family, Felix was at death's door for four whole weeks. It was only in the fifth week that he began the long road to recovery; his fur started to grow again and his pads to heal. I was so overjoyed that I put him on to a diet of the best minced beef. I placed little helpings of meat into the palm of my hand and he would suck it up, for he was still much too weak to chew. It was probably because I fed him in this way that he would later let anyone put their hand into his plate or even remove it altogether, something that used to stagger visitors as the wild-cat family are notoriously bad-tempered while feeding.

He surprised us still further by making friends with Gipsy, who was normally jealous of each new arrival and hated cats into the bargain. They would roll on top of each other while Gipsy allowed Felix to pull her fur or tail.

As he was also on the best possible terms with the mongooses and was now about twice his original size, we decided to try him in the same egg-box with them at night. This was an instant success and they would all cuddle up together. Felix even washed them with his tongue. This arrangement lasted until he had grown too big for the egg-box and chose one of the sitting-room chairs as his new sleeping place. Missing their hot-water bottle, the mongooses moved too and slept under his chair. The last thing before we went off to bed, the boxing matches would start, the three mongooses all standing on their hind legs, clasping each other round the chest and trying to pull each other down; it was more like wrestling than boxing. One little male was always odd man out and so as not to be outdone, he would race around biting the tails or legs of the contestants remaining in the ring. Felix would watch this for just so long and then take one flying leap across the room landing in a heap on top of them all.

Horace the Mongoose and Two Orphan Buffalo

Tragedy is never far away in Africa, and, of course, it struck the mongoose who was the odd man out. He was bitten either by a snake, the proverbial enemy of the mongoose, or by some poisonous spider and died almost immediately. I named the remaining male and female, rather obviously, "Punch" and "Judy". They got to know their names quite quickly and would come when called. Dennis's callous remark after the tragedy, "one less to feed," was soon forgotten in joy when a friend brought us yet another mongoose who could only have been two weeks old when abandoned by his mother. Punch and Judy were now so big in comparison, I was afraid that Punch would attack the orphan so I moved him into a box in my bedroom for the first two days, and he was promoted to a doll's feeding bottle instead of the Insto dropper. We named him Horace.

I thought my fears were being realised when one morning

I heard the high-pitched screaming of a mongoose and arrived just in time to see Judy with the little one in her mouth scuttling down the front steps, round the corner of the veranda and trying to get up the drain-pipe, baby as well. This proved too narrow but as I watched, she deliberately pushed Horace in with her nose and then climbed in herself. All you could see was her tail sticking out. Then Punch arrived on the scene and remained outside making excited "tick tick" noises.

I need not have worried, for the grown-up pair were delighted with their new playmate and took it in turns to carry him in their mouths all over the house. They decided that he must share the safe place underneath the sofa with them and it was comic to watch the way one would baby-sit, while the other went out after grubs. These would be brought back and faithfully carried to baby Horace who would take them out of the other's mouth. His foster-parents spoilt him thoroughly and he became more and more cheeky the older he got.

Although still tiny, Horace was determined to find out about the other animals on the premises. Rather like the mouse with the tiger, he decided to start with the smallest, the cats. He began by merely lying down as near as he dared to Tom Thumb, the tabby, but with access to a quick get-away. As nothing untoward happened, he would then stretch out his front legs and wriggle a little closer. This performance was repeated several times until

he succeeded in getting right on top of the cat and snuggling into his fur. Tom Thumb, strangely enough, took not the slightest notice. Horace, however, was not one to rest on his laurels and decided that there was really no reason why the tabby shouldn't wash him as well as himself. He therefore started all over again and arrived at his goal right between Tom Thumb's paws. Finally, after a lot of encouraging "tick tick" noises from Horace, Tom Thumb would oblige and clean him as if he was a favourite kitten.

By this time Horace was so sure of himself that he decided to ride on Tom Thumb. It would be both fun and a lovely lazy way of getting around. His first attempt at jumping on to the cat's back ended with a thump on to the floor. The second attempt was not much better, but the third achieved success. There he sat like a pigmy jockey, clutching Tom Thumb's fur with both front legs while, to our amusement, the cat strolled off with Horace swaying from side to side to the rhythm of his walk. If the cat got tired and dared to sit down, Horace would bite him between the ears to make him get up and finish the course. If Tom Thumb did not immediately oblige, he would jump on to the other cat's back and, indeed, he spent most of his spare time riding one or other of them.

The two foster-parents had discharged their duties as far as they were able, so now since Horace appeared to prefer the company of the cats they would go off hunting

behind the servants' huts and around a clump of rocks which harboured some wild mongooses. They would return punctually at five o'clock for their feed and a game with Horace before retiring under the sofa for the night. Horace, when he saw them coming in from the garden, would start jumping up and down like a child at a circus, or would race around in circles, jumping over the cats like a mad thing until they eventually arrived; then all three would set up a "tick tick" chorus that almost deafened me.

One day Judy brought a wild boy-friend down to the house to show me. This was too much for Horace who told him to go in no uncertain manner, his tail puffed out in anger like a bottle brush. Later the wild friend got his own back, unfortunately not on Horace but on poor Punch who had nothing to do with the affair. He had a nasty bite on the leg.

Judy, the female mongoose, was the gentlest and perhaps the most affectionate, but all three took it for granted that anyone's pocket was especially made for them to climb into. Horace would jump into the gardener's pocket while he was weeding, and, by mutual agreement, stay there for hours, and when I was knitting or just sitting reading, if I had a convenient pocket, however small, in they would jump, jammed tight like sardines. Nothing on earth would induce them to get out unless I enticed them with a piece of raw meat. Perhaps this was the idea anyway.

Rufus accepted them as he accepted anything and

everything connected with me. When he lay down for his daily de-ticking, he would even permit them to lie on his neck and took it as part of his grooming when they got into, and cleaned out, his ears.

Felix was the only one of the menagerie for whom Horace showed the slightest respect. He would torment him unmercifully until Felix lost all patience and caught him between his paws and bit his tail. Then Horace realised that his position was hopeless and would put on his pathetic act by pushing out his tiny paws as if in defence and squeaking as if his last hour had come. At this Felix would, of course, immediately release his grip and Horace would dart off grinning. He really was a complete cad.

Rufus by now was six months old, very fit and as playful as a kitten. It was obvious to both of us that what he really needed was another rhino baby to play with and for company. We were, at the time, hopeful of finding such a playmate since Kenya was in the middle of the worst drought in its history. The mother rhino were dying everywhere and leaving their calves to fall victims to lion and hyena, but we were not in luck and no rhino playmate materialised.

A substitute was produced one day in the form of two baby buffalo. They were found abandoned on a nearby sisal estate adjoining the Tsavo East Park. They arrived in the back of a Land-Rover and looked, at first sight, exactly like two little domestic calves. The male was about

a month old and the female only about a week. They were wonderfully easy to look after as they took to the menagerie and to their bottles immediately. Their diet, unlike the rest of my wild family, was straightforward cow's milk which arrived from the local dairy each day.

Rufus was duly introduced to the two new orphans and, of course, because I led him up to them, he took to them at once. Anything I approved of was always all right with Rufus, and in his eyes I could do no wrong. It was a relief to me that they all got on so well for I had long since realised that Rufus was now far too big for the kitchen. But we had not dared to move him up to an empty store as alone he would have fretted his heart out. Now that there were the two baby buffalo for companionship, they were all moved up there at night.

Rufus did not at first approve. He far preferred his cosy corner in the kitchen with all the friendly noises of tinkling china and the busy scouring of pots and pans. It was also the one place where he had always had his last night-time feed. Some of the delicious smells of the milk warming lingered in the air and, of course, there was that delightfully light wooden table to charge and barge and push all round the room when he got bored. He even invented his own patent type of skating-rink. As the cement floor was always highly polished, he found that by racing towards the kitchen door in a charge, his feet would slide the rest of the way. He would repeat this performance until some

other mischievous novelty presented itself. The noise was deafening but what did he care? If he woke us up at the other end of the house he was attracting someone's attention.

Rufus found it really hard to grow up especially when he could see no reason why at one hundred and fifty pounds he was less welcome than at fifty pounds. What did it matter if there was no room for his barrel shape between the tables and chairs? He could always barge his way through. There would be no more magic moments when dinner was on the table and he could waddle in, put his chin on the edge, and sample the new tastes of bread, passion fruit and paw paw, or, in fact, just about anything we were eating. Everything was acceptable if it was given to him by me. As by now he had begun to nibble from odd bushes in the garden we put lucerne into the store at night for him. He liked this almost as much as he did my flowering "Pride of Barbados" and it also acted as a sop to his ego since his baby companions were still only on milk.

Kulunda, our garden boy, named the male buffalo Buster and the female Susannah (after a girl-friend of his). To our amazement, they responded to their names when called, well within the first week. Kulunda was marvellous with them but then African herdsmen can control an entire herd of cattle by a series of whistles. Buster and Susannah would not only come running up to him when he called, but would listen while he talked to them during

RUFUS THE RHINO

their daily brushing. During the heat of the day, they would lie under a large shady tree while Kulunda gardened close by and sang African folk songs to them.

The afternoon feed which took place at four o'clock each day was quite a pantomime. As soon as Rufus caught sight of the bucket of milk being brought on to the front lawn, he would start stamping his dumpy little legs in a sideways and ridiculously rumba-like movement, while at the same time emitting his plaintive high-pitched cry. He knew perfectly well he could get round me for anything, once he started this. We were so fond of each other that I always gave way.

As soon as the meal was over, playtime would start as regularly as if I had rung a bell. Buster chasing Susannah all over the garden and down over a three-foot wall was joined by Rufus barging into the middle of the game. In spite of his rotundity, he could spin round as if he was standing on a sixpence. No one, however, could look as absurd as Rufus when he overran himself and with that extraordinarily odd distribution of weight, toppled over, after which he would get up very quickly, hoping no one had noticed.

The only time he threw all dignity to the winds was during the preparation of his bath. This at first took the form of a mud-wallow made inside his outdoor pen, but he went so completely mad with excitement that we had to move it down to the bottom of the garden. The garden



*Bath time: above, Rufus with Brian, Tommy, Gypsy and me
and below, Rufus and Tommy*





Rufus at three months with me

HORACE THE MONGOOSE

boys dug a large round shallow pit about one foot deep in the red earth. Kulunda brought the hose and sprayed in enough water to make it into a mud puddle and then the boys stamped the water into the earth with their feet. When Rufus smelt the water and mud he would wait impatiently, throwing his head from side to side in an ecstasy of anticipation. Then the expectation would become too much for him to wait another minute, and he would rush into the centre of the chocolate liquid. This was his idea of heaven, and like a dog he turned round and round trying to get down into it as quickly as possible. This is a slow and difficult process for a rhino, although they can get up in half the time that it takes them to lie down.

Once down, he would roll over on to his back and when one side was completely covered with a thick layer of mud, he knew how to roll over just enough to cover the other side completely. Whenever my two sons, Brian and Tommy, were with us for the holidays, they loved helping Rufus to complete his mud-pack, smearing the mud with their hands all over the bare patches while Rufus lay there, eyes closed, deliriously happy. It was fascinating to see his natural instinct at work when he was still so young. The hide of a rhino, although thick, is so sensitive that even the common house-fly can annoy and the tsetse fly can bite through. If he had a mother, she would at a very early stage have encouraged him to lie down with her in some natural mud-wallow, and by copying her he would

have learnt that the coating of mud kept off the insistent flies.

Now he had his own private mud-bath which he adored so much that in his enthusiasm he would sometimes jump up before it was over, just to race around the garden, bucking like a bronco, before returning to the pit in order to savour the delight all over again. In between his mud-baths, he loved to give himself a dry dust-bath rolling about in the red soil until he really was "Rufus the Red". This, too, is wonderful protection from the attentions of the flies and is the reason why elephants are often seen blowing dust all over themselves through their trunks.

Kulunda was the ideal keeper for both the two buffalo and Rufus. Although his favourite was undoubtedly Buster, he would play all sorts of games with Rufus, who, if he could not find Gipsy, Susannah or Buster to chase, would walk around the garden looking for Kulunda. When Kulunda was quietly weeding a flower-bed he would suddenly hear a snort from behind. This was a signal for a charge by Rufus and to oblige him Kulunda would drop the fork and take to his heels. After a hot pursuit, in which he was visibly losing ground, Kulunda would leap into a small tree on the front lawn, which only just bore his weight. Rufus, having now treed Kulunda, would prance around the base snorting and puffing with victory. The amazing thing was that with all his bulk and weight, Rufus was never known to be rough or aggressive.

The buffalo were in their element whenever it rained. At the first drop they would frisk around like young calves. If we turned the hose on to them they would go crazy with joy. With a temperature around a hundred and their coats so fluffy, one could well imagine why. Susannah was the funniest as she would stick her tail up in the air at almost a right-angle and then turn round and round into the jet of water as if she was on a turntable. Only when the tickle became unbearable would she race off down the drive.

Rufus came regularly for an afternoon walk with us. It was not really a walk but was his version of one. When we started down the drive and called him by name, he would race at full speed towards us and would pass us like an express train, as if we didn't exist, tail tucked between his legs, ears pinned back, in a crescendo of snorts and puffing until he reached the sharp bend at the bottom. As he rounded this like a racing car, the buffaloes, having heard the fun, would appear close at his heels and all three would be lost in an enormous cloud of dust. At the bottom of the hill, Rufus would turn and race back to the top, passing within inches of us, and then, if he still had any breath left, would rush straight down the hill again. When he reached the bottom for the second time, he would flop down in the red earth making as much dust as possible in the process. The more dust there was flying about, the happier Rufus felt.

Sometimes, if I was in really old slacks, I would sit down beside him and pour handfuls of dust on his back and on what little neck he had. As this trickled down over his round fat tummy Rufus would sink with pure delight into a sort of coma. Only when I got tired did he get up. To vary the routine, we would often take a different way home. Without any signal from either Dennis or myself, Rufus took up his position immediately behind me, almost, but never quite, treading on my heels, and so, with the buffalo following close behind and Gipsy, the Cairn, bringing up the rear, we would walk in solemn procession up the hill and back to the house.

One day, I noticed a small red spot on his forehead and was worried in case it was a sore. He rubbed the place in the soft red earth, and soon we realised that it was the start of his horn. Rather like a child with a teething ring, it must have given him some satisfaction to massage it against the crumbling soil; also this was a most excellent way of creating more dust.

It was fascinating to observe how Rufus changed his whole attitude once he was outside the safety of the compound. When we were on the return walk, he was as good as any watch-dog. At any strange smell or noise, up would go his ears as he turned his head towards it, his whole body alert.

Occasionally, during the mad race down the drive, we played a game with him. As he vanished in a cloud of dust

round the bend at the bottom, we would creep into a thick bush a few yards off the track. Then when he ran snorting and puffing up the hill he would come to a dead stop exactly opposite the spot where we had left the road. With head forward and ears back he would try to pick up our scent or any sound. As soon as he had got either, down to the ground would go his nose and he would start his pitiful crying. This was always too much for me and so we would advance slowly towards each other. The second he caught sight of us his whole face would light up and, spinning round at an uncanny speed, he would be out on to the road again ready for another run. Gipsy, who was always the "busy-body" of the household, and full of female jealousy, would sometimes give the game away by following us into the bush and then racing out to meet Rufus. This was, of course, her way of saying "I found them first". After this she joined in the race, keeping neck and neck with Rufus in spite of her short little legs, while he tried to butt her out of his way.

When we arrived back we were greeted by Felix, Horace, Punch and Judy, and once we got into the garden, Buster and Susannah knew their place and started to graze on the short grass. Not so Rufus. If it was not too hot and I settled myself down in a chair on the front veranda, he was there in a flash lying down beside me. If the front door was shut against him, he rubbed his head against it until it was opened. If I was busy knitting in the sitting-room,

Rufus would arrive and flop down using my arm-chair as a comfortable back-rest. As a result my loose covers were perpetually being washed since it was all one to Rufus whether he had just had his red dust-bath or not. Where his beloved was, there he had to be. He would have liked to be my shadow, but when we were expecting visitors, he had to go out while my unfortunate staff washed the covers and polished the floor. On such occasions, I would call to Kulunda to come and take him away. Immediately he heard Kulunda's name, up he would get, spin round and face the door with his head down ready for a mock charge, and there was no moving him unless I went outside and called his name and Kulunda pushed him from behind. One afternoon I found the two of them chasing round and round the dining-table because Rufus had decided not to be disturbed from his cool snoozing spot.

The second time in his life that I left him was when I went into Mombasa Hospital where my daughter, Maurcen, was born. I was only away ten days but it was much worse for Rufus than during my first safari as then he had been very young. Now he had learnt to know and love me with a dependence that was not a little worrying when one thought of the future. In spite of extra attention from Dennis, he moped the whole time until my return.

He had little time for any strange African, and we were at a loss to understand this attitude since he was now entirely fed and looked after by Africans and, as far as we

knew, they were never unkind to him. None of them, however, could get him to do a single thing other than take his food, and even to this he managed to impart a condescending air. When they wanted to move him from place to place one of us had to be called, and as soon as he heard or saw either of us he would respond immediately.

Most of all he hated being put in his pen because there he was divorced from our company. He took it as such a personal insult that he broke out several times and making a bee-line for the veranda, arrived there with a grin of triumph on his face. His pen was after this reinforced to make it, as we poor fools thought, impossible for him to escape. It only worked until he found that by pressing his large face along the poles and pushing with all his weight, he could move them. Then—oh joy—once one pole was shoved out of the way, he found it was easy to barge himself between the top and bottom cross-bar. His persistence was remarkable since he was only shut up for one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon. At both these times my baby daughter was put to sleep in her pram in the shade of the big tree. Rufus had twice been found, not so much attacking the strange object of a pram, but with his nose underneath it bouncing it up and down in an effort to overturn it to see what was inside. When this game was stopped Rufus would start a systematic search of the house for me. With his prehensile upper lip he could open any cupboard door which was not actually locked.

I always knew when he had done the rounds as all the cupboard doors were open.

If I fell asleep during my afternoon rest, I quite often woke to find Rufus sleeping peacefully on the mat by my bed.

One morning he was noticeably off colour, his face was swollen and his eyes and nose were running. At first I thought it might be a sting from a bee or some insect, and then I got a sickening feeling that it might be pneumonia again. When I felt inside his mouth, however, I found that the trouble was obviously due to teething. I had heard of baby rhino dying during this period. Rufus was quite ill for a few days. His toe-nails started cracking and they got so bad that he found difficulty in walking, but his discomfort was eased when Dennis trimmed off the jagged bits with a coarse file. Had he been walking over stony ground in his natural habitat with his mother, his nails would have worn down quite naturally. Eventually the old nails dropped off each foot and he produced lovely new shiny ones. His teeth also came through and we knew he had turned the corner when he started on my best and most colourful bougainvillea. Fortunately, he only liked the leaves and as he could not reach up very high, the bush ended by looking as if it had been purposely pruned. His other favourite plant was even more fortunately a weed which grew along the front wall. He worked out a clever way to reach it when standing on the top side. In the

absence of anything that could be called a neck—for rhinos have hardly any—he would stretch out his head as far as it could go, not unlike a giant tortoise, and eat off the shoots, encircling them with his pointed top lip. When unable to reach any more, he descended to the bottom of the wall and started to eat his way up to meet the unchewed line he had left. If I ever called to him when he was at the bottom of the wall, he would run up and down my flower-beds wreaking untold destruction, until he was sure there was no gap in the wall. Then, with grim determination, he would go back some distance like a high jumper, take a run at it and, gripping tenaciously with his front toes, heave himself up to the top.

Mudanda Rock

Early one morning Dennis and I went on a special trip. When the first yellow and pink of dawn tinged the sky, we set off in the Land-Rover through the great Tsavo East Park for Mudanda Rock. As the stunted thorn-trees sped past the windows the blue and purple of the surrounding hills appeared against the sky which by now was red, and the Park looked for all the world as if it was on fire.

We turned a corner and there was the great orange rock, end on. It is perhaps the longest in all Africa for it is over a mile in length and over seventy feet high. From the bottom where we stopped, it seemed to reach half-way up to the sky. I was surprised how quickly we were able to climb its great side, putting our feet into the niches between the layers of red, orange and brown crust. We arrived breathless at the top and I stood looking around. Under the rock there was a large circular water-hole, one hundred yards across, fringed on the opposite bank by some great chunks of dark green bush. On the right, and far below, a huge forest tree stood as if guarding the pool and, as I

MUDANDA ROCK

watched, a flock of tiny birds flew out of its branches and wheeled in the early sun looking like giant butterflies. Out and away they flew into the blue distance of scrub, thorn and bush reaching as far as the eye could see, and only relieved here and there by the bottle shape of a baobab tree.

Suddenly Dennis touched my arm, "There they come," he said and as I looked I could just make out the outline of a huge ear and the dark-brown forms of the first elephants, threading their way in single file through the landscape. On and on they came. "They've smelt the water," said Dennis, and almost as he spoke, the great beasts broke into a sort of trot.

They had now reached the edge of the water and here the leader stopped as if scenting for any unseen danger before allowing the rest of the herd to follow. He was a huge fellow with long curving white tusks, the epitome of defiance. As I looked at him I was reminded that these great beasts can actually carry quite a big calf balanced on their tusks if the life of the offspring is threatened. Then he moved into the water and as a police dog will respond to a silent whistle, without any visible sign, the entire herd moved after him.

They stood in line, and down went their trunks as they siphoned the water into their great mouths. Nothing disturbed the silence except the occasional gurgle of their great throats or the rumble of some vast stomach. We were sitting watching the peaceful scene when suddenly, and

for no apparent reason, all bedlam broke loose. The entire herd wheeled and with gigantic splashings, threshed its way across the water making a noise like a dozen paddle-steamers going at full speed, accompanied by the wild high-pitched scream of their trumpeting. They stopped on the other side and turned. Still there was no visible reason for the stampede; all was alert, we on the rock, and the cows, their calves and the bulls on the other side, waiting for the next act.

Still there was nothing but the occasional gurgle of the undigested juices in their stomachs, then just as I was beginning to wonder why the elephant, who is credited with such intelligence, would panic and stampede for apparently no reason, a beautiful bull eland gently sauntered out of the dark-green bushes from exactly where the elephants had moved.

I do not mean to suggest that a great herd of the largest animals on earth had been frightened off by a mere member of the antelope family, but it was a wonderful example of the herd's instinct to flee as one from the fear of an unknown danger.

The ancestors of this herd had passed on to them the meaning of Mudanda, the name of the rock; this is "the place of the dried meat". Here, from earliest times, poachers used to lie motionless on the rock, waiting with their deadly poisoned arrows for the unsuspecting herds to arrive. When they did, the fusillade of arrows would

fly out and after the animal had breathed its last, (sometimes days or weeks later) out would come the poachers with their wicked knives and the mammoth task of cutting up the great carcass would begin. When it was completed, the long strips of elephant meat were laid out across the rock to dry and a kind of biltong would result. The mile-long rock produced quite an adequate drying table for the meat of even a large number of elephant.

While we were remembering these days up went the head of the leader of the herd, and in one unit, the entire herd slowly turned, moved into single file and disappeared as silently as it had come.

My second visit to Mudanda Rock was very different from the first and even more exciting. One of the two rangers posted at Mudanda arrived with the report of a very sick elephant. He appeared, the ranger said, to be very blown up and so ill that instead of walking away after he had watered himself, he lay down and for a long time continued to throw water all over his body. When the rangers managed to get close enough to have a better look, they saw an enormous hole in the poor animal's rump. (This proved later to be a wound, caused probably by a tusk during a fight with a rival, which had pierced his alimentary canal). The ranger also said that the elephant came regularly every early morning and again late each night to drink.

Dennis immediately decided to spend that night on the

rock in order to get a clear view of the wounded animal in the early hours of the next morning. As it was then the time of the full moon, I was delighted when he suggested that I should go too and I set about packing up our camp-beds and enough food for an evening meal. Built on the rock is a small *banda* which provides shade from the scorching sun for visitors during the day-time. This would be an ideal shelter for our camp-beds.

We were able to set off after tea, and reached the rock about an hour before dark. On arrival Dennis was shown the exact spot, a small water-hole on the front side of the rock, to which this elephant usually came. He decided to sit and watch it for the remaining hour of daylight, in the hope of seeing the beast. In the meantime, I cleaned up the mess left by the baboons who treat the *banda* as their property. I then made up our camp-beds and set out our supper, which consisted of hard-boiled eggs, meat-pies and some hot tea in a Thermos flask.

I had nearly finished when a ranger came running along to the *banda* to say that the sick animal had already arrived at the water-hole and that "the Bwana" suggested that I go along with the ranger to join him. We crept along the face of the rock together and, although out of reach of any of the game, it was very eerie and quite frightening. Our progress was completely silent, the ranger was bare-footed and I, too, took off my sandals. We came upon Dennis lying down flat and looking like part of the rock, and I

crawled up and lay down beside him. There were the elephants, about ten of them with a large bull out in front.

Dennis put his mouth to my ear and whispered, "I've already spotted him and the hole is enormous." "Why don't you shoot him now?" I said. "Quite impossible," said Dennis. "By the time the rangers walk around to windward of him to allow him to get their scent and so move him away from the rest of the herd, it will be too dark to shoot." "Then why don't you shoot him where he is?" Dennis gave me an old-fashioned look, but patiently replied, "If I shot him there, it would pollute the water and stop all the other elephants from coming to drink." We lay still for a little while watching him, but it was almost unbearable for he was obviously in terrible agony. All we could hope was that he would come back to the same place to water in the morning. We returned to the *banda*.

The sun had gone down and there was a cool breeze so we took our pies and tea and sat on the warm rock. Dennis told me thrilling stories of the incidents that had been witnessed from the very place where we were sitting. Two bull elephants had once fought to the death just below us. The victor had thrust one tusk right through the skull of the other and having rolled him completely over on to his side, again pierced him through the shoulder and out the other side. My mind cringed at the thought of the ferocity of this battle.

RUFUS THE RHINO

In contrast, how peaceful it was at that moment; nothing broke the awesome silence of Africa just before sunset, even the eternal chorus of crickets hadn't yet started. Only a ringed dove flew up into the canopy of the giant fig and started to coo. Then some baboons began an argument. They were all clustered together bickering while they settled down for the night in a large tree, high enough for them to be safe from their enemy, the leopard. I could never understand how any of them were caught, until Dennis explained how the crafty cat relies on climbing the tree just so far up as to cause the utmost confusion among the baboon troop. Then in the rumpus one of them is sure to panic and fall out of the tree, and the leopard is on to him in an instant.

The moon was rising now and cast a silver pattern across the water. The magic light between night and day threw up in relief the banks on the other side of the water-hole and either in imagination or in reality, I thought I could see all sorts of animals moving in the shadows on the far bank. Two frogs started a duet and were joined at intervals by an insistent chorus. A night owl joined in from the distance with his haunting screech, and then a twig cracked just underneath us. I wondered what was moving about in the darkness below. Through the darkness Dennis saw something large. But strain my eyes as I might, I could see nothing. Then we heard it moving across the water in our direction making a great splashing as it



*"He liked my 'Pride of Barbados' ":
above, at three months and below, as a two-year-old*





Rufus on the veranda with Maureen, Gypsy and me

MUDANDA ROCK

walked. Suddenly it crossed a patch of moonlight and we could clearly make out a big rhino, his horn silhouetted against the background. He stopped on the edge of the rough grass at the side of the water, so close that we could hear the loud munching noises as he cropped the juicy stems. Then he wandered out of the moonlit patch and the darkness cloaked him once more.

We tore ourselves away from the fascination of the pool and went to bed, because Dennis had to be up at dawn to catch the elephant at his early drink. Our sleep was, however, very spasmodic, as we were constantly awoken by large herds coming down to water, and the noise of their splashings and wallowing and, above all, of their trumpeting, was deafening. Once or twice, when the night was torn by a particularly strident trumpeting which echoed off the rock, I jumped out of bed to see what was happening. I was rewarded by the incredible sight of giants everywhere. Except for the rock they seemed to be all round us and underneath us and I had the feeling that they were somehow on top of us too. There were only one or two hours of quiet in between the arrival of the herds during which we were able to sleep.

The pink shafts of the dawn woke us as they stole in through the windows of the *banda* and we finished the remains of the Thermos for early morning tea. Dennis was off almost immediately, taking his Rigby '416 to try and intercept the wounded elephant. My imagination flew

away in a fantasy of improbabilities. Why could not some Harley Street elephant surgeon arrive by helicopter, operate and save this precious beast's life? His species may be extinct in this Park in a few years. The two rangers went with Dennis. I thought I heard a shot fairly soon after they left, but they did not return for some time. It was indeed the mercy shot from Dennis's gun that had put the poor beast out of its misery. He was drinking as they approached him and then started to walk off. One of the rangers walked down wind to give the elephant his scent, while Dennis kept a parallel course hidden by some bushes. He then crept up closer and the elephant turned towards him presenting him with a perfect target. I was relieved that his torture was ended. Our mission finished, we drove back to Voi.

Drought and Floods

Most of Kenya, and especially our eight thousand square mile Tsavo Park, was at this time facing the most terrible drought in living memory. In one and a half years there had only been about nine inches of rain, and this year what are locally called the "the long rains" had failed altogether. The whole countryside was gradually turning into a semi-desert. Even the small amount of grass for grazing was being burnt up by the scorching rays of the sun. The only green patches to be seen in the usually lovely view from our house were a few of the taller trees in the permanent forest fringe along the Voi River. As the river only runs during the rains, this, too, had completely dried up, killing a terrible number of these beautiful trees. The plight of the animals was pitiful since the few green shoots on the trees were soon nibbled off and the sparse patches of grass were gobbled up so quickly that they did not get a chance to grow again.

The Royal National Parks Authorities were not only very aware of the probable consequence to the game but were so

concerned that a world-wide fund was started for "Water for Wild Animals".

Across the Athi River rhino were dying at the alarming rate of three or four a week and in our area the ghastly total of over seventy dead rhino had been reached. It was only when the water fund had been going for some time that we were able to purchase and install two large pumps with sprays along the river bank. These worked by tapping the river at intervals, forcing the water by pressure up into the sprays which saturated the withered grass and foliage to make it green again for the rhino to eat.

The drought had also forced the elephant herds to walk as much as twenty-five miles in a day in order to find water. This meant that none of the newly-born baby elephants could possibly keep up and were, in consequence, left behind by their thirsty mothers. Several of these orphans of the drought were brought into headquarters by the rangers but were so weak that none survived.

The smell of death was everywhere and the putrefying carcasses we passed made one sick at heart and in the stomach. Dennis took me on an inspection he had to make after the few pumps had been going about three weeks. We set off very early one morning, crossing a causeway instead of taking the road, which is the only gap in the great Yatta Plateau. Here was another track which hugged the river bank. Dennis had often told me about the fascination of this drive since it was possible in a year of

normal rain to see, while driving along the causeway, anything up to thirty rhino in as many miles. In consequence, I was expecting the excitement of seeing at least a dozen of the great lumbering beasts. I saw many more than a dozen—all dead. They were everywhere, lying along the river bank, or a few yards from the road, in inert heaps, surrounded by a blue haze of bluebottles.

All round them was the evidence of their desperation since every piece of vegetation had been cropped right down to within a few inches of the ground. The elephant had even pushed over a large tree in order to get at the few shoots remaining at the top of its canopy.

About the only living things to be seen in all this carnage were a small herd of impala trying pathetically to get some shade under a dried-up bush. They seemed quite lifeless and instead of bounding off at our approach were too weak to care. Their ribs were showing and my heart was heavy when I saw that the only green thing in sight was a clump or two of reeds on an island in the middle of the river. It was impossible for them to wander in further search of possible food since the river provided the only water for miles around.

We drove along until we found some shade under a dom palm and I unpacked our picnic lunch. I couldn't eat anything. Instead, leaving Dennis with the basket, I walked down to the muddy river and put my feet in the water to cool. I heard a small rustle in the branch above

me and looked up to see a little vervet monkey giving his quaint bobbing greeting. I went back to fetch my lunch which he enjoyed enormously.

Feeling more encouraged after this, I had a cold drink and watched two little wagtails or dishwashers on the island opposite. They were walking around the edge of the water with that stilted gait of theirs and diving their beaks into any juicy insect foolish enough to be walking in the same direction. Gipsy was, as usual, longing to give chase, and unable to contain herself any longer, plunged in hoping to catch up with them at the water's edge. Instead, one wagtail flew a few feet in front of her, while the other dive-bombed her, almost touching her nose in the process. This infuriated her so much that, pretending to ignore them completely, she ran a race around the island until she was exhausted.

We got her back into the Land-Rover, dripping but cool, and continued our drive along the course of the river until we reached the point where the sprays had been installed. Even from some distance we could see quite an oasis of green and when we got closer, the parched bush looked as if some giant paint brush had washed it over with green. The grass, too, was showing green spikes mingled with its matted brown hair.

This new carpet now covered a six-mile stretch about a hundred yards wide along the river bank and the rhino had obviously got used to the noise of the pumping engines

for their spoor was all around and some of it a week old.

Although the total of dead rhino in this region alone was over two hundred, it is not always realised why an exceptional drought affects the rhino population far more than the elephant, even though the latter have a much bigger capacity for water. Elephants not only have the intelligence to walk perhaps twenty-five miles to a river, but also have the stamina. Added to this, although it was not even their normal diet, the elephant had already stripped what little green vegetation remained. The poor old rhino is too stupid to move far from his normal beat and cannot cover immense distances like the elephant. He just blunders around what has been his favourite water-hole for years, and which is now completely dried up, until he drops dead in his tracks from thirst. Perhaps this green belt would save the lives of a few. With this thought as the only cheerful straw to cling to, and after Dennis had repaired a small fault in one of the engines, we returned to Voi.

The next time I was to cross the causeway was on a trip to the Tiva River. This runs through the northern part of Tsavo East Park which is so undeveloped that it is closed to the public. It is only natural that this very fact makes it more exciting and gives one a feeling of slight superiority. There is only the one main road which runs through to Ithumba, which, in turn, joins the Kamba Reserve. It is

the need to cross the Athi River which caused this causeway of four hundred yards of concrete to be built. Immediately below the crossing-point lie the famous Lugard Falls, originally discovered, as their name implies, by Lord Lugard. We reached the place after a long drive through uninterrupted scrub and thorn. Layer upon layer of rock lie in great burnt-umber slabs, with sticks of grey stone looking like peppermint rock. The coffee-coloured water flows with deceptive slowness past the fringe of dom palms along the river bank until it reaches a small canyon through which it gushes out between the great round rocks.

Elephant droppings were so numerous that they formed a dark pattern of footballs all along the game-tracks leading down to the river's edge, and here and there long strips of bark were torn off the tree trunks or whole branches broken off and thrown about like the damaged toys of naughty children.

Crossing the causeway is quite exciting, since it is only just wide enough to take the wheels of a Land-Rover, and in parts the water runs over the top so that it is impossible to guess where the edge really is. Dennis, as usual, took the whole thing in his stride, or rather the Land-Rover's stride, and soon we were up the other side through the only large opening. This gap was made for us by the elephant since it is their only access to the river. It was so well used that the collection of untold years of elephant manure under our wheels made us feel as if we driving on

a sprung mattress. After a short climb we were on the top of the immense Yatta Plateau and gazing out over ninety miles of completely flat uninhabited plain.

I caught the occasional glimpse of a lesser kudu with his elegant corkscrew horns, perfectly camouflaged by his grey and white stripes against the silver-grey twisted branches of some dead thorn tree. Against a square of brown background we saw three graceful giraffe-necked gerenuk standing improbably on their hind legs to reach the top of a bush. A little farther on, three wild pigs broke cover on our left and rushed like small engines across the road, tails straight up in the air making a ridiculous right angle against each fat hairy body.

As the bush got denser, so the animals got bigger and after we had driven about twenty miles, herd upon herd of elephant appeared in the middle distance. When we rounded a bend in the road we saw several times the baggy backside of a bull elephant retreating at the sound of our engine. The occasional baobab tree interrupting the otherwise smooth plain gave an almost prehistoric background to the elephant and the fact that in the whole drive of ninety miles we saw not a living soul gave me a feeling of being in at the beginning of the world. The Africans are very superstitious about the baobab and say that even God was angry with them and planted them upside down as punishment, hence their comic shape. They can be a life-saver to the elephant, however, especially in time of

drought as their fibre holds a large quantity of moisture. During the dry months the elephant gouge out huge sections of the trunk of the tree to suck. One of our rangers once discovered the skeleton of an elephant which had been trapped under the weighty branches of a baobab which had toppled over on him after he had eaten away the centre.

The sun was setting over Tsavo when we still had twenty more miles to drive, but I wished we could go on for ever. The deep-blue silhouettes of the giant trees against the rose colour of the sky were like a picture of the end of the world. We arrived at our destination, Ithumba, about seven in the evening. Ithumba consists of one house. It is owned by the Royal National Parks and there, for most of the year, a warden is in residence and spends his time controlling, with the help of African rangers, an appalling amount of game poaching. The whole length of the dry river bed is ideal for these torturers, since it is there that the elephant can be so easily caught napping while he digs in the sand for water.

The warden being away, the house was unoccupied, so after the food and bedding we had brought with us had been unpacked, we ate our meal, and went immediately to bed.

The first thing next morning, after a sizzling breakfast, we walked out to a rock near the house which Dennis wanted to show me. The view over the Karkindu Hills

was beautiful in the early morning light. "Why is this one so special?" I asked, wanting to be left to admire the panorama instead of being dragged out to see one of countless billion rocks. "Because of the Pink Elephant," said Dennis, and without another word, strode off. He knew perfectly well I would be far too intrigued not to follow, which of course I did. Sitting beside him on the rock, I was rewarded by being told the story of the Pink Elephant.

The routes of elephant movement were not known, so it was decided to mark the elephants with paint so as to be able to spot them from a small aircraft to see how far they had moved and in what direction they were travelling.

A cylinder was made out of a fifteen-inch section of six-inch pipe. Each end was welded with a quarter-inch steel plate, while one end had a gate valve tap into which the paint was poured. An inlet and outlet of three-eighths-inch pipe was welded to take in compressed air from a cylinder. The other end of this had a control tap. At the first trial the paint had squirted about twenty feet.

It was realised that quite a proportion of the elephant's head and neck or back must be sprayed to make him clearly visible from the air, so pink plastic paint was used and also some very adhesive yellow enamel paint.

The rock we were on was perfect for sitting up over the water-hole, since it was about four feet higher than the average elephant which stands about ten feet at the

RUFUS THE RHINO

shoulder. The fact that the rock was only twenty feet from the water and the elephant made it very dangerous.

On the next fully moonlit night when the first elephant came down to drink, Dennis and Hassan were positioned on the rock together with all the apparatus. After letting him have a good fill—they drink anything up to twenty-five gallons a day—he was squirted with at least three-quarters of a gallon of paint on his forehead. He rushed headlong into the bush and stopped about thirty yards in. After manœuvring his trunk all over the painted area, he calmly continued feeding.

After a very long wait, probably because the smell of paint spilt on the ground had scared them off, two large bull elephants appeared. One was successfully squirted on the forehead and much later yet another. At this juncture the pink paint ran out and was replaced by the yellow enamel.

When it was obvious that no more elephants would appear as the smell of paint was by now quite unbearable, Dennis and Hassan packed up the apparatus and set off back to the house. Early next morning a party of rangers was sent out and reported seeing the pink elephants five miles away dotted about in different herds and with none of their fellows apparently in the least uneasy of their coloured comrades.

Elephants which had been sprayed with white paint near the Voi water-hole were duly spotted by the aircraft

DROUGHT AND FLOODS

about twenty miles away. From this it was apparent that they were watering daily at two different places, down at the Galana River and at the Voi water-hole. They were therefore roving a very large area and going without a drink for some twenty hours or more. It was also apparent that the Ithumba pink and yellow elephants had not moved as far, but this was probably because the water-holes in this area were limited.

This method, like that adopted by Bernhard Grzimek—plastic collars for the zebra in the Serengeti Park—could only be called a fairly successful experiment, but if some infallible method of marking could be found the information gained would be of the most tremendous value.

Dennis suggested a trip to the Tiva River next day and we set off early to drive thirty miles back along the same road of the previous day. We turned off on to an almost completely overgrown track which nearly engulfed the Land-Rover. We had only gone about twenty yards down it when we saw as through the door of a green cathedral an old bull elephant standing fast asleep on the verge. He was in a rather battered state for not only was one tusk broken off half-way down but one ear was hanging as if the muscles had been damaged. His whole appearance was so dejected that he looked quite harmless, but in passing him we would come too close for my liking. "Don't you think we'll be a bit close?" I ventured. "Nonsense," said Dennis, but he did rev up the engine and hoot the

horn, more to appease me than anything else. The old boy never moved and seemed unaware of our presence. Feeling rather foolish but with my eyes riveted on the old beast, I heard Dennis let in the clutch and we started to pass him. Everything then happened at once. The "passive" old elephant crashed over the bush in front of us, gathered up bushels of earth and stones with his trunk which he hurled at us, and roared down the road after the Land-Rover. His one good ear was lying flat and lifelessly against his neck—so he meant business—while the damaged one flapped out of control on the other side. Dennis concentrated on his driving, while I, facing backwards, gave a running commentary. In spite of the speed we had picked up, the distance between us had shortened to less than a hundred yards and he was still coming. Just as we were approaching a frighteningly sharp corner, he stopped, turned sideways, tore down the bush at the side of the road, and hurled trunkfuls of branches and grass high into the air, churning up the earth under his feet with the ferocity of a hurricane. Once round the bend and out of sight we stopped and each lit a welcome cigarette.

The rest of the drive was so peaceful as to be almost an anti-climax, but once at the river, where we stopped the Land-Rover under a big shady tree, we were able to watch, from a safe distance, quite a big herd of elephant including some calves. "This is the only water for twenty-five miles," said Dennis, watching the elephants, "and they

actually ration it among themselves." I was marvelling at the intelligence of these huge beasts when Dennis pointed to a small concrete blind on the opposite bank. This was very cleverly built to ensure maximum safety while watching elephant and rhino drinking at the river. The concrete floor was three feet below the level of the ground and when one had gone down the rough wooden steps, the dry river bed was actually at eye level. As added protection, giant boulders surrounded the blind for about twenty yards. Dennis explained how the "Big Ones" will not walk over loose boulders and certainly no rhino could charge over them. I felt doubtful.

The time was about 9.30 a.m. and it occurred to me that we were perhaps too late to see any elephant since their normal drinking habit is either very early or very late in the day. I confess to having been rather relieved at this thought when Dennis suggested walking over to the opposite bank to sit in the blind for a few hours' game watching. I was still shaken by our narrow escape from the one-eared elephant.

Dennis strode off in front while I stopped and scanned the river to see if anything was coming down to drink. Then I started following cautiously down the hot narrow game track. I was tensed up to hear the slightest sound or see the slightest motion and kept my head moving from side to side like a bird. I gave myself quite a shock by seeing the dark blur of the Land-Rover through the dense

RUFUS THE RHINO

foliage. It was about the size of a small elephant. As I stopped to regain my composure I realised that we were just about half-way between it and the blind. "Dennis," I whispered, afraid of disturbing I don't know what, "we were silly not to have driven the Land-Rover down to the bank, it would have saved us this long walk." It was not too late to turn back now and make for the car, I thought, but was interrupted by "Why, do you feel tired?" As he got no answer to this, he walked even farther in front with his big strides. By now I had only one thing in my mind and that was to get to the blind in the shortest possible time. I could see that Dennis had actually reached the bank and was looking up the river. I wondered what he was looking at. Hoping he wouldn't see me, I started to run, but as the path had given way to the soft river bed, my feet were losing ground in the sand. Just then, one sandal came off. At the same moment I thought I heard a slight rustle behind me from the path I had left. Not daring to look back, I snatched off the other sandal, gathered up the one from the sand and started running again. I didn't even care if Dennis saw me now but the sand was unbearably hot under my feet. Verging on panic, I flung down the sandals, kicking my feet into them as I started up the bank on the other side. My heart was racing my feet and I was still faced with the twenty yards of boulders to cross. I stumbled along, losing my balance twice and barking my ankles and shins on the stones.



Felix with Dennis



Felix with me. "He was so gentle, his claws always retracted"

Punch, Judy and Horace "the cad"



DROUGHT AND FLOODS

Dennis was waiting to help me down the steps into the blind. I clutched at his hand, took the steps in one and flung myself on to the bench at the bottom. I propped my back against the friendly safety of the wall and to calm myself down started to tie my scarf over the crown of my sun hat with as much nonchalance as I could muster.

After a fairly long wait, during which I loaded up my camera with a new film, we were rewarded by the sight of a small herd of elephant slowly approaching from the distance along the dry sandy river bed. The nearer they got the more my excitement mounted. Within a few minutes they were well in view for as these great beasts saunter at about ten miles per hour it does not take long for a herd in the distance to come into focus. Their huge sail-like ears were continuously waving backwards and forwards like so many giant grey flags; this is their system of fanning themselves and helps to catch the slightest unfamiliar sound. In addition, most of their trunks were at right angles up in the air to catch the faintest scent of anything strange. Like the rhino, their long-distance sight is poor and nature has compensated them with a strongly developed sense of hearing and smell.

As they came into range I focused my camera and took my first photograph ever of elephant. Like every amateur photographer the world over, I was convinced that this was going to be the picture of the year. I had already visualised a full page enlargement in one of the glossy

English weeklies with a fat cheque in the bank for the brilliant and daring photographer. I then tried to turn it on to the next world-shattering picture, but nothing happened. I handed the camera to Dennis saying, "I can't turn the winder, it's too stiff." "Nor can anyone else," said Dennis, "for the simple reason that the winder's broken." I now remembered dropping it in my excitement when I first saw the elephant. That was the end of my photography for this trip, but I am sure that by the law of compensations I was able to observe far more accurately than if I had been fiddling with the knobs and winder of a camera.

The elephants had skidded down the bank in a cloud of dust and were walking towards us, trunks down, sniffing the sand here and there. Dennis had already told me about the uncanny way in which they know exactly where to dig for water and how they ignore huge areas which to a mere human look completely similar. The nearest of the herd was a large cow with a two-year-old calf standing beside her. She started to dig with her trunk in a hole that was already nearly filled up with sand. The little calf couldn't contain himself at the smell of the water beneath and kept trying to put his trunk into the half-dug hole. His mama with infinite patience pushed him away every time and continued to dig. After great exertion on her part, and as soon as there was enough water seeping through, she stood by while her calf took his fill. No

sooner had he finished than she nuzzled a four-year-old calf over to the water and he, too, had his drink. Not until both her children had completely satisfied themselves, did the cow herself start to drink. This performance was being repeated with variations all along the river bed and I marvelled at the beasts' beautiful behaviour. Then they moved off down the river bed as silently as grey clouds across the sky.

The next visitors were a great contrast; a flock of ring-necked doves. They must have been waiting in the trees nearby for the "Big Ones" to go, knowing that there would be enough water left to satisfy their small thirsts. They swept past and round in a blue circle and chased each other along the sand, playing a variety of games and dancing a ballet of delight at the sight of the water. Suddenly, like a flash, a falcon swooped down from above and immediately the peaceful picture was wiped off the canvas. His streaking descent was so fast that it was impossible to see whether after it their number was one less or not, but like everything in the wild where death goes practically unnoticed, the doves were back again within a matter of minutes.

The sun was now high in the sky and blazing into the blind which had little shade to offer because of its position in the middle of the hot rocks. It was improbable that we should see any more big game now and as the coast was clear on all sides, we decided that this was a safe oppor-

tunity for us to make our way back across the river bed and to cover the considerable distance to the Land-Rover. Safe as it seemed I was determined to stick close to Dennis this time and risk no repetition of my morning nightmare.

We walked into the oven heat, one behind the other, and I stepped gingerly from boulder to boulder, remembering my painful arrival. We could not have covered more than twenty yards when there was a sudden crashing in the bush immediately behind the blind. We turned and then once again I was racing across those awful stones back to the safety of the concrete walls. Only just daring to look in the direction of the noise, I was horrified to see, not one, not two, but *three* large rhino trotting down the river bed not forty yards away. There was no hope of making the blind and we stood like statues as they snorted past. I felt as if my throat were full of earth, I could not swallow, and even my hair was tingling when Dennis whispered, "It's all right, the wind is with us." In my panic I do not remember reaching the blind and tumbling down those steps again, but once there, still panting, we watched a new and fascinating scene.

The three rhino had stopped and were carrying out a systematic search of each water-hole left by the elephant. No sooner had one beast found a hopeful hole than one of the others lumbered up snorting to chase him off. He then put his head down to drink, only to be charged by

the third who came tearing up from behind, crashed into him and took possession in his turn. This ridiculous performance was repeated with variations until the foolish creatures had in the *mêlée* churned up so much of the sand that most of the holes were now filled. What a contrast to the sane and controlled behaviour of the elephant earlier that morning, I reflected.

The trio were now not only more frantic than ever for a drink, but almost exhausted by their jostling match. One of the less stupid bulls then started to try and dig his own water-hole. This, in spite of the plight of their thirst, was a really comic sight. He was digging with his two fat front feet well down inside the hole, leaving his rump up on the rim and at the same time flinging the sand out between his back legs just like a dog. The other two stood watching this act for a few moments and then, as if obeying the whistle of a ring-master, they too started digging their own holes exactly like the first one. It was very difficult not to laugh aloud, but the operation was evidently partially successful as they left each other alone and departed in different directions soon after.

Dennis, I noticed, was watching carefully which direction each of them had taken, especially the one which was making his way across the open plain. He was heading for the Land-Rover and stopped when he got to it. After sniffing around, he remained standing over it as if on guard. This was a new hazard as by now the sun was

almost unbearable and we had the long drive home in front of us. Added to this was the fact that the causeway must be crossed before dark.

I asked Dennis what we should do and, as usual, he gave the only sensible answer. "Precisely nothing," he said, "until that rhino has gone." What, I wondered, should we do if he stayed waiting for us until dark? Then Dennis nudged me and pointed towards the Land-Rover. Whether he had just got our scent, or whether a lesser kudu bull which bounded on to the scene had frightened him, was not apparent, but the rhino suddenly turned on his heels and tore off across the plain.

We made our final journey back to the Land-Rover and started for home. After all the excitement of the day, I was glad that the homeward trip was almost uneventful—not quite, however, for we caught a rhino napping about ten yards of the side off the road. He lifted his head with a shocked expression and started to scramble to his feet just as we swept past him.

The nearest oasis in this desert of drought was a dam called Aruba, about eighteen miles east of Voi along the river. In a normal rainy season this was an area of water covering 216 acres and countless hundreds of elephant, many rhino, and buck of all sorts relied on it as a water-place. But the water had now receded to nothing more than a muddy pool in the middle. No visitors came to stay in the delight-

ful lodge as before, since no animals came to drink, but a few passing through the Park stopped at the petrol pump to fill up or at the little shop for a bar of chocolate. It was to one such party en route to Voi that the ranger in charge reported the plight of a wretched buffalo. It had, during the previous night, walked out to the muddy puddle for a drink and had got itself completely bogged down in the thick slime. The poor thing, frantic for water, and having probably walked miles for it, must have been so eager to get at a drink that it was right into the muddy quicksand before it knew what was happening. The struggle that it put up had only sunk its weight further into the morass.

The visitors kindly delivered the message as soon as they reached the Park office at Voi and Dennis started out immediately with a friend and tow ropes in his Land-Rover. This he drove as near as he dared to the shallow bottom end of the dam, taking care not to risk getting the vehicle bogged down. The buffalo was now so far sunk that only the top of its back and its head were above the evil chocolate mud. Dennis knotted all the ropes into one long length, filled up a tin basin of water, and armed with these started wading out towards the animal. He would have been above his knees in liquid mud had he not put down enough planks to walk on. The poor thing was so far gone, after struggling for twenty-four hours, that it made no attempt to move even its head and Dennis immediately proffered the basin of water. It put its big

black mackintosh nose into the basin and one of the most ferocious animals on earth drank as meekly as a kitten. When it had finished the water, it looked up with nothing but gratitude in its great terrified eyes. After this Dennis had no difficulty in winding the rope around its horns and making a rough halter-cum-bridle.

By this time the friend in the Land-Rover had loaded the gun, just in case. Dennis returned to the vehicle, paying out the end of the rope attached to the bridle as he did so. Then he engaged in a macabre kind of towing, driving very slowly at first until the rope was taut between the beast and the vehicle, and pulling the animal along very carefully until it was clear of the liquid mud and on ground hard enough to bear its weight. The animal found its feet almost at once, but now there was the task of getting the rope off its horns. Dennis was covered by the gun as he crept up from behind and with a long stick managed to flick the rope off one horn. At that moment the buffalo charged towards the Land-Rover, and in the split second that it put its head down to do so, Dennis flicked the rope off the other horn. As soon as it felt itself free, it spun around, and as Dennis dashed for the Land-Rover, the animal was practically on top of him as he swung his legs into the back of the vehicle. His friend let in the clutch and swerved out of the full charge of the terrified animal. They drove off some way across the parched mud and stopped. As they looked back, the buffalo stopped, too,

gave them one long thoughtful glance and made off in the opposite direction.

Even if the report is a depressing one, it is very heartening to the Park staff that so many people unconnected with wildlife preservation bring in information unasked and as a matter of duty to the animals. Only a few days after the buffalo was saved, another report was brought in by a visitor to the Park.

This time, a giraffe had been seen with a noose so tightly drawn around its neck that it had caused a large angry swelling. The unfortunate beast was trailing the long wire attached to the snare. The visitor in question was busy photographing a herd of about thirty giraffe when he noticed this lone animal a little way away, neither feeding nor moving much. The horrible reason became obvious as he looked through his binoculars.

As the area where the giraffe had been seen was about twenty miles away along the Park road running parallel with the main road, it was late to start out at four o'clock, but to Dennis there are no hours where a wounded animal is concerned. On the way there he described the type of snare to me. "Giraffes," he said, "are usually caught while browsing on the tops of their favourite conifer trees. The snare is set with a large noose hanging from the branches while the other end is tied to the trunk of the tree itself. Once caught, there is little or no hope of escape. The most the frantic creature can do is to pull on the wire

until it breaks. In so doing, it all but strangles itself. It then wanders sometimes for weeks in acute agony until mercifully released by death or, with luck, as in this case, until some animal lover sees and reports it."

Dennis reckoned that the herd would not have moved far, and after we had covered the twenty miles we slowed down and swept the area with our eyes. Small glades now opened up and clumps of conifer trees appeared each side of the road. Slowing down still more, we spotted the giraffe a few hundred yards away, their long brown-and-white chequered velvet necks towering above the canopies of the trees. As usual, when we had drawn up alongside, their innate curiosity came out and they just stood there staring at us with their huge black-curtained eyes. The only movement was that of the tick birds jinking from beast to beast as they sought bigger and juicier ticks.

The bush between the trees was so thick that Dennis decided to send a ranger to the rear of the herd to drive them out into an open glade. We could then cruise among them in the Land-Rover and get much closer than they would allow Dennis to come on foot. We waited some little time and nothing happened. No giraffe appeared in the open vista, but we heard the ranger calling as he walked towards us down the road. We drove up to him and were told that as we had expected, the giraffe had been scared off and out to the other side of the bush on to the open

plain. The Land-Rover ploughed through the bush for about half a mile in their direction and as we emerged from the thick curtain of branches there they were, quite close to us. The herd stood in two bunches and as Dennis drove between them he spotted the snared animal almost at once. "Get the gun ready," he called to a ranger in the back of the vehicle as we drove closer. The pitiful creature, instead of loping off at our near approach, took hardly any notice. The murderous wire hung down about four feet from its neck and the swelling above the noose was enormous. My nostrils caught that same sickening smell of death that we had experienced with the dead rhino, but I was still wondering hopelessly whether nothing could be done to save its life when I heard Dennis fire.

The pathetic creature dropped where it stood. Dennis quickly fired a second shot just to make certain it was dead. We walked over with heavy hearts to where the poor sprawling body lay.

Dennis tried to cheer me by saying it would have scarcely lived another few days and then only in excruciating pain. I could only be thankful that, in a Park of eight thousand square miles, some animal lover had seen and reported it and that we had been able to find it.

The whole of the Park now resembled a withered wilderness. The animals were so thirsty that they even approached civilisation in their desperate search for water. As soon as each parched night succeeded each scorching

day, we could hear them quite close to the house. The little remaining grass and bush, too near to the house for them to venture into normally, provided the only oasis in this barren waste.

The elephant came so close that not only could we hear the branches cracking like pistol shots as they tore them off in destructive delight but also the thunderous rumblings of their great bellies. The shy waterbuck came right up to the small green patch of grass formed by our wastewater drain and even slept in the open clearing near the house. The little sloe-eyed timid dik dik dared the front lawn itself and made a meal off my flower-beds during the night. An entire flock of vulturine guinea-fowl arrived one tea time to scratch up the grubs which had survived thanks to the drain water. After this and throughout the rest of that terrible drought, I had the garden tap turned on for them. With the punctuality of a regiment they came at the same time each evening for their drink.

The only person who was not happy at this invasion of her realm was Gipsy. The elephant and buck were too big to "shoo off" and they mostly came at night, but with the guinea-fowl she assumed her sporting-dog role. It was hilariously funny to see the entire flock with heads down and wings outspread advancing in battle formation on one small chastened Cairn.

This Noah's Ark collection of visitors was completed one night by a full-grown lion who had a drink from our drain.

Next morning, when I went to see if my ears had deceived me in the night, I found that enormous pug marks patterned the damp soil all around the overflow.

Terrible reports of five hundred animals dying or dead from drought had come in from the forty-four square mile Nairobi Park. What, we wondered, would be the toll in our eight thousand square mile Tsavo Park? Just as I, and even the usually optimistic Park wardens, were beginning to despair, the rains broke.

After the very first few inches had fallen, it was staggering to see how quickly the Park threw on its cloak of green again. Trees appeared to put out new shoots overnight and grass took root where there had been nothing but hard baked bare earth. For the first few weeks the whole Park was singing, but, as everywhere in Africa, nothing is done by halves.

Night and day it rained ceaselessly. Inch after inch fell until within six weeks the whole land was covered with sheets of water. The parched earth had now reached saturation point and could hold no more, but still it rained. Thunderstorms accompanied by a frightening amount of lightning were commonplace and we had as many as three and four a day at Voi. The many rivers through the Park swelled hourly and even the normally sluggish ones turned into raging torrents carrying all before them. The great forest trees of immense age which fringed the banks were torn up as if by giants, flung into the waters

and carried away. Whole stretches of familiar scenes were rendered unrecognisable overnight as the rivers overflowed their banks to one hundred yards and more on either side.

For the first time in history, Nairobi, the capital from which a 312-mile road runs to the port of Mombasa, its life-line, was cut off by both road and rail. Conversely, the residents of Mombasa who rely on fresh vegetables coming by train and lorry from the highlands of Kenya, had to content themselves with the tinned variety. The fresh meat supplies were similarly affected and soon stocks were running low.

At Voi we were completely cut off from both Nairobi and Mombasa, and as the tins quickly disappeared from the shelves of the two local shops, we began to wonder how long the siege would last. The animals seemed to have vanished from all their normal habitats. The Aruba dam soon lost its muddy puddle and filled up, water even running over the spillway for the first time since its construction. The Egyptian geese alone were unconcerned and had re-established themselves around the lips of the dam.

Some other lesser-known denizens of the dam were the cannibal barbus fish. During the drought they had dug themselves into the mud for an enforced hibernation. Even they, although they can remain buried for more than nine months at a time, must have been surprised at the length of their stay. They are long, fat, ugly fish with fleshy

whiskers or feelers. With these, and with spasmodic wiggings of their strong tails, they manage to dig themselves into the mud as deep as three feet. As soon as the rains broke, they all surfaced to swim up-stream to breed and feed off the talapia fish. To avoid this a grid had been built across the stream which feeds the dam. This was piled high with four hundred or more barbus. The barbus themselves are all bones and taste of mud.

Another strange visitor washed inland by the floods was a twelve-foot python. It was slithering its way across our drive when we first saw it. Dennis caught it somewhat apprehensively by the tail so that it could be photographed for our album, but it would be difficult to say which of them enjoyed it least. As soon as the portrait had been taken, the python was put into a sack and carried into the house. He weighed twenty pounds on my bathroom scales, but he got so excited at the smell of water that we soon returned him to the river and wished him farewell.

Felix Departs

During the gloom cast first by the drought and then by the floods, I was sustained at home by my family and by my animals. A couple of ostrich chicks had been added to the menagerie, but, sad to relate, one of the pair only lasted three days. I was an unwilling witness to the tragedy. As I sat on the veranda sewing, the large gawky chicks were scratching up the earth in a nearby flower-bed. Suddenly, an eagle plummeted down like a rocket, and punctured the lung of one of them with his cruel curved beak. He tried in vain to lift it up in his great yellow claws, but the ostrich was too heavy. It was all over in a second and I was glad that at least he was done out of his prey. The poor chick died almost immediately.

To keep the remaining chick company, I bought a very young chicken to be its new companion.

By now, Rufus was, if possible, more at home than ever and Felix had gained tremendous confidence. The latter had worked out a routine for himself and would disappear

at about ten o'clock each day. The first time he did this I was very worried and organised a search party to look for him in the bush surrounding the house and garden. Just when I was returning very dejectedly up the drive, still calling his name, he sprang out at me from under a small bush and clasped me round the legs with his paws. It was a joke to him but as I picked him up and carried him back to the house, I scolded him for giving me such a scare. On closer inspection I could see that he had made himself a comfortable den under this bush. After this he lay up there during the day.

Most of the time Felix and Gipsy were inseparable companions. They shared everything together. If Gipsy started to dig a hole in the garden, Felix would arrange himself behind her and, like a wicket-keeper, try to catch the lumps of earth as she flung them out between her back legs. Needless to say my garden was getting like a colander as a result of their excavations. At meal times, they would lap from the same saucer quite amicably and Felix would even allow Gipsy to take any piece of meat out of his plate to which she took a particular fancy. He was so generous that I had to put a stop to this or Gipsy would have had the lot and Felix have gone hungry. These privileges were not extended to the mongooses. If they approached too near, Felix would bat them out of range of his food with a big black paw. Horace only once managed to get through his guard and then it was lucky for him that Felix had his

mouth full at just that moment so that Horace escaped unbidden.

One of Felix's greatest games was chasing butterflies, with which our garden was swarming. We had the most exciting selection but it was all the same to Felix if they were rare ones or common cabbage whites. He could leap three feet into the air to catch the low-flying ones and if successful he would lie with the fluttering remains between his paws playing with it by the hour. The contrast of his sleek black fur against a bank of bright vermilion cannas with the white butterflies flitting past was something I longed to paint.

The butterfly game inspired us to buy him a rubber ball. He loved this with an all-consuming passion. Besides the fact that it was much more durable than any butterfly, it bounced every time he dropped it and he could then catch it in mid-air and start the exercise all over again. This usually took place on the cement floor and when it lodged behind a piece of furniture, he would stalk it, pounce on it and then carry it away in triumph. When he tired it would be carried out into the garden and hidden in a flower-bed. There was then the delicious excitement of looking for it and finding it again. Punctually at bed time each night, he would arrive complete with ball which he hid under his blanket.

Gipsy and he struck the most extraordinary postures together in the garden. They would first set out on a

solemn walk around the premises. If Felix stopped at a bush to have a sniff, Gipsy would have to do exactly the same. Once the rounds were over, Gipsy would sit down very purposefully with ears straight up while Felix rubbed his face all over hers. Gipsy would then do exactly the same to Felix. They then rubbed noses together and immediately after, raced off in the same direction. There was really no sensible explanation to all this unless it was a conference between them and once an agreement had been reached, decision was acted upon instantaneously.

As Gipsy had a collar and a lead, Felix had to have one of each too. It took a few weeks to train him to follow us on a walk. At first, he would come so far and no farther but as soon as he realised that just as all three of us went out of the drive so we would return, he began to follow us all the way. It was not long before he so looked forward to his afternoon walk that he would sit waiting on the veranda for the magic hour.

If it was not too hot, Dennis and I would walk quite a distance while Gipsy and Felix jumped and pounced at the slightest movement in the grass fringes of the road. On the way home Felix would start a race, but with his terrific turn of speed it was almost impossible for Gipsy to keep up. Rufus never came on the same walk with Felix. He was far too much of an individual and if he couldn't have Dennis and me to himself he wouldn't come at all. For some weeks now he had been reluctant to sleep inside the

RUFUS THE RHINO

house. He would run outside exactly at bed time, but was back early each morning scratching at the bedroom door to be let in. I was worried that one of the many leopards living in the hill behind might catch him, but as he was always there for his milk at the same time each morning, we thought it best to leave him to his own devices.

Then, one day, Gipsy was conspicuous by her absence. When I realised it was six o'clock and not more than three-quarters of an hour to dark, I was really concerned. Dennis and I set off to search her usual hunting grounds while I kept up a constant repetition of her special whistle. She had always come immediately she heard this, before, but now both calling and whistling were in vain. We had to keep to the game paths as the surrounding bush was practically impenetrable and as darkness fell we were forced to give up the search for her and return home. We sat for a long time hoping she and Felix would suddenly appear as it was inconceivable to me that Gipsy could survive the night outside. I wondered what had happened and how far Felix had led her astray. They were wonderful hunting companions and the wild was Felix's domain, but it was hardly that of a Cairn terrier. It was midnight before I gave up hope and went miserably to bed.

As dawn broke next day, after an almost completely sleepless night, I set off with the faithful Kulunda on one last desperate search for my beloved Gipsy. We walked



Rufus with Punch, Judy and one of the ostrich chicks

Rufus at five months and one of the ostrich chicks





*Rufus, now about fifteen months old,
and the baby elephants*

FELIX DEPARTS

down every possible path calling and whistling and only gave up in defeat when it was almost midday.

I returned to the veranda inconsolable and quite frantic at her loss. I was sitting gazing at the undrunk cup of tea that Kulunda had made to try and cheer me, when a small bundle appeared out of nowhere. It was Gipsy, but almost unrecognisable. She advanced with her tail between her legs, shame written all over her face, and the rest of her one matted tangle of burrs. Overjoyed with excitement at the return of my most constant companion, I rushed to get her water and something to eat. The water she gulped down, but strangely enough she was not at all hungry.

We returned to the veranda but she was too restless to settle down and kept her ears pricked and her nose pointing in the same direction away from me. I decided to walk a little distance in the direction of her interest hoping she would lead me to Felix. This, in fact, was exactly what she did.

Once away from the house she started running on ahead of me and then racing back to see if I was still following. When I called "Felix", once or twice, she went mad with excitement and raced blindly on. It was almost impossible to keep up as there was no path at all, only an ill-defined newly-made track. As I blundered along I noticed a few feathers which struck me as oddly fresh. Gipsy had now slowed down. She stuck her tail out straight behind, and

started that stilted walk that I knew so well meant we were about to meet something unusual.

As I, too, slowed down, I realised that we had gone so far that we were almost half-way up the hill. Gipsy now stood quite still, wagging her tail. I could not see the object of her delight as the noonday sun was like a white flame and, reflecting from a solid mass of white convolvulus flowers ahead, completely blinded me. When I had adjusted my sight there was still nothing to be seen except the cool green depths of the foliage and the contrasting loveliness of the flowers. Not knowing quite what to do, but displaying the utmost caution, I called "Felix" again, not daring to hope that he would hear and show himself. Gipsy froze and at that moment, from behind a large rock covered with the convolvulus, out walked Felix. He looked magnificent in his sleek black coat contrasting with the white flowers. We were delighted to see each other. He had never showed his treacherous claws at me in his life. It was no different now as I picked him up. He put his paws round my neck and purred like a little engine, rubbing his furry face against my shoulder.

As I put him down Gipsy rushed up to him and rubbed noses. She then ran on past him with some purpose, and I was suspicious that the two of them were in league and had something hidden behind the rock. I walked round slowly and there to my horror were the mangled remains of the pet chicken I had trained as the ostrich's companion.

They were both extremely proud of their kill and it made me even more angry when I realised how the two of them had been within a few yards of us when we passed calling and whistling the day before. Neither had given the slightest sign and I was stung by their deception and treachery. To think that Gipsy had only returned at all because she was thirsty and was probably even then quite loth to leave the kill to Felix. It was obvious that Gipsy was now quite dominated by Felix's influence and would, therefore, have to be closely watched in the future.

Making scolding noises all the way down the hill, I made my way back to the house, closely followed by the two unrepentant murderers.

Some time before, we had built a small platform in a giant forest tree which grew about three hundred yards from the house. We had also put down two drinking troughs and in the clearing around them we had placed a large block of rock salt. The two troughs were filled with water every two days. This was quite an operation as we had to put three forty-gallon drums into the back of the Land-Rover, fill them with water and then drive very carefully over the rough ground between the back of the house and the tree-house. Kulunda came with us to clean out the troughs and to fill them up with fresh water; I am sure we benefited every bit as much as the animals from this arrangement.

My daily visit was the highlight of a walk I took with

Gipsy and Felix. We almost always saw two little dik dik, perhaps the daintiest deer in Africa, who also loved the cleared bush around the tree-house and especially the salt block. In a very short time they had made a complete groove through it with their tongues. Whenever I climbed up into the platform I could look down and watch beneath me the wild and the domestic animals at play. There was Gipsy, a household dog, playing with one of the wildest of the cat tribe, Felix, and only a short distance away were two of the shyest buck in the forest.

This idyll was, of course, confined to the daylight hours, but at night an extraordinary selection of the wilder animals visited the troughs to drink. The story of the spoor was there for all to read next morning. A rhino had been coming quite regularly, and I wondered wistfully whether it could perhaps be Rufus's mother. Then there were the huge padded prints of lion, the lesser dog-like ones of hyena and a large selection of the sharp pointed ones of various types of buck. One day when I went down to read the pattern of the prints, I was glad Gipsy and Felix were not with me. As I approached the big tree a flutter of tick birds flew up just in front of me. As the role of these birds is an uninterrupted de-ticking, for food, of either elephant or rhino, I stopped dead in my tracks, but not for long. At that moment I was greeted by the unmistakable snorting and puffing of a nearby rhino. I never saw him as I turned and raced back up the path to the safety

of the garden. After this episode I never again visited the tree-house without either Dennis or Kulunda. They usually made such a noise talking in Swahili to each other that it would have scared off any wild thing long before we got there.

Gipsy was now completely under Felix's influence. We soon realised that the fact that she could get water from the troughs would very probably prevent her coming back to the house for it the next time they were out on one of their hunts together. We were, therefore, forced to stop taking water down to the tree-house.

Felix was now eight months old and therefore nearly mature. A friend had told me that the male serval nearly always mates at nine or ten months old. His feeding habits had changed quite a lot lately. Instead of three bottles of milk each day, he would now only take one and sometimes not even that. I was not sorry as he was not a tidy feeder. He had also a rooted dislike to his lead although his collar did not appear to trouble him at all. I took all these small signs to mean that he was just growing up. His affection towards us and to Gipsy never wavered, which was all that mattered. Never, even during one of their rows with each other, had he so much as scratched Gipsy, and Dennis and I had hardly ever even seen his claws out. This was exceptional, as the serval in his natural habitat is a most vicious creature.

Then one day Felix disappeared, never to return.

We had been out for the day leaving Kulunda strict instructions to keep a very close watch on the "hunters". Gipsy was quite capable of stalking and killing chicken or guinea-fowl alone but with Felix to show off to, and as a partner in crime, there was no knowing what mischief they would get up to. I had watched Felix during a chase. He was as fast as lightning and could spring over quite large bushes. Any dik dik would be easy prey. The two of them even practised together in an imaginary hunt in the garden. They would start by stalking a small pigeon when one was drinking from the waste-water pipe. As they took up their positions, Felix would creep up on his belly under cover from bush to bush, while Gipsy would turn into the complete "gun dog". She would remain in this ridiculous pose, head, tail and body all in one straight motionless line, with legs completely stiff and hardly moving. Then as if Felix had blown a whistle they would pounce simultaneously on to the victim.

When we returned, it was a long sad tale that Kulunda had to tell. He had apparently been playing with Felix and Gipsy while watering the garden. He quite often sprayed them with the hose on the hottest days. They loved this and it saved me bathing Gipsy, whereas Felix kept himself clean. Kulunda finished his watering and having, out of the corner of his eye, noticed Felix walking off, with Gipsy following close behind, he went in search of them. They were nowhere to be seen so Kulunda

decided to go down to the tree-house to look. It was a great relief when he saw the two of them lying up from the sun under one of the bushes. Usually Felix was obedient to Kulunda and came at once whenever he called him, but not so to-day. Felix simply lay there and stared him out. Remembering our instructions, and knowing that Gipsy was now completely under Felix's spell, he was going to have no more nonsense, so he picked Gipsy up and started back to the house. Gipsy was heavy to carry so when they got half-way, Kulunda put her down thinking she would now follow him for the rest of the way. She immediately gave chase after some quite uninteresting bird and then doubled back in the direction of Felix. She did not deceive Kulunda for one moment. He picked her up again, carried her right back into the house, and locked her into the sitting-room.

After this, Kulunda went back to his watering and it was not until some time later, when he finished, that Gipsy's disappearance was discovered. She had broken through a window; there could be little doubt where she had gone. Poor Kulunda, by now thoroughly alarmed, returned to the tree-house, but found nothing there. Plenty of tracks, however, showed that while he was worried sick with anxiety the two of them had had a wonderful game. He returned to the house defeated and dreading our return.

After listening to his story, Dennis and I set off immedi-

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ately on a search. We went straight to the tree-house calling Gipsy all the time, but got no response.

It was nearly dark when we were forced to give up. As we walked back, my heart dragged like my feet. I remembered how the tiny black cat had come into my life. How I had fed him night and day and how he had so very nearly died. I thought of the happy times we had had together, and of course of Gipsy, the most faithful of them all. And now the call of the wild had taken Felix, and poor, domesticated, deluded, silly little Gipsy had decided that it was the wild life for her too. I had lost them both. It was altogether too much to hope that as she had once got away with a night in a leopard-infested area, she could possibly survive a second time. It was equally useless to hope that either or both would return that night, especially if they had made another kill. The only thing left to do was to organise a wide-spread search next morning.

At dawn Dennis sent out a large party of rangers in the charge of one who was considered a really expert tracker. For a whole day they searched in vain, in a radius of over a mile. If Felix had led Gipsy farther than this, there would be little or no hope of her ever finding her way back, even if she had not already made a leopard's dinner. The rangers returned at 8.30 p.m., empty handed, having picked up the original tracks which had crossed and recrossed each other, leading them nowhere.

The following morning, my last hope came and went.



Rufus at feeding time (ten months old)

Rufus and Susannah





Rufus, two and a quarter years old



*Kulunda with Buster,
his favourite*

FELIX DEPARTS

There was still no sign of either of them. They might never have existed. I walked automatically down to the tree-house, not with any expectancy, but just for something to do. Of course they were not there. I knew they would not be. I stumbled back up the hill crying.

Dennis came over from the office during the morning to see if there had been any news. He tried his best to cheer me by saying he was sure the two of them would return. How could he be so silly, I thought, when they had now been out in the wild for two whole nights and days.

I had flung myself down into a deck-chair on the veranda, puffy-eyed and trying to swallow the marble in my throat, when round the corner came Kulunda. He was carrying the same matted bundle of fur as before and my heart leapt because it could be no other than Gipsy. He had found her making her hard way home when he was returning from the tree-house. She was in a far worse condition than the first time. There were even more burrs all over her and the hair round her face was such a matted mask that it was amazing that she could see at all. When I snatched her up and tried to brush the mat back I noticed that her eyes were very bloodshot.

This time she accepted both food and water and was so exhausted that she lay down immediately and slept not only through the rest of that day, but right through the next day as well.

Felix never returned and Gipsy alone knew where they

had been and what had happened. Had she realised that her serval boy-friend belonged to the wild and had no intention of returning to the boredom of domestic life? More humiliating, had Felix found himself a mate? Or perhaps in her heart, had Gipsy regretted leaving me?

I flattered myself that I might mean more to her than her new-found love, a cat at that.

Gipsy's return did not in any way make up for the loss of Felix. We all missed him horribly, all, that is, with the exception of Rufus, who had heartily disliked him. Gipsy was the most affected, and for four whole weeks nursed a broken heart. She moped about the house and although she never left my heels when outside our walks held no interest for her. Instead of the gambolling, stalking, bounding and pouncing which had punctuated all the walks with her wonderful black friend, she now followed along behind us as a sort of duty, taking no interest in her surroundings.

The only time she showed any animation was when we mentioned Felix's name. To prove that I had not imagined all this, I sometimes called his name out aloud. Immediately Gipsy would jump up, dart outside and start looking all round the house for him, only to return looking more dejected than ever.

Nothing could quite make up for the loss of Felix, but Judy did her best by producing a baby male mongoose under the big arm-chair. The husband, I regret to say

was not anybody we knew, but a wild mongoose she had secretly seduced. Perhaps she knew Horace for the cad he was, as she would certainly have none of him, try as he would. The baby was revolting, about the size of a field mouse, and a beastly pink colour covered with brown down. Judy, however, thought him divine and I eventually persuaded her that the original mongoose box was a more suitable maternity ward than the floor under the arm-chair.

Three whole months had passed since Felix had disappeared and I had almost given up hope of ever seeing him again. One night, however, after we had gone to bed, I was woken by the old familiar sound of him scratching at the door to be let in. My heart raced for joy, and struggling into my dressing-gown and snatching up a torch, I ran on to the veranda. I was even more convinced that it must be Felix by the way Gipsy was sitting by the door wagging her tail off. Instead, there was a shout from Dennis, who had gone around the other side of the veranda. "It's no cat, it's an elephant!" I raced round to Dennis with the torch in time to see a huge bull elephant busy reaching for the one and only bunch of ripe bananas on my one and only banana tree. Dennis let out a yell and picking up the nearest missile hurled it at the elephant. I am sure this is about the only time that a full-grown elephant has had a dog's enamel plate thrown at it. The elephant turned and as he did so a yapping bundle of fury

raced between his pillar-like legs. This was Gipsy. What she thought she could do considering she wasn't even the size of one his feet, no one knows. The fact remains, that the combination of a tin plate, a screaming Cairn and the hullabaloo that Dennis set up, saved my bananas.

My disappointment at not finding Felix was soon offset by the fact that no amount of calling would get Gipsy back into the house. She was quite the most plucky dog I had ever had, but this was just showing off. I began to wonder whether I *had* heard Felix scratching at the same time that Dennis heard the elephant, and whether Gipsy too had heard him. We whistled until our mouths ached, then gave up and went to bed leaving the door open for her. She returned hours later looking very guilty.

First thing next morning, I searched the garden in the dew for any tracks that could possibly have belonged to Felix. There was one pug mark exactly like his.

Six months later, nine months after Felix's departure, I had a presentiment about him. I had been thinking about his disappearance and cheering myself by the thought that it was at least after the floods had finished, so there must have been plenty of rats, guinea-fowl, chicks etc., for him to kill and eat. My "hunch" that I would see him again, developed most strongly whenever we drove through a certain area only about three miles from the house. It was so real that the minute we got to this spot I started looking for him. I did not dare tell Dennis as I thought he

would only laugh at what the family have always called my "psychic tendencies". Then one day there were three gerenuk in this area and we stopped to watch them. There was one little chap who could not have been more than three weeks old and it was fascinating to see how even at this early stage he copied his mother, by standing on his hind legs to reach an extra juicy tip.

The "hunch" was now so strong that I started talking about the gerenuk to Dennis in an extra loud voice. This is obviously what Felix heard, for suddenly he sat bolt upright in the long grass to see if it was really me. As soon as the gerenuk saw this lovely black cat they were off. Felix, however, sat there flicking his ears as he always did when something out of the ordinary aroused his curiosity. I held my breath, terrified of frightening him and praying that he wouldn't move off. A rain-bird chose this moment to flap out of a nearby tree and let out a raucous squawk as it flew past. I could have wrung its neck, but Felix took no notice and remained where he was. I then dared to call "Felix". He flicked his ears again and did not seem to be in the least frightened. I think we had perhaps disturbed him in the middle of stalking a prey for his next meal.

We sat staring at each other until the suspense was too much for me. Slowly I opened the door of the Land-Rover and got out. I walked unhurriedly towards where Felix was sitting, calling him by name in that special high-pitched tone I had always reserved for him and I had

actually got to within less than ten yards of him, when, alas, I saw him crouch down, turn and bound off into the bush.

Even when he had been completely tame, he never liked to be picked up. Now obviously he had returned to the wild. I made Dennis drive me back to the same spot next day, but there was no sign of him.

Three weeks later a friend of ours was working on a pipe-line not fifty yards from the spot where we had seen Felix. Having never himself seen Felix, he was surprised to notice an "extra-large black domestic cat" sitting under a tree only a little distance off and taking no notice at all of the noise and bustle of his workmen. Our friend could not get any closer as the animal bounded off into the bush, but it was such a queer-looking cat that he mentioned the incident to Dennis when next he saw him. He described Felix exactly. This proved beyond doubt that the one spot in the vast surrounding plain where I had my "hunch" was indeed Felix's hideout. It also proved that he had not moved far during the intervening three weeks.

We talked it all over and decided to try to trap him. I was anxious in case his collar had got too tight for him or might cause him to get caught up. I also wanted to see what condition he was in as even in the short time in which I saw him he looked thin.

We set off the very next day armed with meat and a

panga knife, the former to tempt Felix and the latter to clear away the thick grass from under the tree where we had seen him sitting.

As soon as we approached the tree, I saw something black half-hidden in the long grass not five yards from the tree. It was Felix. I started my high-pitched call again, walking quietly towards him all the time. I carried his old plate piled with fresh meat in my left hand and got so close that I stretched out my right hand to touch him. He was off, bounding into the nearest thicket and away, and I was left standing holding the plate of meat.

The only cheering factor was that this time I had got so much closer. We started clearing all the grass and small bushes away from under the tree. This done, we placed the meat in the centre of the clearing and drove back home. Next day we returned to the spot to find the meat all gone and the empty plate surrounded by Felix's footprints. So far, so good, but after repeating the whole performance the following day, we were disappointed to find the meat untouched.

We returned again the next morning to find the meat gone, but instead of Felix's small footprints, the much larger spoor of a hyena.

Seeing my expression, Dennis said, "Don't worry, the hyena will move off. He won't be here to-morrow." With this he placed the meat back in the same place in the middle of the clearing and once more we drove off home.

It was a little exciting when, next day, we discovered that two serval cats had taken the meat, for there were unmistakably two lots of prints. Felix alone could not have made such a pattern unless he had literally jumped over the meat six times before eating it and then run all round it like a dervish.

Thus encouraged, we decided to do some alterations to an animal box-trap we already had. It was quite small, about three feet long, and only the door needed strengthening. At the same time, we had the wooden planks at one side replaced by wire netting. This would give us better observation of anything we might be successful in catching, especially if it turned out to be Felix's mate. The first day we placed the meat in the original place and the trap alongside. On our second visit we discovered that only one serval cat had taken the meat, and gone off. Knowing how cunning Felix was, on the third day we placed the meat inside the box. As we expected, on revisiting the scene on the fourth day, Felix or his friend had walked all round the box, but had been too wary to take the meat from inside. On the fifth day, therefore, Dennis put the meat just inside the entrance and we once more returned home to await events.

We never left more than about half a pound of meat at a time, just to whet but not to satisfy his appetite, so as to try and ensure his return. Sometimes I varied the diet and left some brand of tinned meat. This always used to

be a favourite with Felix, although I had never given it to him except when the fresh meat ran out.

On the sixth day our patience was rewarded as the meat had been taken from the inside of the trap, and there was only one set of footprints up to it and back. This time we strung the meat on to the wire hook at the end of the box and set the trap.

On the seventh and last visit I was brimming over with excitement and anticipation. As we parked the Land-Rover I could see that the trap was sprung and the door down. Was my lovely sleek black Felix sitting in the box or was it his common spotted mate? If it was Felix, would he recognise me and let me lift him gently out, take him home and would we all "live happily ever after"? If it was only the spotted one, we would be greeted by a wild snarling and spitting, but surely it was more likely to be Felix.

Hardly able to breathe, and in order not to excite the prisoner, we literally tip-toed the last forty yards of the way. I noticed that Dennis was even avoiding the big tufts of grass in case the slight crunching noise could be heard from the trap. Like him, I, too, walked only on the hard spaces of bare earth. Every step nearer, the excitement mounted until we were level with the tree and crept round the box to the wire-netted side. The trap was empty.

Dennis was busy examining the bait and with a supreme effort I managed to look as if I were interested. "He

didn't go right into the box," said Dennis. "Instead of taking the meat with his teeth, he must have tried to snatch it off the hook with his paws." I remembered how often I had held out some juicy morsel of meat to him and instead of grabbing it with his teeth, he would take it delicately in his paws without so much as putting one claw out. Dennis confirmed my recollection by saying, "He must have found it difficult to grasp the meat properly and after a few taps at it, the trap door must have closed on his back." I looked with horror at the evidence that what he was saying was true; there was some black fur on the underside of the door where he had reversed out.

Dennis quickly assured me that since the door was only made of plywood, it could not have injured Felix. "At the most, he lost a bit of hair," said Dennis. I, however, would not be satisfied until I had seen Felix again and made sure he was all right.

We gave up all hope of ever catching him and removed the trap for good, only leaving a little meat behind. We then drove around the area in the vague hope of catching a glimpse of him, but we did not see him.

For the next few days, the meat was put out and as many times left untouched.

Then Felix returned and ate the meat. Now I knew at least that he had not been crippled by the trap. I never saw him again, but on one last occasion Dennis caught a glimpse of him.

He was driving up the pipe-line road not far from the tree one day when his eye caught a glimpse of fur in the grass and as he watched, an ordinary spotted serval cat bounded off at high speed. He stopped the Land-Rover and switched off the engine. The spotted cat stopped too, some way off and crouched in the long grass. Dennis waited for about ten minutes, giving my high-pitched call for "Felix".

Just as he was about to drive off, he saw a completely black tail flick up above the level of the grass. He got out and still calling started to walk towards the now invisible tail. When within a few yards of the spot, Felix jumped up and slowly strolled off in the opposite direction.

Dennis returned to the Land-Rover and from the added height was able to see Felix walk towards the spotted cat and flop down beside her. He then proceeded to clean his face on his paws. It was quite obvious that all was well with him and Dennis observed that he had even managed to get rid of his collar, thus shedding the last of the civilised world.

The Vulturines, Jacky and the Badger

With the rains, the sansevera had grown up into a thick hedge, which the vulturine guinea-fowl found excellent cover. I have always thought them the most beautiful of African birds. Their chests are a mixture of cobalt and cerulean blue, topped by a long mantle of black and white feathers, with black and white spotted backs. To complete the picture they have a brown madder tuft at the back of the neck and a ruby eye. The chicks are rather dull in comparison, being mostly black, white and brown.

All of them would congregate around our drain like a blue mist. If this was full they all started a contented clucking chorus while they drank their fill, but should the drain be empty the tremendous strident trilling they set up was quite deafening. This only ceased when I went in and turned on the bathroom tap. They then all raced into the drain like the Gadarene swine, even taking baths in the damp earth of the flower-beds. Gipsy resented these

THE VULTURINES, JACKY AND THE BADGER

invaders bitterly, and when she raced out to drive them away the noise was indescribable.

During one of these visits by the guinea-fowl I ran out to stop Gipsy, who I presumed had caused the panic, but instead there was a blue-backed jackal standing quite still, watching them. He did not seem to be afraid and stood gazing from me to the guinea-fowl and back again. As soon as he moved off, the whole flock flew up and away. That afternoon, he appeared again, this time much closer to the house. I thought he must be hungry so I cut up some meat, put it into a tin plate and tried to get nearer to him with it, but he ran off immediately.

I then put the plate down in the middle of the drive, wiped out any footprints near it and retired to the house, locking Gipsy up for about an hour to make sure she couldn't steal the meat. When I returned the plate was empty and surrounded by the jackal's footprints. All next day I watched for his return, but there was no sign of him. It was late evening, but I put the plate down in the same place just as before. When it was almost dark I returned to the spot and there he was, sitting near the empty plate, calmly cleaning his paws. I repeated this exercise every evening, putting the plate of meat nearer the house each time, until the jackal was actually taking his meal on our front lawn.

"How wonderful it would be," I said to Dennis, "if I could tame him enough for him to become a playmate for

Gipsy." Dennis then told me that he was probably the jackal that had been brought into the office some time before and put in a cage. As soon as he was grown up enough to fend for himself, he had been released in the Park.

This was very inspiring as jackal are very shy of humans. My plan was to put Gipsy on the lead each evening at "Jacky's" feeding time and walk her round as near as I dared. This worked like a charm and within a few days they were the best of friends, so much so that fickle Gipsy appeared to have completely forgotten her broken heart. For this I was thankful and as I went each evening to the kitchen to cut up the meat I encouraged her by saying, "This is for Jacky, not for you, Gipsy." She would then sit on the front step of the veranda waiting for him. As soon as she spotted him, she would run down the hill to meet him. The greeting was the same as with Felix, a sniffing of noses and then both would run up to the lawn together wagging their tails.

We tried to get Jacky to come into the house and might have been successful but for Judy. She was quite determined that no wild jackal should come anywhere near her baby. If Jacky got as near as the veranda door she raced out scolding and shrieking at the top of her voice until Jacky retired. Her mate, we discovered, lived at the top of the hill behind the house and we now saw him quite often. Whenever she came in season she would disappear

for two or three days on end. After one of these disappearances she arrived back in a terrible state. Half her tail was missing, two of her toes were almost off and there was a deep gash over one eye. Whether this was due to her husband or some jealous female we never found out, but she had recovered completely three days later.

The next fatality was Punch, who disappeared one day and was never seen again. Perhaps, as the champion of his sister Judy, he had been killed in combat with the wild mongoose.

Horace, the cad, showed that he had a decent streak in his make-up by adopting Judy's baby. He temporarily lost all interest in the cats and turned into an exemplary baby-sitter. He either sat with it, keeping away anyone who approached, or carried it in his mouth wherever he went.

One evening, as Jacky was waiting patiently for his meal, I heard the most agonised yelp from him. When I rushed out to see what was the matter, there was Horace firmly fastened on to Jacky's nose. His needle-like teeth must have been excruciatingly painful, and he only let go after I had nearly yelled myself hoarse. Presumably poor Jacky had gone too near to Horace's new protégé. He kept his nose well out of reach ever after.

In spite of this nasty experience, and the fact that the cats invariably chased him, Jacky became tamer than ever. He loved me to scratch him behind the ear and had a

passion for my shoes. If they were missing they would always be found in his sleeping-place down the hill where he had carried them off in triumph. His next favourite toys were my dusters. Any that were left lying about by the staff were seized upon, thrown up in the air to be caught again, and shaken furiously like a victim. Gipsy, who had to join in any game, would end up by having a ferocious tug-of-war with him. It was expensive on both shoes and dusters.

Another game they organised even better was "hunt the lizard". At dawn Gipsy scratched at our door to be let out and Jacky was always outside to meet her. They then ambushed a lizard somewhere in the short grass in front of the house. When the wretched creature hid under a stone or bush, Jacky would guard one side while Gipsy flushed it from the other. Jacky then allowed it to race off some distance before making his mighty pounce to bite it in two. As a cat with a mouse, there was no further interest once the prey was dead, except to look for another. Gipsy, however, had to be in on it somehow, so she carried off the corpse to roll on it.

Until now Jacky had taken no apparent interest in any of the other jackals which we frequently saw or heard around the house, but one day he arrived trotting up the drive, closely followed by another. Bringing his girlfriend up for some dinner, I thought, and was just about to get some more meat to put out in another plate when

jealous Gipsy arrived. She drove them off in no uncertain manner and I was furious with her, but to my delight Jacky broke back, gave me a friendly nip in the heel as he passed behind and went straight to the back door where he sat patiently for his food. As soon as he had finished he went off down the drive again and there waiting for him, with her nose peeping round a small bush, was his little girl-friend.

The next day Jacky was missing and his plate of meat remained untouched. The following morning, while Kulunda was opening the back door to let in the day, he heard some yapping outside. He looked cautiously through the kitchen window to see not only the two jackals but Gipsy, all playing together quite happily in the dawn. Kulunda called me to come and have a look at this strange sight; a semi-tame jackal, a completely wild one, and a Cairn terrier all enjoying a romp in my back yard; but as soon as the wild female saw me she bolted like a blue streak. Jacky followed her close behind and never returned to the house.

The divorce, I am glad to say, was not complete, for we often saw him again in our walks, but always with the mate. Poor Gipsy was now deserted.

It was not long, however, before we had another visitor, perhaps the most unusual of them all. Living where we did, there was always something on the prowl round the house at night, and the variety of noises was most exciting.

Some nights as I lay safe in my bed, it was like listening to a three-act drama. First, the warning note of approaching danger which was invariably given by the high-pitched whistle of the tiny dik dik. Then the loud barking of the male baboons, followed by the unmistakable cough of the leopard. The most blood-curdling noise of all was when the great spotted cat caught one of the baboons and there was the hideous finale of the killer's victorious growls and the petrified shrieks of his victim as he was carried off in the leopard's powerful jaws.

Our new visitor turned out to be a badger. We first heard him prowling round the house at about 11.30 p.m. He arrived when Gipsy was locked up for the night and when everything was quiet. In the moonlight we saw him pass underneath our window. He stopped at the back and busily picked up the left-over maize meal and meat from the cats' evening meal. He was conspicuous in his pure-white and jet-black coat supported by his little black legs. He evidently liked the posho mixture of maize meal for he was there again, not only the next night, but for the next few weeks. His visits got earlier and earlier until he became a regular visitor each evening at about seven o'clock. I encouraged him by augmenting the cats' food quite a lot.

He waited quite patiently while the cats finished, then he took up their communal tin plate in his mouth and waddled with it to the end of the house. Having licked this

clean he then retraced his steps, picking up any small morsels which he had dropped en route. After the moon waned we tried, at first cautiously, to watch him through the pantry window with the aid of a torch. He did not mind the light, in fact he was scared by nothing.

Gipsy sat tolerantly by while the badger walked off with the cats' plate, but this amicable agreement only lasted until he decided to have a bit more from Gipsy's plate on the front veranda. She was always very jealous of anyone coming anywhere near her food. Even when she had finished eating and did not want any more, she guarded the plate like a sentry until she got bored. The old badger waited for this moment, when he could sneak up from behind and carry it off.

The sitting-room light flooded the whole front veranda and one night we witnessed a priceless scene between these two. The badger arrived unknown to Gipsy, who caught him in the very act of removing her food plate before she had even started her meal. The badger bolted with the plate with Gipsy tearing alongside barking her fury. The badger juggled the plate from side to side in his teeth as he ran, with his tail straight up in the air. The object of this was to see where he was going, as if he held the plate straight his view was completely obscured. It was a most ridiculous sight.

After this episode, Gipsy waited every night for the badger and as soon as it got dark he would come trotting

across the lawn to within about two yards of her. Here he would stand, snarling, while Gipsy stood over her plate growling back. She only once completely lost her temper and went into the attack. When I saw this, I rushed out, calling to her frantically, as I knew full well who would come off worst if the badger turned. There was only a glimmer of moon that night. I thought Gipsy returned rather more readily than usual. It wasn't until the animal emerged into the half-shadows almost at my feet that I realised that it was the badger who had come to my call and not Gipsy. I froze where I stood while Gipsy rushed up but the badger had already grabbed her plate and they tore off neck and neck across the lawn. This time Gipsy knew she had lost the battle and returned to me wagging her tail. This was to try and fool me that she had been big enough to let him have her supper.

Rufus Transferred

On Rufus's first birthday I was inspired to make the most successful cake I have ever made. It was certainly unique for it was eighteen inches across and made of posho maize meal. This was a favourite food of his and I even sprinkled it with white flour to look like icing. To Dennis was given the honour of sticking the one candle on top and of cutting the first slice. The "Birthday Boy" was called, and arrived at a trot to witness the ceremony. He was breathing so hard with excitement that he blew clouds of "icing" all over Dennis. I was only just in time to take a photograph of this family scene, Rufus with his mouth open, Dennis offering a slice of cake, and both looking very well behaved, but before I had turned the spool on for another shot, our Birthday Boy had picked up the whole cake. Dennis only just managed to rescue the candle.

Rufus was now the proud possessor of a front horn two inches long. It never ceases to amaze me that a rhino's horn is made of nothing more than solidified hair; it

eventually grows anything up to three feet in length, and can damage a Land-Rover almost beyond recognition. The second one which lies behind the first had not broken through yet and showed only as a slight curve in his profile, but the front one was a great joy to him, so much so, that he was to be seen daily busily polishing it in the soft red earth. It was all part of growing up. He was, in fact, so rotund now that there was barely room for him in the small stable with Buster and Susannah, the two buffaloes. I spoke to Dennis about this and he suggested moving them all up to a much bigger stable behind the head offices. This had belonged to the seven-year-old elephant, Samson, and his mate, Aruba, who was four now and who had been moved out to two much larger stockades.

I was more than worried at the prospect. Apart from my loving Rufus dearly, there was his all-consuming passion for me to be considered. He was so possessive that he practically never left my side except to go to bed, and even this had become quite a trial. He resented his herdsman coming for him at bedtime more and more and used every possible ruse to elude him and come sneaking back to me. He hated strangers, especially if they came anywhere near me to deliver a message or have a discussion. Most of them were never allowed this far. They were charged and sent flying up the nearest tree or into the safety of the back quarters. Then, having satisfied himself that he had routed them, he would return to me triumph-

ant and would sink down on the veranda with a huge sigh of relief that we were alone together once more. If Dennis and I went out for the day, Rufus started crying as soon as he saw the Land-Rover being driven out, and apparently he moped all day until I came back.

He had no idea of his strength or size now or that what had originally been considered funny little pranks such as pushing all the chairs and tables around the sitting-room, dining-room or veranda, had now become quite dangerous and destructive. A decision had to be taken.

A large pen was therefore made in front of the stable with a drinking trough for Rufus and the two buffaloes. The overflow from this made an excellent mud-bath for Rufus. Although I tried to console myself that he would still be under my watchful eye, I realised that it meant that he would be leaving us. Apart from the distance between the house and the new pen, he would obviously graze nearer his new stable. It was no exaggeration to say that Rufus sensed his departure. He started by being difficult. When he was introduced to his new herdsman, he flatly refused to leave his old pen. He planted himself in the middle and all four fat feet appeared to be stuck into the ground. The herdsman coaxed, pushed and cajoled, to no effect. The herdsman's attempt at pushing Rufus was ludicrous for he was trying to move a stubborn four hundred pounds of solid rhino. The only possible hope of moving him was for me to take over.

RUFUS THE RHINO

And so the sad little procession started: me in front, calling his name, followed immediately by Rufus, who cried the entire way, the hated herdsman bringing up the rear. I felt like a fond mama taking her ewe lamb to school for his first term, but like any normal schoolboy, Rufus settled down in his new stable quite quickly.

The house and garden felt very empty without him, but I was relieved that the whole operation seemed to have gone off without incident. My task next day was to walk up and visit the three of them and to introduce them to the two tame elephants. Samson, the elder of them, took very little notice either of the buffalo or of Rufus, but Aruba, who was three years younger and still playful and high spirited, took an instant liking to Rufus, and adopted him from the start. Whether it was an abnormally over-developed maternal instinct at her tender age or whether it was because he was more her own size than Samson, we did not know, but she took him over from the second they met. She curled her trunk over his back, and even around his face, like a large nanny putting her arm round a child and all the time she made extraordinarily affectionate rumbling noises in her throat. From that moment Aruba took complete charge and chased away Susannah, Buster and, in fact, anyone who dared to come anywhere near Rufus. They ate every meal side by side. If Rufus felt like lying down, Aruba would guard him by standing over the top of him with her legs straddled each side of his



The Mud Bath: Rufus, now two, with Tommy, Kulunda and Brian

"He lay there, eyes closed, in a delirium of bliss"





Jacky

"He had a passion for my shoes"



RUFUS TRANSFERRED

barrel-shaped body. It was the most absurd sight, for if anybody came within a few yards of them, Aruba would flap her ears like fans and wave her trunk in the most menacing fashion. Rufus basked in this new-found affection and even if Aruba found it necessary to add some shrill trumpeting in her defence of him he seemed only to be the more impressed. He just lay there between her legs with his eyes closed for his midday nap, secure in his magnificent isolation.

After only a few days spent in exploring his new surroundings, Rufus decided that the workshop or the garage held the most interest for him. Deprived of my tables and chairs, he had to show off his strength to Aruba by pushing around all the empty oil-drums and boxes he found in the workshop. There was only one thing that defeated him and that was the anvil. He compromised by scratching his back on it.

Instead of wondering when he would exhibit any fierce tendencies, I now began to wonder if he would ever have any at all.

Although he accepted his new abode with the greatest possible tolerance and took the flattery of Aruba's attentions as a matter of course, nothing really made up for his partial loss of me. It was not enough that he always saw me once a day when I walked up for my regular visit. The day that their keeper herded the five of them in the direction of our house, of the two elephant, two buffalo and one

rhino, only the latter was missing when he began to collect them for the homeward trail. Rufus had used his natural camouflage to melt into the bush while grazing. He was much too intelligent to use the main road, for there he might be spotted, but found a secret path through the thickest bush back to me. The frantic herdsman, having searched all the surrounding country, eventually arrived at the house to find the runaway lying peacefully in his usual place on my veranda. My self-control in not going to visit him more than once in every twenty-four hours seemed to have been fruitless; as for Rufus, he had never been so high in his own estimation. Needless to say it was I who had to drop whatever I was then doing and lead him back up the hill to join the others.

On his second visit, he managed to produce an even better drama. Instead of sneaking in through the back and on to the veranda, the whole household was alarmed by the unmistakable snorting and crashing through the bush of what we thought was a wild rhino. Only when it broke cover and galloped up through the garden did we see that it was Rufus. The expression of terror on the face of a new member of our staff was one that no actor could produce. He stopped his weeding as soon as he heard the snorting, puffing and crashing and made for the nearest tree. Then he witnessed the surprising sight of a rhino charging up the garden only to stop dead in front of the

veranda, walk solemnly up the steps and lie down by the side of my deck-chair.

We were both pleased to see each other and I could not produce one scolding word. Instead, Rufus had a good scratch, several lumps of sugar off my tea-tray, a long conversation, and much petting and patting. He then turned over and went to sleep.

The herdsman thought that to placate Rufus he would drive the trio down to graze near our garden in the afternoons; this was when I had a nap and was not visible. This did not satisfy Rufus, whose one idea was to spend all day with me—nowhere else and with no one else. To cheer the poor herdsman I told him not to worry too much if Rufus was missing again as he was sure to find him with me. He must have been very strict with him next day as there was no sign of my pachyderm.

The morning after, however, at 6.30 a.m. I could hear him snorting as he galloped down the road. I listened fascinated as he raced off the hard surface on to the soft red earth of the labour lines. A tremendous cloud of dust billowed up, the spikes of sansevera parted like hair and the scrawny African chickens who had been peacefully sunning themselves on the path were scattered squawking in all directions like straws before a whirlwind. This race ended as usual the moment Rufus smelt me out and there he was, as of old, bashing his head against our bedroom door to be let in. He had defeated the herdsman who now, for the

sake of peace, let him have his own way and graze all day near the house to be near me. This meant that Buster and Susannah had to come too, so it was like old times until the hated hour of return to the upper stable. The moment Rufus realised his time was up and the herdsman tried to collect the three for the walk home, Rufus would dig in his heels. There he stood like some garden statue hewn out of granite and nothing less than a two-ton crane would have been able to move him. This was very awkward for Dennis and for me as it could only mean that one of us would have to lead him back up the hill every evening at his bedtime for no African had ever been able to persuade Rufus to do anything. He was not in any way dangerous or bad tempered, simply obstinate. However, his current herdsman seemed to have some vestige of control and when I went to see just how he managed to get the animal to move, it was quite a revelation. At the appointed hour, he dived into his pocket and produced a large flat native pancake. Then breaking off a piece, he proffered it to Rufus, and walked a few yards ahead, holding out another morsel. By repeating this absurd performance every inch of the way up the hill, he was able to get the naughty rhino back into his stable. When I questioned him next day and found that he actually bought these pancakes out of his own money, he said, "What else can I do, Memsahib, it is the only way to get the stubborn one up to bed." It took another African, a frequent visitor to the camp, to find

out that if pancake was Rufus's weakness in terms of food, Coca-Cola was his favourite drink. But this could hardly have lasted as bait the whole way up the hill, or I am sure that expensive as it was the desperate herdsman would have tried it out.

Thanks to bribery our major problem had now been settled, but Rufus was not one to be easily defeated. Dennis and I went off on a shopping expedition to Mombasa one day about this time. There were about a hundred miles of appalling road between us and Mombasa, although this was our nearest possible shopping centre. It was hot and dusty the whole way in, the pavements of the port were like molten steel and finally the drive home had to be faced at the end of a tiring day. It was with a sigh of relief that we drove up the drive towards the cool house, and a long cold drink. The doors were open as usual, but there was no one about. We paused on the threshold to take in the shambles which was our sitting-room. Every single piece of furniture had been pushed out of place, a table lay upturned in the middle, and all the ashtrays and ornaments were strewn upon the floor. The rugs were bunched up against the few upstanding chairs, while my largest picture hung drunkenly at right angles to the wall. The place looked like a battleground.

"There's either been a burglary or a running fight in here," I called to Dennis. "Oh no," said Dennis, "just a visit from Rufus I should think." And so it was. At that

moment, my house servant arrived breathless to say that he was not in time to greet us back because Rufus had only just, with great difficulty, been persuaded back to his stable.

Rufus had apparently sneaked down to see me while we were in Mombasa. Unable to find me on the veranda, he had ransacked each room in turn, looking for me. He had opened all the cupboards in his search. It was only when he had plundered the entire house that the servant returning from an unauthorised shopping expedition had found him. His natural instinct was to put the house in order first, but then he thought he had better get rid of the rhino before he did any more damage. This proved even more difficult than he had bargained for. Rufus stood at bay and charged him every time he tried to get him out of the door.

It was just bad timing that we should have arrived back between the two operations. Finding nothing broken, it was easy for me to find all this only further proof of Rufus's devotion.

Departure for Nairobi

It was with mixed feelings that I received the news that we had been transferred to Nairobi. Voi is not a healthy place for adults, far less for children. My little daughter Maureen had hardly any colour and was not thriving in Voi, so for her sake I was glad, but I was also overcome by a cloud of depression at the thought of leaving Rufus.

What, I thought, would our successors to the Park house be like? However nice, I could not imagine them allowing Rufus to come down to the garden and charge all over the flower-beds. They would certainly not allow him his favourite game of rearranging the furniture throughout the house. Perhaps they would be as unable to control him as were the Africans.

I would no longer be able to see that the herdsman deticked Rufus regularly. Without my influence he might get slack and allow his ward to wander off into the bush while he indulged in a snooze. Even at his tender age, the amount of horn Rufus had so far grown would be of some interest to poachers. Hundreds of rhino are slaughtered

RUFUS THE RHINO

annually for their horns. Apart from being believed to be a lucky charm, rhino horn is bought at a great price by Indians and Chinese who have a superstitious belief in its medicinal value. The Masai carve rhino horns into knobkerries, because they have enormous strength. If a poacher didn't get him, some lion might attack him. He was still too small to hold his own. Such frightening thoughts started to gnaw their way into my mind. How many mud-baths, for instance, would he get in the future? Besides the fact that he adores his wallow, it was necessary in order to keep off the dreaded tsetse fly.

My anxiety was so great that it kept me awake at night. I had only one week in which to pack up the entire house, including all my clothes, my child's and my husband's things, not to mention all the furniture. In a way, this was my salvation, as I got so overtired that I had little time to think.

Of one thing I was certain. If fate was going to separate us now, there was nothing I could do about it except to see as much of Rufus as possible during the time that was left. He came over to the house every single day of that last week, and took complete possession not only of the house but of me. Although he was now two and a half years old he still followed me about from room to room like an amiable dog. He stood quite still beside me while I dived into some packing-case and as soon as I reappeared to go into another room to fetch something else, he trotted after



Rufus at two, Maureen sixteen months

Rufus at three, Maureen two and a half





Rufus and Maureen

DEPARTURE FOR NAIROBI

me. As if to show his dislike of the packing-cases, he would stop now and then to scratch himself against a corner of one. After about an hour of incessant trotting all round the house after me, he decided that I spent most of my time in the sitting-room, so he promptly lay down right in the centre so that whichever way I went, I could not escape without his seeing me. During the few days that were left to us we were happy in a sort of way. I even found myself organising my packing so that with a basketful of ornaments on one side and a pile of paper on the other, I could sit on the floor next to Rufus while I packed.

Every now and then when I looked lovingly at the little fellow, he would look back at me with his ears pinned back to his small podgy neck, deep in thought. Did he realise that we were leaving?

As each short day succeeded the next, the time of parting came closer. I had to use all my will-power to restrain my tears. What on earth would anyone think of a woman, who was leaving for another place with her loving husband and wonderful child, if they found her in tears at leaving a rhino?

The last day arrived, the crates and boxes were all ready to be loaded on to the lorry which would leave at dawn for Nairobi. We kept the car for ourselves and our small luggage. This was Rufus's last day with me. He was free to do what he liked with whatever he liked and to wander in and out as he chose. Instead, he just lay on the

veranda watching pathetically as the boxes and crates were loaded on to the lorry. It was true that there were no longer any tables and chairs to push around inside, in fact the house was now an empty shell, but he seemed to have little interest in anything. I hardly left his side except to fetch some titbit which I hoped would cheer him up.

The awful moment came when it was time for him to go back to his stables for the night. In the morning we would be gone. I walked back up the hill with him. I felt as if I was walking to an execution. Dennis took a cine-film of the departure. It shows the two of us walking up the road side by side. His small fat back-view is towards the camera, he is trotting along on his stumpy little legs and wagging his short tail to keep the flies off until we round the corner together and go out of sight.

He would, I know, in his innocence, come galloping down this same road to-morrow, round the same corner into the garden and up the steps into the shell of the house looking for me, in vain.

I had to prevent this at all costs, so I called the herdsman over as we approached the stockade to tell him to take Rufus out in the opposite direction next morning. I felt like a Judas as I led Rufus into his stall. He put up his little face and I kissed him.

Rufus Revisited

Normally the drive to Nairobi held my interest, but this time as each mile separated me farther and farther from Rufus, I could not be interested in anything. "It will be better when we get there," I kept telling myself. Dennis drove fast, as usual, and the ayah looked after Maureen in the back of the Peugeot. My menagerie was sadly reduced to Gipsy the Cairn, Tom Thumb the black cat, Horace, Judy and the baby mongoose.

As a passenger I had nothing to do but think and I could think of nothing but Rufus. What had guided him to me in the first place? Was there some hidden purpose behind this miracle? I was in no doubt that it was a unique event for where else in the world had a newly-born rhino walked straight into someone's house for food and protection? Surely I should try to find someone who could write about Rufus so that others could share my wonderful experience? I couldn't do so myself for I find even letter-writing difficult. My memory, however, is good, so I must, I told

myself, make some notes on Rufus's life so far, to capture the details while they were still fresh in my mind. The world's newspapers were full of articles on rhino deaths from drought and poaching. "The Death of a Species" and "The Last Rhino" were two awful headings that had stuck in my head. If only I could in some small way help to preserve them.

Before we had got half-way I had made up my mind. I would try to contact the only person I knew who was a writer. She was a free-lance journalist but she knew Voi and our house. She was the person who had introduced me to Dennis. Was she still in Kenya? Perhaps in Nairobi? It was rather a big city to search for someone whom I knew to have no relations there. The more I thought about it the more determined I became. I must find Joan Vyvyan.

It was late afternoon when we arrived on the outskirts of Nairobi and to avoid as much anti-climax as possible, Dennis turned the car into the first Park entrance on the Mombasa road. This meant we missed the depressing stream of cars and lorries and the awful town atmosphere. Instead we enjoyed the last few miles among the animals.

The Nairobi National Park is only forty-four square miles compared with our vast eight thousand square mile Tsavo, but even during those few miles I realised that we had seen more varieties of game than we ever saw in Tsavo in the same length of time. Exciting notices such

as "Stay in your car", "Beware of Lion", "Hippo Pools" and "Beware of Crocodile" met us on the route. The animals seemed comparatively tame; no doubt this was because they have become rather blasé about the enormous number of visitors who stare at them and about the cars they come in.

The Park is unique because it is virtually on the outskirts of the city. The skyline is dotted with factories, blocks of flats and rows of houses, not to mention two outdoor cinema screens, and overhead the long-distance air-liners roar, while in the foreground, the animals roam in their natural surroundings. It is perfectly possible for an air traveller to arrive by plane in the morning, drive for few hours around the Nairobi Game Park and see upwards of fifty species of game, (this could include lion, buffalo, giraffe and rhino, not to mention hundreds of plain's game and birds in their natural habitats) and catch the plane onwards the same evening. The Park is both an animal's paradise and a photographer's dream for the latter can drive up to within a few yards of a pride of lion, for instance, without in any way disturbing them.

I was delighted to see that the Park house looked out on to a lovely wild bit of the countryside; in fact, there was no reminder that we were only nine miles from the city centre. The house was an old Kenya one, made of grey stone, and had any amount of character. I also noticed that the garden needed to be opened and a lot of colour

introduced into it. This was a pleasing thought rather than a depressing one as it meant that I could be busy immediately. My whole daily programme of feeding and looking after various animals every four hours was going to be so changed that I felt I must cling on to the nearest thing needing attention to keep myself from pining for them. My happiest thought was that Maureen would obviously flourish in this much cooler climate.

There were, of course, no wild animals for me to tend, but as if to cheer me, when I looked out of our bedroom window the very first morning, there were three Grant's gazelle grazing on an open space opposite the house. The two mongooses, Horace and Judy, who had travelled up in their box at the back of the car, soon settled down in their new surroundings, and on the second day Tom Thumb, as if to show his approval of the new garden, caught a huge field rat. He was hotly pursued by Horace, Judy and Gipsy, so had to tear across the lawn and up into the nearest tree with his kill.

I suppose because the house had been left empty for some time and because it is right inside the Game Park three wild pigs had got used to coming up to the garden. I was delighted to see them so close and although Gipsy drove them away the first time they arrived, I soon stopped her bad manners. Now, six months later, the pigs come every day and crop my front lawn grass within five yards of the veranda. They are very well-behaved and never

go into the flower-beds to eat the flowers. The family consists of a sow, a boar and two half-grown piglets. They must be the ugliest creatures that God ever made, but are friendly, and the way they scratch their backs on the stump of a dead tree near our window is comic. They have hideous hooded eyes, a ridiculous cream-coloured moustache on each side of their tushes, and a coarse mane of long hair which hangs like a dirty shawl over their withers.

On one of the first occasions that Dennis took me out into the Park with him, we stopped fascinated to watch a lioness make a kill. We were unfortunately too late to see the lioness actually spring, but when we saw her she was swinging on the nose of a kongoni. The poor beast was still alive, but so stunned with fright and hypnotised that Dennis assured me that it was not feeling much. The slaughter was soon over. Only when the lioness had done all the hard work did her mate the lion arrive. He immediately batted her out of the way and started on the most succulent bits of the stomach himself.

Within a few weeks Maureen was beginning to get some colour in her cheeks and I was beginning to collect yet another menagerie. It was not half as interesting as my Voi one, for nothing could make up for Rufus, but it was a good selection just the same.

First a woman brought me a tiny dik dik asking me if I would look after it while she went on leave. Out came

the feeding-bottle and I was once more filling it with cow's milk. The poor little thing was sick when she arrived. There was a nasty swelling on the side of her face and most of her fur had fallen out so that her four pencil-like legs looked as if they were covered in black kid. After two weeks of nursing and care Dennis realised that he must open up the abscess. The operation was entirely successful and the little creature put up a tremendous fight to live. Her efforts were in vain, however, for she died four days later.

As if in replacement, another two buck were brought in to me the same week. One had had its neck broken by a African who had thrown a rock at it hoping to kill it for food. This one only lived for three days, but at least I made its last hours comfortable. The other one was a duiker and looked just like all the children's story book illustrations of Bambi. He thrived from the very first and is getting more beautiful daily.

A crippled cat was my next patient. He has a broken back but enjoys life. I put him out in the sun daily and sometimes give him one of the mice that Tom Thumb catches. You can imagine what Tom Thumb thinks of him.

The telephone rang one day and I thought as usual it would be some tourist asking if the Park roads were open again after the recent heavy rain. Instead it was a woman resident of Karen, an area at one corner of the Park that

is on the edge of the indigenous forest. She announced that there was a leopard caught in a gin on the outskirts of her garden. No sooner had I delivered the message than Dennis rushed off and jumped into the Land-Rover yelling at me, "Ring Monks the chemist. Tell him to bring his gun and dart full of anæsthetic out to the Karen house." By the time I had got Mr. Monks I could hear Dennis roaring round the corner of the drive; as the chemist had told me that he had both gun and dart and was off too, I went back into the house rather disappointed at being left out. This idea of "men's work" always irritated me.

The leopard was a female. She was well and truly caught around the stomach with a wire so tight that one could not put even a finger between the wire and her. All the thick fur had been rubbed off her stomach by her efforts to free herself and she was naturally demented with rage.

Monks wasted no time in filling the dart with the anæsthetic and firing it. It hit her in the shoulder and she let out a terrifying snarl, turned her head and bit at the dart. Monks assured Dennis that this didn't matter because she had had enough anæsthetic to put her out as the stuff went in instantaneously. Within minutes she was out for the count and was loaded into the back of Dennis's Land-Rover.

I was beginning to wonder why Dennis was taking so long when the telephone rang again. "Hallo," said the

voice, "this is Monks here. Is your husband back yet?" "No," I replied. Monks said irritably, "I've just looked at the dart and discovered that when the leopard bit at it she left about half the dope behind. This means"—he was now shouting—"that the leopard will come to in less than fifteen minutes' time, and she is in the car with him."

Thoroughly alarmed myself, I left the receiver off and yelled to my cook to go to the end of the drive to see if he could hear or see anything of the Bwana. There was a horrible silence and my heart did a double somersault. Then I heard the cook shout out in Swahili, "I can see the lights, here he comes." Regaining my composure, I put the telephone back on its hook and tore out to meet Dennis. "Darling, get that leopard into its cage at once, Monks says it will be round in five minutes from *now*." I think the last word shouted in crescendo told him all. He gave me one piercing look and without a word seized the leopard by the tail and hind legs and swung it out of the Land-Rover. Willing African hands joined in and they had the animal into the cage within one minute. As she was put down on to the floor, her head moved from right to left and she came to life with a shattering roar.

I slept badly that night. I could not fight off the nightmare of an angry and wounded female leopard at the back of an open Land-Rover with Dennis in front driving. There was no partition between them.

Maureen was now two-and-a-half. Father and daughter adored each other and she was very like Dennis in lots of ways. She looked quite a different child after six months away from unhealthy Voi, and I had been lucky to obtain a most excellent ayah.

It was also six months since I had set eyes on Rufus, who was now three years old. It was true that we got occasional reports that he was all right. My friend Joan Vyvyan was, I discovered, working on the staff of a local magazine. She came out to spend one Sunday with us and I showed her some notes I had taken about Rufus and my Voi menagerie. Between the three of us we decided that she should write a book on Rufus from my notes. As I had many photographs and some cine-films and she knew Voi, it seemed a venture that we must try.

Dennis who was, of course, tied to the Nairobi Park by his work, was the first one to say, "Why don't the two of you make a safari back to Voi?" I was overjoyed at the thought of revisiting Rufus but worried about leaving Maureen with Dennis and the Ayah even for a few days. I need not have worried. When we returned father and daughter were closer than ever and I was calmly told that she had behaved even better than usual.

The main object of the visit was, of course, to introduce Joan to Rufus, but I was as excited as a child at the thought of seeing the little fellow again. We were to stay with some friends, the Josephs. It was like old times.

Voi looked just the same as we drove past the dusty tin-roofed shops and turned off up the hill to the Josephs' house. The garden was full of flowers and the welcome full of warmth.

After a hot bath and a superb meal, I was aching to suggest a visit to Rufus. I restrained myself, however, as Joan had done all the driving and even the extra three miles up to Rufus's stockade would, I knew, add to her fatigue and she might not be in a mood in which to be introduced to the hero of our book.

Next day, to our delight, Bron, our hostess, said she would like to come along too. I happened to know that on her first visit to the Park she had had the fright of her life. She had been charged by a rhino and she had never in the eight months since they had been stationed there, been in the Park again. I am certain she thought we were merely driving up to pat Rufus in his stockade. I also knew only too well how, with a husband at work all day down in Voi, the loneliness was sometimes quite overpowering. When I was in the same circumstances the visit, for even three days, of some female company would have so delighted me that I would not have wanted to let them out of my sight.

As we drove up the road all the memories came flooding back and it suddenly occurred to me that Joan ought to see not only the track that Rufus had first taken, but his birthplace. We therefore decided to go up to see Rufus

only on the way back, and continued along the Park road until I recognised the big tree in the distance under which he was born.

"We're not getting out are we?" asked Bron. "Of course," I replied, not noticing the panic behind this question. "It's only about half a mile to the tree." "Half a mile?" said Bron, her voice now about an octave higher. Thinking she was just a non-walker, we got out of the car and crossed the road, climbed up the bank on the other side and set off towards the tree. I led the way, Bron was in the middle and Joan brought up the rear. "There," I said to Bron, "now you're in between us you are quite safe." The look I got was rather like that of a dying patient in hospital.

The ground was very rough and we had to wind around the clumps of spiky sansevera. Bron had white shoes on with slight heels. She stumbled over a hidden stone and immediately a whirr of wings startled her into immobility. "How much farther?" she asked. "We've only just started," said Joan, and I could practically feel Bron's sigh on my back. This started me thinking that this was the area in which we had always suspected that Rufus's mother had been and also that there were no trees to climb if we were charged by a rhino or an elephant. I lit a cigarette. This gave me an opportunity to have a look at Bron. She was a nasty off-white colour. I decided not to voice my thoughts and on we went. "Plenty of fresh

rhino dung here," said Joan, and stopped to point to a large unmistakable imprint. Bron didn't even turn round, but continued up the trace as if she had a gun in her back. I wish Joan would shut up, I thought, we will never get to the birthplace at this rate. At that moment she shouted, "I can smell elephants." I could have strangled her. As if to confirm this statement, at that instant there was a shrill trumpet from just below us. "Oh," said Bron and I turned to see her as white as her shoes. I must confess that as the evidence of both rhino and elephant was becoming fresher and fresher I was no longer enjoying the walk myself. I had, up to then, had Bron as a foil and thought what Dennis must have felt like on all occasions when he had had me with him in the bush.

"You can see the tree from here, Joan," I said, hoping she would agree that we had gone far enough. "Oh, but we haven't got there yet," she answered. This was greeted by a loud snort, not from any of us. We turned and like a trio in a three-legged race, tore back the way we had come. Joan was now leading and I was the end one. At every step of the run down, I imagined the next snort coming from over my shoulder and a terrific and final jab in the back. Bron, who is not at all athletic, won the race, and was already on the road scrambling into the car when Joan and I arrived. She looked like a ghost.

"I hope you're both satisfied," was all she could muster, but I must say that at that moment she had earned the

respect of both of us. We turned the car and started back. Not eight hundred yards down the road we passed eleven elephants browsing just under the path we had been on not ten minutes before.

We drove quickly past and on up to the offices behind which was Rufus's stockade. He was, we were told by one of the rangers, out grazing with the two buffalo, Buster and Susannah. I got out of the car because I knew it was about the time when they were all due back to be locked up for the night. Joan parked the car with Bron still sitting in it.

Here was the workshop and the garage where the little chap used to "push the gong around." Up behind was his stockade and in front of me was the small winding path they all took home at bedtime. Just where it melted into the tawny bush I saw him. He was walking slowly and, like Shakespeare's schoolboy, reluctantly, to bed. I knew he could not see me at that distance, so I called—"Rufus". He stopped dead in his tracks. I called again. At this, his ears went down, his nose forward and he broke straight into a trot. I called again in what to him was my familiar high-pitched voice to keep him coming in the right direction straight to me. I called his name a fourth time and I must now have been in his vision for he broke into a gallop. He had grown tremendously and when he arrived, nearly knocked me down in his enthusiasm. It looked, as Bron

said afterwards, "exactly as if I were being charged by a fully-grown wild rhino and enjoying it."

Rufus immediately started his plaintive little cry, rubbing himself up against me and putting out his flat wrinkled nose to be patted. I then remembered that I had brought nothing with me. No sugar cane, no lucerne, not even a lump of sugar from Bron's kitchen. It didn't matter; as I put my arms around his podgy neck there was nothing more in the whole world that Rufus wanted. We remained in this embrace while I fought back tears and Rufus cried his funny cry. He then did the only trick he knew. He lay down and rolled over for me.

I responded as I was expected to by scratching him behind the ears and under the belly. He shut his eyes as if in a trance and indeed we might well both have been. Six months had been spanned in an instant. Buster and Susannah both came up then. They both knew me and accepted all the patting and petting that I could spare with one hand, while scratching Rufus with the other. He was in good condition but I noticed that he had several ticks on him. The work of the tick birds had he been a wild rhino had been taken over by me as his foster-mother from the very beginning. I got up to go over to where the herdsman was standing to tell him off. Rufus immediately got up too and followed me.

Here we are, I thought, playing follow-my-leader all over again. Having extracted a promise from the herds-

man which I knew he wouldn't keep for long, and remembering that Bron was still sitting in the car, I turned to go. Rufus started his crying again and followed immediately behind. We arrived at the car at the same time and I bent down to kiss him good-bye. As Joan opened the door to let me in, Rufus had one foot on the running board and his head inside. He was now too big to climb in, but the intention was almost too pitiful to bear. The only bathos was provided by Bron who, now confronted by a rhino trying to get into the car with her, was cowering in the back like a cornered fox.

I got in as quickly as I could and Joan sizing up the situation let in the clutch and we started off down the horribly familiar route and away. Like Lot's wife, I could not resist one last backward look at Rufus. He was trotting down the road trying to catch up with us.

Postscript

I have now heard that the two buffalo, Buster and Susanah, are to be moved up to the new Animals' Orphanage in Nairobi National Park. I was most distressed to hear that Rufus was not coming too. Apart from my love for him and his for me, I knew that as Aruba had wandered off to join a wild herd, he would now be utterly alone at Voi. Rhino are perhaps the most dependent of all animals. I was even told by Nick Carter, a rhino expert, that Rufus would still be pining for me. Now he had lost me, Aruba had departed, and finally the buffalo, his two remaining companions, had been torn away from him.

"Why?" I kept asking, "Why?" "He is being kept for experimental purposes," said Dennis. In my tormented mind I imagined all sorts of beastly needles full of serum being injected into him. I was reassured that the experiments were to get a record of his favourite diet in the forest and to try to make some sort of analysis from it.

Will I, I wonder, ever see Rufus again?