

# THE SAFARI OF THE DISARMED HUNTER

ONLY THE ONE-EYED TURKANA  
THOUGHT IT BAD FOR THE BLOOD

ARTICLE: by ROBERT F. JONES

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Bill Winter: ex-hunter successfully turned safari operator.

A field on the outskirts of Nanyuki. At one corner a garbage dump smolders behind a row of shops lining the highway; the sun pounds down through a stiff south-westerly breeze; and smoke flattens toward a hut not far away.

The hut is build of old tin cans and branches, whose dead leaves flap in the acrid wind. Inside the hut, seated on cattle skulls, three men and a woman are drinking tea from chipped enamel mugs. A small fire sputters. Outside lies what looks like a bundle of sticks wrapped in a tattered, faded red blanket. But something stirs for a moment, black skin through the holes. It's not a bundle of sticks. It's old Nyang'ao the Hyena, the Eater of Meat, and he is dying.

"Na Kwisha," says Bill Winter. "He's finished. The poor old sod doesn't even know we're here. When I first met him, he was a big, strong fellow with bracelets above his biceps and a wrist knife on his arm. His head was plastered with blue mud interwoven with ostrich feathers and the hair of his ancestors. He was full-grown before he ever saw a White man. Must be more than 100 years old. Now look at him." Winter shakes his head. "Na Kwisha."

The woman says she is Nyangao's granddaughter. We give her 25 shillings for milk and tobacco. Maybe it will ease the old man's departure. At the sound of our voices, he wakes. Eyes crusted with dried pus, he stares up and finally recognises Winter. The rheumy eyes focus sharply with delight, and he rises from the blanket. He offers his hand which feels like a fistful of twigs wrapped in grease paper.

"Habari yako, rafiki?" "How are you, friend?"

"Mzuri sana," the old man replies. "Very well, indeed."

As we drive away, Winter shakes his head again. "It's all finished, Bwana. In a few years it'll all be gone. The old ways, the warriors, perhaps even the game. That dying Turkana is just one symbol of it. When he was young, he told me once, he marched clear across the Suguta Desert, drinking nothing but the sweat he could scrape from his armpits. Wearing nothing but his togalike shuka and that great, hairy blue periwig. Imagine it! In those days they raided and stole cattle from the neighbouring tribes, they killed their enemies. Now he's dying behind a garbage dump."

Kirinyagga rises ahead of us like a broken fang, blue and white in the afternoon sun. Mount Kenya, the map-makers call it, but to the people of this country it is Kirinyagga, the home of their god.

# THE SAFARI OF THE DISARMED HUNTER

I HAD come to Kenya to assess the state of the game; to check on the effect of the government's ban on sport hunting and the "curio" trade in wildlife trophies and products.

I timed the visit to coincide with the dry season, but found the rains had hardly stopped for a year and Kenya was never more beautiful. Grass grew waist high even in the arid Northern Frontier District; the normally stunted, spavined cattle of the herding tribes looked fat and sleek; such plains game as impala, topi, hartebeest and Grant's and Thomson's gazelles were calving as if at the Creation.

Cape buffalo covered the grasslands in greater abundance than I had ever seen in three earlier visits to Kenya. Yet in three weeks of travel over more than 1,500 miles of Kenya, from the Tanzanian border in the south to the Northern Frontier District above Isiolo, we spotted only two rhino and just one elephant with respectable tusks.

Lions were abundant, and frequently we heard leopards hunting at night, but we saw not a single cheetah — perhaps on account of the tall grass.

Burchell's zebra — the small, wide-striped variety most commonly seen in Western zoos and game parks — galloped the plains in greater numbers than I had ever seen. But the Grevy's zebra, longer-legged, pin-striped and mule-eared, proved to be in short supply. Perhaps there had been a shift in taste among tanciers of zebra-skin rugs.

From all the horror stories I had read about "the end of the game" from hunting and poaching, I had expected to find the country empty of animals. It was quite a joy to discover that, among certain species at least, the fecundity that follows plentiful rain was at work once again. "There's a resilience to wildlife that always surprises you," said Bill Winter as we drove from Nairobi to his home near Nanyuki. "Given half a chance, either by the weather gods or by man, most species can rebound from disaster in very short order."

The same could be said of Winter himself. Three years ago, on a hunting safari in the Masai Mara region, he was accidentally shot in the right leg while following up a wounded buffalo. The .375-calibre bullet shattered his leg a few inches above the ankle. After 21 operations and months of delirium in a Nairobi hospital, the foot was saved, but his right leg is now two inches shorter than the left and the foot itself is virtually boneless. "They filleted it for me in England last autumn," he said. "Funny thing, when I flew back to Kenya from London after they took the bones out, I set off the airport security metal detector into a long loud howl. Bits of bullet still in there. But I can hop about all right, thanks to a good shoemaker."

In the 46 years since he was born in England's Lake District, William Henry Winter has "hopped about" in some very hot places. As a commando noncom in Korea, as a police officer in Malaya during the guerrilla warfare of the early 1950s, a police Chief Inspector in Kenya during the Mau Mau "Emergency" and as a warden in the Kenya Game Department,

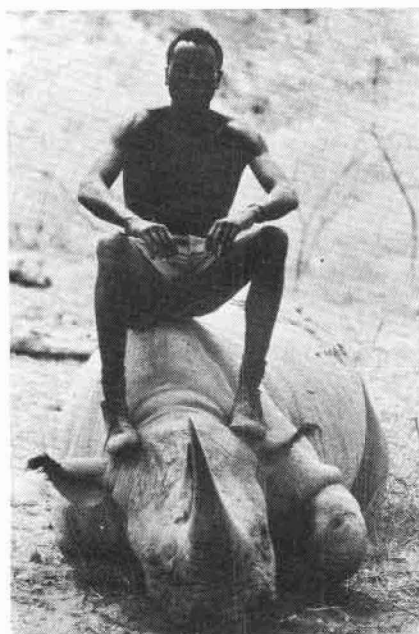
he "saw the elephant" (as the 19th Century expression goes) in every possible guise, both figuratively and literally. Short and stocky, with a leonine mane of brown-streaked blond hair, he remains an incorrigible punster and maker of limericks, a lover of words and wild country, of books and beasts and the beauty of stark places. To travel Africa with him is to have Linnaeus, Dickens, Darwin and Monty Python at Your elbow. Not to mention Allan Quatermain. Although he is no longer permitted to earn a living as a professional hunter, he remains active as a leader of photographic safaris.

\* \* \*

*Funga safari!* Make ready for the journey. But remember that this is Africa we're about to see, and Africa is the land of inconsistency. Pliny the Elder knew it, and the headlines of today confirm his warning, "Out of Africa, always something new."

Swahili, the lingua franca of black Africa, is a language of fatalism, of the dying fall, of the story in which cruelty and beauty meld into a swift, soft sunset. Leopards cough at night on the *kopje*: the stars are like shattered sapphires; a baboon screams in death. Lions rip at a wildebeest's gut while zebras browse placidly nearby.

Our first stop was at Ol Pejeta, a 40,000-



IN THE OLD DAYS — rhino as hunting trophies.

acre game not far from Nanyuki. A week earlier, game scouts had found the carcass of a young rhino killed by a poacher. "It was an inside job," Winter said as we bumped through tall grass and thorn bush to the site of the killing. "The poacher turned out to be one of the cattle drovers. He most likely plugged it with a homemade hand-loaded slug from some single-shot gun or other. The government called in all firearms last September, but farmers and drovers were allowed to keep their guns for protection against marauding lions and stock theft by rustlers."

The kill lay at the foot of a *kopje*, a weathered knob of rock that rose from the bush just above a water hole like the knee of a sleeping stone giant. We smelled the

dead rhino long before we saw it. A solitary baboon watched from a mimosa as we got out of the truck; klip-springers bounded away over the brow of the *kopje*. As we neared the skeleton, a family of hyraxes began barking their sharp alarms. By now the carcass of the rhino had been picked clean by scavengers. The head lay upside down, the spine curved around the trunk of a thorn tree. The stump of the sawed out horn was the only straight line in the twisted array. Leg bones, ribs, well-gnawed feet and sections of thick, tattered hide lay strewn for 10 yards all around. Flies flushed from the eye sockets as Winter poked a stick at the skull to show us where the horn had been.

"It was a very young rhino," he said "Couldn't have been much of a horn, not on a skull that size. But at the price Hong Kong is willing to pay . . ." (which at that time was up to \$300 an ounce!).

The rhino's bones gleamed white under the sun. Bleaching bones were to become a familiar sight throughout our safari; great middens of them lay heaped on the roadsides of the game parks, some of the animals the victims of predators, others of poachers.

We walked away, out of the scent of death, and all around us the grass brimmed with life. Button quail flushed nearly underfoot — tiny birds the size of North American bobwhites, buzzing off furiously like feathered darts. Beyond the water hole, where a raft of yellow-billed ducks paddled and preened, a dozen or more gazelles grazed on a sunlit ridge.

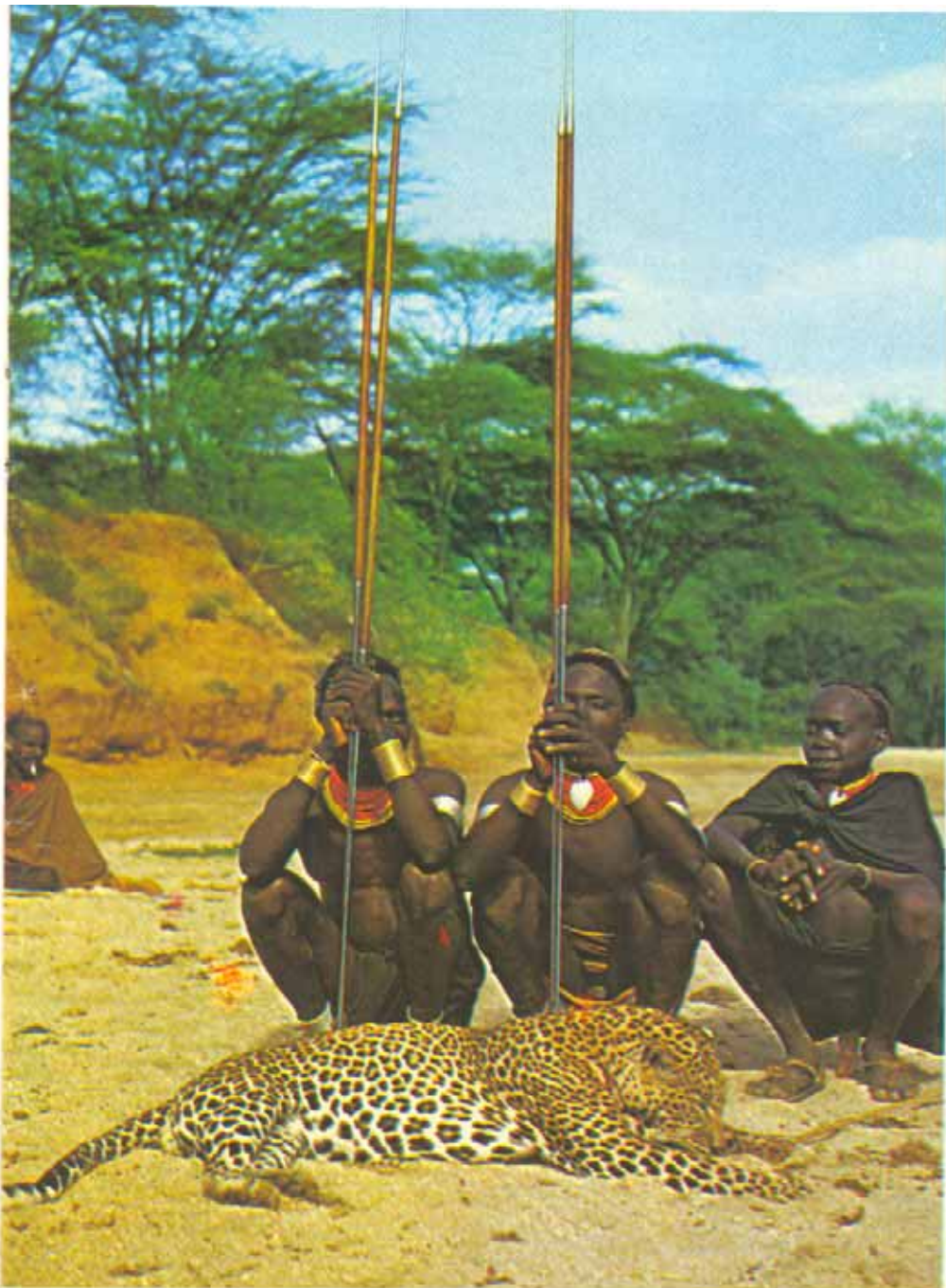
The pug marks of a leopard led up from the mud near the water hole toward the *kopje* — recent tracks, clearly defined, probably made no longer ago than at dawn. Driving in we had seen zebras, eland, giraffe and big bands of impala glowing like russet jewels as they watched us pass. In the presence of such fertility, it was hard to believe that the death of a single young rhinoceros could matter very much; it was easy to imagine the temptation of the cattle drover as he squatted in the thorny cover beside the water hole as the rhino came close, all covered with dollar signs.

Winter, his head tracker Lambat, and I drove southwest out of Nanyuki toward the Masai Mara in Winter's green Toyota safari wagon. Whydah birds flapped over the savannas, struggling to keep their long black tail feathers from causing a crash landing. We stopped to photograph jackals and vultures contesting a kill beside the road. What was left of the dead antelope — it was small and already so torn as to be unrecognisable — had become a battleground. One jackal leaped into the air, snapping at a tawny eagle as it flew in for a feed.

Plumes of blue smoke rose from the forest of the Aberdare Range. The locals were busy, as usual, making charcoal. Much of the deforestation of East Africa, which is rapidly turning once-fertile land into desert, is the result of this widespread practice. But again it is too easy for an American or European visitor to condemn the charcoal makers; it is cold at night at these altitudes (Ol Donyo Sattima the highest peak of the Aberdares rises 13,104 feet above sea level) and the wind is as sharp as a spear; and after all, what happened to the woodlands of Ohio? Even here, where lions prowl and giraffes give flat-topped haircuts to the acacia trees, the price of fuel oil is unconscionable. The world has not yet produced a political leader brave enough to demand that his people freeze in order to save the forests.

We descend into the Great Rift Valley,





that huge gash in the earth's surface where the plates of Africa and Eurasia mesh. Stretching from Lake Baikal in Russia to the depths of Mozambique, it is (according to the astronauts) one of the most visible features on the earth. For us, as we go down into its depths, it is only a source of sweat and earache. The cool of the Aberdares gives way to stifling heat, the game of the highlands surrenders to trucks and scruffy towns. The main road from Uganda runs through the Rift, and along it pound lorries laden with coffee, the newest source of wealth in the region — a windfall that just before the ban turned many East African entrepreneurs away from the trade in animal curios, ivory and rhino horn onto less destructive paths. The lorries chuff black diesel smoke into the air. Around and between them scoot the matatus, privately owned cars and minibuses crammed with passengers and bearing names such as "The Professor," "Safari To Happiness," "Good Friday" and "Kill Me Quick."

Naivasha, once a tranquil, pastel-painted town near the shores of a lake full of fresh-water birdlife has gone dirty gray

with exhaust fumes; paint peels from the stucco roadside shops and restaurants. The Bell Inn, where in colonial days travellers sipped tea on the airy, cool verandah, now smells like a cross between a latrine and a slaughterhouse.

Still, on the hillsides south of Naivasha, just before we turn west toward Narok, I saw herds of feeding antelope and giraffe, just as I did on my first visit 14 years ago.

The Suswa Plain unrolls ahead of us, undulating waves of grassy hills stretching north to the Mau Escarpment and south to the Tanzanian border. Herds of game browse in clots on the slopes as far as the eye can see. And this is no national park, this is real country. "The Green Hills of Africa," says Bill Winter, "just as Hemingway saw them half a century ago. This is where I had my hunting concession when I got plugged, a considerable acreage of this country just stiff with game. It's Masai territory and since they're a cattle-herding people there's been very little agricultural development here thus far."

At the edge of a tree line to our far right

**NOWADAYS:** leopard casualty in Turkana, speared for persistent stock-killing. Pictures: Bill Winter.

stands a group of eland, registering at this distance as white daubs against the dark green foliage. Eland, which weigh up to a ton apiece, are choice eating and much sought by the type of poacher who is merely trying to feed his family. The sight of this group of more than half a dozen is heartening. Yet the saliva begins to flow: this is the first safari I've been on where fresh meat was not ours for the shooting. I begin to understand why the Kiswahili word *nyama* means both "meat" and "game".

Narok is the end of the pavement. An oldtimer named Ole Pussy used to have a bar, restaurant and small hotel here, but now it is closed, and we have to drink warm beer from the lunch box in the truck. The *dukas* are shabby and flyridden. The last outpost of civilisation. Masai in red *shukas*, wearing sandals made from the tread of truck tires a la Viet Cong, stare at us from the shade of their roadside stands. Their spears glint in the fierce light. Rain threatens from the north, where the sky has gone an ominous, gunmetal black.

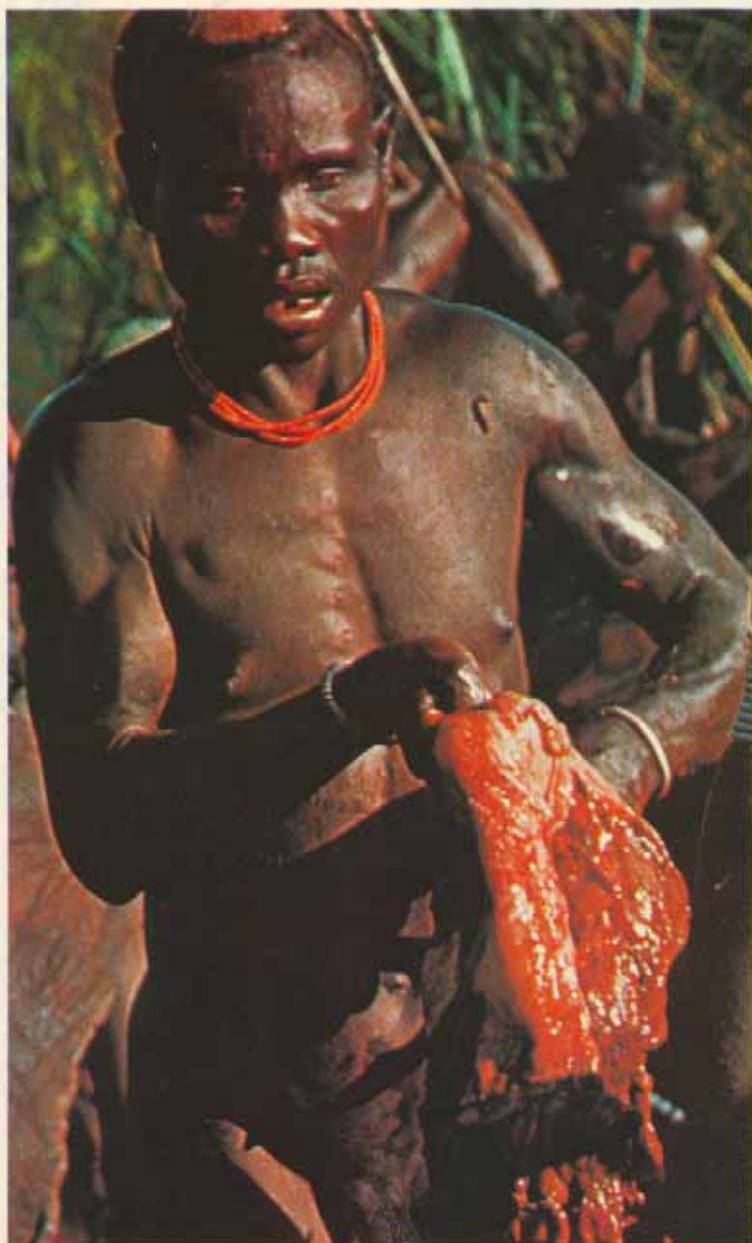
Winding westward through red rock hills thick with candelabra trees, we come to a vast plain. One stretch is ploughed clear across the horizon. Winter says it is a government wheat project under the management of Americans. "All of this country from here on down into the Serengeti Plain of Tanzania is ideal grain land," he says. "Look at the thickness of the grass where the ploughs haven't ripped it off. It's like the American Great Plains a century ago. But you people shot off your buffalo herds and turned it into farmland. Believe me, the temptation to the Kenya Government is just as great in this era of paucity. It's a credit to them that they haven't acceded to the demands of the developers — yet. But if Western critics keep nagging at the Government, they may just throw up their hands and turn it all over to cattle and wheat. That'll be the end of the game, you can bet."

Toward evening, we spotted a dark mass crossing the gravel road — a herd of Cape Buffalo. Winter stopped the truck and we watched. They were moving from south to north, hundreds of them, their horns glinting in the dying light, their hooves stirring dust into a dim red cloud. Herd bulls pulled out to challenge us, their nostrils flaring as they stood four-square in our path, heads up, tiny black eyes fixed on the strange shape of the Toyota. The light caught the ridges of their coruscated bosses. "There must be at least a thousand of them," Winter whispered. "Just look at them move. Like a bloody black river in spate. Don't you love it, Bwana? It was one of that ilk that did my leg, but I love them dearly, I do. Crikey just look at that!"

Then the light failed and the rain hit, sheeting down out of the north with the force of a million fire hoses. The road turned to grease under our wheels, and the Toyota began a dance, a kind of motorised disco twitch that soon became the theme song of the Mara visit: "Slip-slidin' away, slip-slidin' away . . . The nearer we get to Mara, the more we're slip-slidin' away."

The Masai Mara Game Reserve, on the edge of which we camped, is the nearest a visitor can come to the Garden of Eden in all of Kenya. A northern extension of the great Serengeti Plain, it is a mix of country combining rivers and





**AFTER-THE-HUNT BONANZA** for villagers around Maimaito in Kenya's Northern Frontier District. Pictures Bill Winter.

mountainous ridges, swamps and rolling grasslands, all interspersed with sudden outcrops of rock on which dwell the greatest concentration of spotted cats (leopard and cheetah) left in the country. They look down on hundreds of square miles of wildebeest, hartebeest, impala, Grant's and Thomson's gazelles, zebra, giraffe, warthog, buffalo, dik-dik, duiker, bushbuck, reedbuck, waterbuck and topi. All of these are preyed upon by a hardy stock of lions, whose roars can keep a tented camp tossing all night. Elephants knock down trees outside of camp, the sound of rending roots shattering the midday silence. Baboons troop from kopje to creek bed in truculent alert. Along the tangled stream beds, vervet monkeys scramble in the lianas while a Tiffany's treasure of brightly feathered birds — sunbirds and starlings, hoopoes and drongos, rollers and bee-eaters — flicks through the leaves.

The rain had ended by dawn. Under the

clouds of the eastern sky a streak of light transmuted a herd of grazing buffalo into splotches of rust against chartreuse hills. The tent smelled of mildew. The boy who brought me tea with my wake-up call had uttered a cheerful, "Jambo, Bwana," but the tea was full of soggy bits of fluff and wings — moths that must have flown into the cook tent during the rain of the night before. The green light of morning was weak; I still felt limp from the sight of the moving buffalo the previous day.

We were ensconced at Fig Tree Camp, a permanent tented bivouac recently opened by a former hunter.

Bill Winter's own camp, in the meanwhile, was being pitched far to the north: we would go there in a couple of days. After breakfast we headed into the reserve, passing large bands of impala en route. Impala are polygamous, with a dominant ram gathering as many females into his harem as possible. Smaller groups of bachelor rams hang around the outskirts of the harems, hoping that the master will let his guard down for a minute or two. We stopped to watch the shenanigans. It was the mating season, all

right.

While Winter signed us in at the main gate and paid the entry fees (\$10 ahead — it's costly to watch wildlife in the raw) Lambat took a look inside the game ranger's house. Lambat is a lean, lanky Ndorobo, 28 years old, one of the best trackers and gun bearers in the business. When Winter was wounded, Lambat was the only tracker who stayed, prepared to shoot if necessary, as the buffalo charged. (Later, in the hospital, Lambat brought Bill a little gift: a chunk of his shin bone blown off by the bullet.) Now Lambat sauntered back to the truck and reported that he had found a freshly killed impala under the game ranger's bed. "Do you see what I mean?" Winter asked. "Even to the game scouts, it's just *nyama* — meat."

We angled off the main gravel road onto one of the side trails that thread through the park. On a ridge to our left, a large herd of buffalo was silhouetted against the red morning sky. When we stopped near them and shut off the engine, we heard a sound that might have been that





of a strong man slugging a tree stump with a heavy wooden sledge. Then the herd parted, and we saw them: two bulls fighting at the edge of a thorn thicket. "Oh, sugar! That's a rare sight indeed," Winter exulted. "Just look at them hammering each other. Let's get closer — but I'll have to keep the motor running for a quick getaway, or they'll be hammering us."

Snorting and grunting, their huge neck and shoulder muscles abulge in the red light, the bulls strained at one another with a combined two tons of fury. The younger of the two had broken the tip of his right horn, and a jet of blood squirted straight up with the beating of his heart. Blood from a gaping wound on the older bull's neck washed down and into the slippery grass. In that strange light the scene was primordial, elemental, a frame from the dawn of time; it would not have come as a great shock to see, on the next

ridge, a band of shaggy, slope-browed protohumans loping past on the hunt.

The bulls battled for a full 20 minutes. Now and then an anxious cow tried to separate them, but whenever the older bull tried to retreat, the young one hooked him from behind, and the combat resumed. The rest of the herd began to move off and, finally exhausted, the huge bovine wrestlers had had enough. They turned their backs to each other and began grazing. "Show's over," Winter said. "Let's move ourselves along and see if we can find a few *simbas*."

We found them in the early afternoon, lying up in a dense patch of brush as they slept off the torpor of the night's kill, two lionesses and a big red-maned *ndume* (in Kiswahili, a male of any species is called a "bull," but only a strong, vigorous man deserves the appellation). One of the lionesses was sprawled comically on her back, her big yellow eyes studying us

upside down from 10 yards away with a bored, world-weary gaze. Thickets of flies covered her muzzle, feeding on the blood of last night's meal; her left ear was badly tattered. "They've been mating," Bill explained. "If you think alley cats go at it savagely, you ought to see these tabbies." When the male rolled over and stood, he moved with a distinct limp.

"*Iko mgonjwa*," said Lambat. "He is sick."

"Poor old fellow," Bill commented. "Probably got clouted by a buffalo a while back. He's a real *mzee* — an old man. Maybe finished. A hell of a nice mane, though. If we were hunting, we'd be doing him a favour to take him. Put him out of his misery and let the younger studs move into the gene pool."

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First of all there are hundreds of aims and directions and problems when you're doing a book — producing the thing is the main aim. . . . But sure, it is a pity that all books can't have everything in them and be aimed at everyone.

Yet as entertaining as the reviewer is, I don't think he has a straight-forward leg to stand on. He was out trying to save his own sentimental neck and I was out to create some thing to startle the man starting up the bulldozer and the slob in the cement suburbs across America and Europe. And definitely also to startle the rather innocent citizens of African countries. I wish I could say the book had been done entirely for these citizens, but actually it was for everyone, anyone. Nevertheless it will support the African. By accurate documentation it will justify the suspicion with which we are viewed as we call the shots. It will show them the road to hell along with the heroes, missionaries and martyrs; and it will hopefully give confidence and direction to those African citizens who do not want to denude, domesticate and ruin everything they have; those who are tired of being sucked up to and manipulated with cute little lies. It will forever record for them a wilderness they lived in for many hundreds of years and saw mangled and over-run by our well-meaning missionaries and high-velocity heroes.

The greatest damage done to this earth had been done by us — and it's a joke that the citizens of Kenya should be blamed by us in any petty way. We are the ones who have promoted all the artificiality and bad taste, and when everything is perverted and "endangered," we lead the race to regret it.

Ever since Mackinder stepped on Mbatian, the highest peak of Mt. Ke-nyaa, God's home, on September 13th, 1899, it's been a downhill parade. And up front were the benevolent missionaries referred to by Karen Blixen as "the insipid immigrants." It was "the reverse Midas touch," and the damage they've done far outweighs a trainload of arrowheads or whatever or whoever the latest scapegoats are. We have been inconsiderate overnight missionaries of misinformation and might, imposing ourselves on a people who had all the wilderness in the world until we arrived to save it.

**Africana:** But the point is: Are we, after all, really observing *The End of the Game* in East Africa, considering areas like the Serengeti-Mara which probably has more game in it right now than it's ever had?

**Beard:** I would say it's the end of the play-period. We no longer have the luxury of living in a world where there is the time and the space for playing games in the "wild-deer-ness." The speeds are too great.

And as far for us humans, we're poised at the lily pond like dinosaurs. Sheer size may do us in. By tracing fossil series we know that evolution has favoured size and numbers but these things in evolution have their own limiting factors, their own built-in demise. As Richard Leakey says at the end of his speeches, he wants to discover the origins of mankind before mankind destroys itself.

In our own terrible hurry we've going to have to face up to ourselves — face up to the negative information we are being expertly trained to ignore. Otherwise. . . . But let's stop with a quote from Karen Blixen and *Shadows in the Grass*:  
Now all is done that could be done — and all is done in vain.



## THE OF THE SAFARI DISARMED HUNTER

FROM PAGE 11

The rest of the day produced much game but nothing as dramatic as the battle of the bulls at dawn. A vast armada of white storks darkened the sky; bands of plains game—impala, gazelles, topi, wildebeest—fed and bred; crook-necked, irregularly marked "Masai" giraffes, smaller than their reticulated, northern brothers, browsed the tops of riverine thorn trees; a spotted hyena trotted stiff-legged through the tall grass, a rare sighting during full daylight. Toward evening, with the sky darkening again to rain clouds, we spotted a lone female rhino in a valley outside the park. She carried a long, thin frontal horn and was moving fast.

"With a pembe like that she won't last long outside the park," said Bill, putting down his binoculars. "Do you realize that's the first live rhino we've seen on this safari? In the old days, 10 or 15 years ago, they would have been charging out from behind every bush. It's a bloody shame. A Kenya without kifaru will be like meat without pepper."

A lone bull elephant stood at the forest edge as we returned to camp. The tusks were small—35 pounds at most, Winter estimated — and he flapped his ears wide at our approach, a warning to keep clear. "He's feisty," said Winter. "If we'd been walking back into camp, it might have turned into a fast gallop." The comment triggered a story from Lambat.

"When I was young," he said from his 28 years of old age, "a friend of mine met just such an elephant. He had decided to go to a nearby village to get some beads for his girl friend. As a moran (a young warrior), you are not permitted to travel alone over-

night, since you might be killed and the tribe thus weakened. Some of us went with him. When we were coming back with the beads, it got dark. We chose to spend the night on the trail, but he went on against our warnings. On the trail he came upon the elephant. It tossed him and knelt on him and broke his ribs and his legs. Then it went away. In the morning we found him, still alive. He asked us to look for the beads, but we couldn't find them. Just before he died, he told us to go to his girl friend and see if the elephant had brought the beads to her. But the elephant hadn't. We never found the beads."

All of this was said in a matter-of-fact voice, the story trailing off into a dying fall: Africa.

The next day we would see much more of the Mara — great sweeping herds of buffalo calving and mating and feeding on the rocky ridges; seas of tall grass spiked by the horns of thousands of antelope; young lions stalking a solitary topi, crawling belly-down through the grass with eyes fixed, intent on the kill; two splendid simbas mating beside the road, the male with a lush dark mane, his muscles in relief in a scarless, rain-cleansed hide as he crouched in rage, watching us, ready to spring into the open roof hatch of the Toyota; numberless birds — guinea fowl and yellow-necked spurfowl, tall Kori bustards, francolin and quail, honey guides and fiscal shrikes and marabous and eagles. As Winter had promised, the Mara was "stiff with game." But that was to be expected. As the showplace of Kenyan game reserves, it would certainly be the most carefully protected park in the country (despite the impala under the ranger's bed).

Our next stop, though, would give us a more accurate picture of the game: a reach of country to the north, where Winter and I had hunted four years earlier. If the game was still strong at Naibor Keju, where we would join up with Winter's camp crew and his big lorry, then we could begin to breathe more easily about the future of wildlife in Kenya. What we had seen thus far was certainly encouraging — except for the paucity of rhino and the lack of big ivory on the elephants. Even with the heavy poaching before the curio ban, buffalo, lion and plains game of all kinds seemed to be plentiful.

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# THE SAFARI OF THE DISARMED HUNTER

FROM PAGE 18

Lying in my bunk that night, with the rain thrumming on the canvas and the Coleman lantern hissing beside me, I thought back to my hunt at Naibor Keju. It would be good to see the old safari gang again — Joseph and Wanatitu serving elegant meals in the mess tent, while outside the jackals barked; old Wachira, the sprightly 70-year-old "apprentice firesmith" setting the night ablaze with whole, dry thorn trees as we sipped cocktails; N'deritu, the steady, shy Kikuyu driver and mechanic; and most of all old Isaac, the jolly Teriki with the cropped gray hair, who brought my tea in the morning and took away my shoes for a quick touch-up before breakfast. "Habari yako, Bwana?" Very good indeed old friend.

I wouldn't miss the killing, now that the hunting was finished. That is something you do for meat, or when you are young and want to confront danger for its own sake. I'd killed my nightmare buffalo years ago. Oh, I'd miss the bird shooting sure enough — the sandgrouse pouring in over the hot springs, folding to the clap of the 12-gauge Browning over-and-under; the button quail whizzing out from the tall grass, quick above the shotgun's ventilated rib; the ungainly guineafowl moving overhead with deceptive speed, clacking with the metallic squawk so reminiscent of driven pheasant. In a way, bird shooting is an anti-art: the shotgun a negative paintbrush that strokes the bird from the sky. The corner of my mind, of my experience, that can appreciate such a bird shooting view could accept the end of it. Still, they taste so damned good. . . .

Across the river near our camp a lion roared, that long, rising, hollow thunder that sets the scalp atingle. Another lion answered out on the plain. I picked up a book that Winter had loaned me: *The Recollections of William Finaughty, Elephant Hunter — 1864-1875*. The opening sentence was priceless. "Being a harum-scarum from youth, a good horseman, and a very fair shot, I determined to get into the interior of Africa for the purpose, mostly, of shooting big game."

Yes, it would be good to get back to

Naibor Keju. . . .

Except that the surrounding plain was strewn with dead zebras.

Last night's thunderstorm had flooded the flatlands hoof-deep, and lightning did the rest. More than two dozen carcasses dotted the grasslands. Already, only an hour after dawn, the vultures were at work. Black-backed jackals stood their ground defiantly as the Toyota safari wagon rolled to a halt.

"The rifle of God," Bill Winter said. "Silaha ya mungu. The government can keep us from hunting all right, but it can't deny God His sport."

Ahead of us, at the edge of the plain, Naibor Keju soared up from the border of the Lorogi Forest, a stately curve of granite that glowed in the early light. Naibor Keju means "White Legs" in Samburu, but there was nothing remotely white or leggy about it. The most obvious landmark in the region, the mountain is prominent in Samburu mythology. But nearby stands a more famous landmark, a smaller outcropping known as the Rope of God.

Agos ago, the Samburu say, this was a giant umbilical cord connected to Heaven. Down it poured milk and blood — food for the people — from God's herds. One day a man whose cattle had been killed by lions climbed up and asked God for some cows to replenish his stock. God refused, and in a rage the man severed to rope with his short sword. That was the Fall from Grace, Samburu-style.

A great gusher of milk and blood poured down, inundating the countryside, and the umbilicus drew back up into the sky. Indeed, the whole sky rose higher than it had ever been before. From then on, men would have to fend for themselves. But the man who had cut the Rope of God was forbidden to keep cattle. Henceforth, God decreed, the only creatures he could herd would be bees. That, according to legend, was how the bee-hunting Wandorobo bands split off from the cattle-herding Samburu Maasai.

The Dorobo were also obliged to hunt wild game, which for the Samburu was *enamakua*, entoki "socially unbecoming." They still do, but in Northern Kenya the serious game killers are the deliberately "anti-social" Somali tribesmen. Groups of them, known as *shifita*, cross the border with impunity, often armed with Russian-made AK-47 assault rifles and plastic land mines. They raid villages ambush trucks and slaughter game. Somalia claims that all of northern

Kenya, clear down to Mount Kenya itself, is its property. As a result, the Kenyan government has opened new roads into the north, mainly to expedite troop movements in the event of war, and caravans of its own troops course the countryside every day. But soldiers in Africa are notorious for slaughtering wildlife whenever they can, and they have the weapons at hand. So between *shifita* and soldiery, the game takes a heavy pounding.

I had hunted the country around Naibor Keju with Winter in 1974, and at that time it was thick with gazelles, buffalo, eland, impala, game birds and lions. In our three-day stay this time out we saw plenty of gazelles but very little else, except for the zebra herd, which seemed to be stronger than it had been four years earlier. Heavy rain kept us from penetrating deep into the surrounding Lorogi Forest, so we had no chance to check for signs of rhino or elephant. But clearly the region had taken a "dreadful clouting," as Winter would say in his English locution. It seemed that the Rope of God had been cut again in a new, more insidious, manner.

Not far from the scene of the electrocuted zebras we came upon the carcass of a freshly killed impala doe. She had been partly skinned, and a spear, a blanket and a walking stick lay beside her. Lambat, our Dorobo tracker, found blood and hair along a track down which she had been dragged. Nearby, a group of young Samburu were herding goats, and when we began to gut the animal one of them — a boy of no more than 12 — came running up. Soldiers had shot the impala, the boy said, and because they had left it to rot, he had decided to salvage the meat. Yet on opening the body cavity we could find no bullet, not even a fragment of one. The doe was heavily pregnant.

"She was probably lying up in some cover, in labour, and the lad spotted her," Winter said. "Short work with the spear. Well, Bwana, we've caught ourselves a poacher — but what do we do next? If we let him go, this boy will be a hero tonight in his *manyatta* for bringing home the bacon. If we turn him in, he'll spend months in the toils of the law, and that isn't pretty prospect anywhere on this continent."

The boy went off to his goats, loaded with fresh meat. Behind him he left the almost born *mimba*. The fetus was sleek and darkly marked, gleaming with amniotic fluid, and its perfectly formed hooves felt soft as jelly.

"I hope we did the right thing," Winter said as we drove away. "This kind of poaching is never going to be eradicated. The people are hungry for meat, for protein of any kind. They see game as competition for their cattle. And with the human population of Kenya growing at about 3.5 per cent a year, the competition is going to get sharper and sharper. In the old days the tribes were nomadic, so they took their killing of the game with them whenever they moved. Now the government is encouraging permanent farms, subsistence farms. No farmer wants bushbuck invading his plot of maize. He sets wire snares along the game trails. Keeps crop loss down and puts meat in the pot. When lions kill his cattle, he puts a spoonful of Coopertox — cattle dip — into the carcass and the lions are finished. Poisoned. In the old days the warriors went out after the lion with spears, but that's all in the past. Tin roofs babies, wire snares and cattle dips — that's the way of the future. That's what will ultimately finish the wildlife."

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numbers and the removal of immatures which have not had a chance to breed.

There are two additional environmental factors responsible for their scarcity. The first is sewage pollution since more lobsters are being found with exo-skeletal inflections possibly caused by bacteria such as *Aeromonas* or *Pseudomonas*. The second is the increasing presence of oil slick which can now be found on any beach. Oil in concentrations as low as 0.001 per cent has been found to interfere with the lobsters' feeding habits — in technical terms, lobsters rely on chemoreception to locate food and the presence of oil blocks their chemoreceptive abilities and thus hinders their feeding.

From all this, it should be clear that there is an urgent need for action to slow down the rate of deterioration of the beach-marine environment. The Kenya

authorities would therefore be well advised to consider the points raised in respect of these two important areas, Malindi and Matwapa-Shanzu. Specifically that:

- Continuous removal of mangrove trees will bring about an accelerating decline of mangrove-dependent components of the inshore fishing industry.

- Further reduction of mangroves will result in a steady decline of dependent reefs.

- The inability of the reefs to regenerate and protect beaches will lead to the removal of most if not all the beach sand and possibly cause a shark problem, both of which would adversely affect tourism.

- Inadequate treatment and control of sewage will add to the ecological damage.

- Over-exploitation of shells and over-fishing without control or supervision will have adverse economic as well as environmental consequences.