

BIG GAME WITHOUT A GUN

Written and Illustrated by LESLIE BROWN

ALMOST everyone I meet, newly out to Africa, seems to suppose that our big game animals are necessarily dangerous, and that it is most unwise to approach them on foot without a rifle for protection. But to those of us who live and go about our ordinary day-to-day business in the haunts of rhinoceros, buffalo and lion the carrying of a rifle sufficiently heavy to stop a charging elephant in its tracks becomes rather a bore. The thing is inconvenient in forest or thick thornbush, it cuts into one's shoulder and the number of occasions on which it is likely to be even useful is very small. Rocky Mountain Jack, in *Jock of the Bushveld*, replied, when asked why he carried a six-shooter, "it's a thing you don't often need, but when you do you need it dern bad." One can follow this philosophy and carry a heavy weapon or one may come in time, as most of us do, to regard the pachyderms, bovines and big cats with not quite the respect that is perhaps their due. When trout fishing in forests infested with

parting gently and silently as an animal moved cautiously away. No buck or pig could have caused that movement, as they would have bolted precipitately, and the dog with me pressed close in to my heels instead of rushing after whatever it was. All this spelt at least a carnivore, and a few minutes later an outcry from monkeys and birds in a bushy gully gave a clue as to what it must be. Moving slowly forward I found that this large male leopard had lain in his bed in the cool long grass till it became evident to him that I would tread on him if he did not move; his bed was *two* yards from me when I first saw the grass swaying. Since then I have wondered how often I have been under close scrutiny by unseen leopards; the dog, of course, knew all about it.

Lions, too, may behave in the same way, but usually when I have been in lion country I have been carrying a rifle, and even though it is not going to be used the feel of the barrel in one's palm is comforting when one is suddenly faced with a lion. I remember one occasion in particular.

bulls of evil repute, nursing their imagined wrongs in dense cover and just waiting for me to come a little closer, have never done me any harm. It makes the heart go pit-a-pat when a buffalo, unseen in thick cover, starts at your feet like a monstrous rabbit and crashes off with a snort of alarm, but that's all. Indeed, I have tried, without success, to attract the attention of an old bull buffalo by that sure draw for inquisitive heifers—lying on my back and waving my legs in the air. One day some bull buffalo, wounded by someone else, may go for me in earnest, but I do not fear the whole buffalo tribe on account of that remote possibility.

Rhinoceros, I admit, are rather a different matter. Nine out of ten rhinoceros will go away when spoken to sharply, or at the sound of a tree tapped with a stick, but the tenth gets up and comes in your direction without making any bones about it. The right thing is to locate your rhinoceros and avoid him if you can; because of the tick birds who are always with him, this is



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rhinoceros, elephant, and buffalo—and such forests do exist—we seldom think about a rifle; in Kenya in these days, too, the possession of a rifle is so hedged about with necessary restrictions on account of the Mau Mau that when in doubt it seems hardly worth while to go through the forms and get the gun out. The odds are, in any case, that if you tread unawares close to a hungry man-eating tiger or lion you will not know anything about it till it is too late to use the gun. Of course I am not suggesting that foolish liberties should be taken.

If your early training was as a big-game hunter, used to thinking in terms of guns, as mine was, it is a little time before this unusual attitude can be firmly adopted, but if you are new to it there is no reason why you should not from the start accept one simple fact—that the only idea of almost any game animal, however large, on becoming aware of the presence of a man is to escape, usually precipitately with a crash or a snort, but sometimes quietly so as to attract no attention. This was very clearly brought out by a leopard I encountered two years ago. I was walking through breast high grass, looking for birds' nests, when I became aware that the grass just in front of me was

We were going along a small game trail which passed through a patch of bushes, little more than knee high and about the extent of a good-sized room. When it became plain that we were going to pass *through* this cover and were within ten yards of it, seven lions came out like a covey of partridges, but making the sort of woof that no partridge ever makes. The male stopped and looked over his shoulder, his teeth bared, but in a few seconds followed his pride. Had we deviated round the bushes they might well have lain there without moving, and perhaps skulked off when we had gone. Once since I have looked over my shoulder and met the regard of a young lion who was watching me from the top of an anthill, behind which he had taken cover at my approach.

Cats, you may say, are one thing, but what about the really heavy game—buffalo, rhinoceros and elephant? Buffalo, most dreaded of all, and popularly supposed to spend their time stalking the human being with intention to gore and crush him, I hold of no account. If wounded they are very terrible adversaries, and they are also dangerous when sick with rinderpest, but when hale and healthy they are far less dangerous than domestic cattle. Even the old solitary

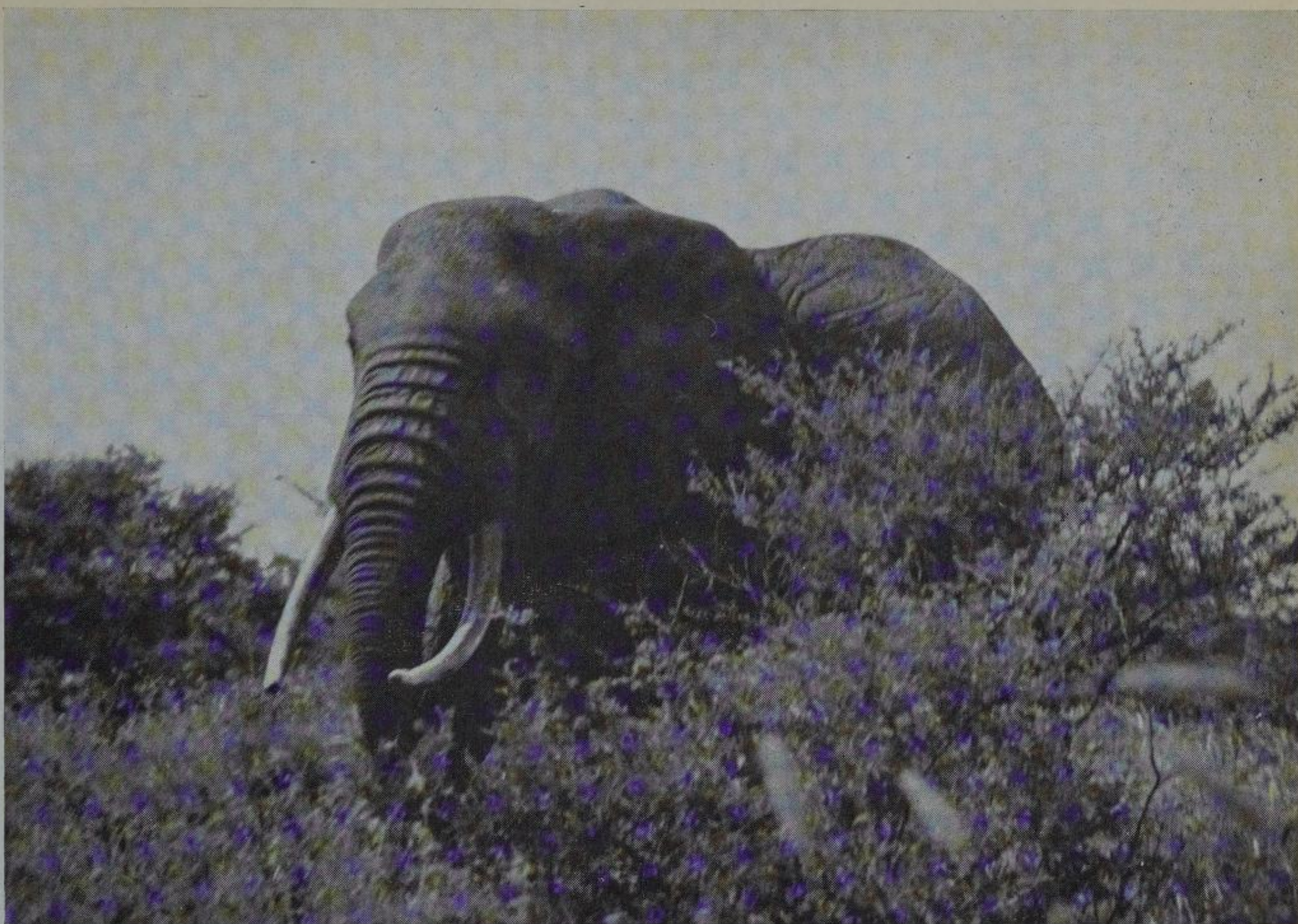
not very difficult even in thick bush when the rhinoceros is asleep. If you locate him and cannot avoid him, find a climbable tree, and from its base instruct the rhinoceros to go away; he probably will, and if he does not you climb the tree and abuse him from there till he does. If there is no tree, and the rhino is located and unavoidable, return the way you came. If charged, I am told, you should wait till the rhino is six feet away and then step nimbly aside; I am also told that experts hang their hat on the horn as the rhino passes. I have never had to do either of these things, but I have had to climb a tree, and had the pleasure of seeing the African who was with me kick the rhinoceros on the snout.

For practical purposes, even if armed, I am gunless in rhinoceros country because they are not, to me, worth an expensive licence as trophies, and if I were to shoot one and claim self-defence the Game Department would certainly pursue me. This was the position in which I found myself some years ago; I was looking for elephant, guided by an Mbere child of an age at which, in Britain, he would hardly have been allowed to cross a main road alone (and indeed this would have been a much more

dangerous undertaking), and while we were making our way through dense thorn, without any climbable trees, we came on a cow rhinoceros with calf, reputed—I think rightly—to be one of the world's most dangerous animals. The child turned to me and with an engaging grin remarked "Shall I chuck a stone at it?" Realising that I was in the hands of someone who knew more about rhinoceros than I did, I made an ambiguous sign, and a well aimed stone hit the beast fair and square, and it bolted. My respect for rhinoceros has never quite recovered.

Much more satisfactory as an anti-rhinoceros measure is a good dog. Some years ago I possessed a bull terrier Patchy, who loved to chase three animals—baboons, pig and rhinoceros—because these were the only animals he could actually catch. The pig and baboons mauled him repeatedly, but the rhinoceros were absolutely at his mercy. I first learned this when we were coming down a hill one night after dark, and the bull terrier dashed madly away into the murk and could later be heard barking at something that squealed in protest. Thinking he was embroiled with a pig I rushed up to help, and very nearly cannoned into a large rhinoceros. It was bailed up on a small promontory of earth with steep sides falling into a gully, and there it remained for some little time till the bull terrier tired and heeded my cries at last.

Thereafter nothing could stop him; he got to know every possible rhinoceros holt on that hill and would make straight for them in the hope of finding the rhinoceros at home. If it was, there would be a chorus of snorts and barks, and a heavy crashing receding into the distance. Then back would come Patchy, grinning all over his face as only a bull terrier can, and looking up at me as if to say "There now, what d'you think of that?" With him at my heels I never had a qualm, though there were many rhinoceros on that hill and the



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bush was both dense and devoid of climbable escape trees.

With the wrong dog it is another matter altogether; I now own a boxer bitch, and thinking to put her in the right way of it, the other day I took her up to a rhinoceros I had located. She barked at the rhinoceros all right, but evidently not with sufficient conviction, for it charged her. She then ran back to me, and I had to get on top of a big rock pretty smartly. I had a splendid view of the rhinoceros from my rock, and could see that at five yards range she was very uncertain of my position, since I was some feet above her. She turned and made off, and I did not encourage the bitch to pursue.

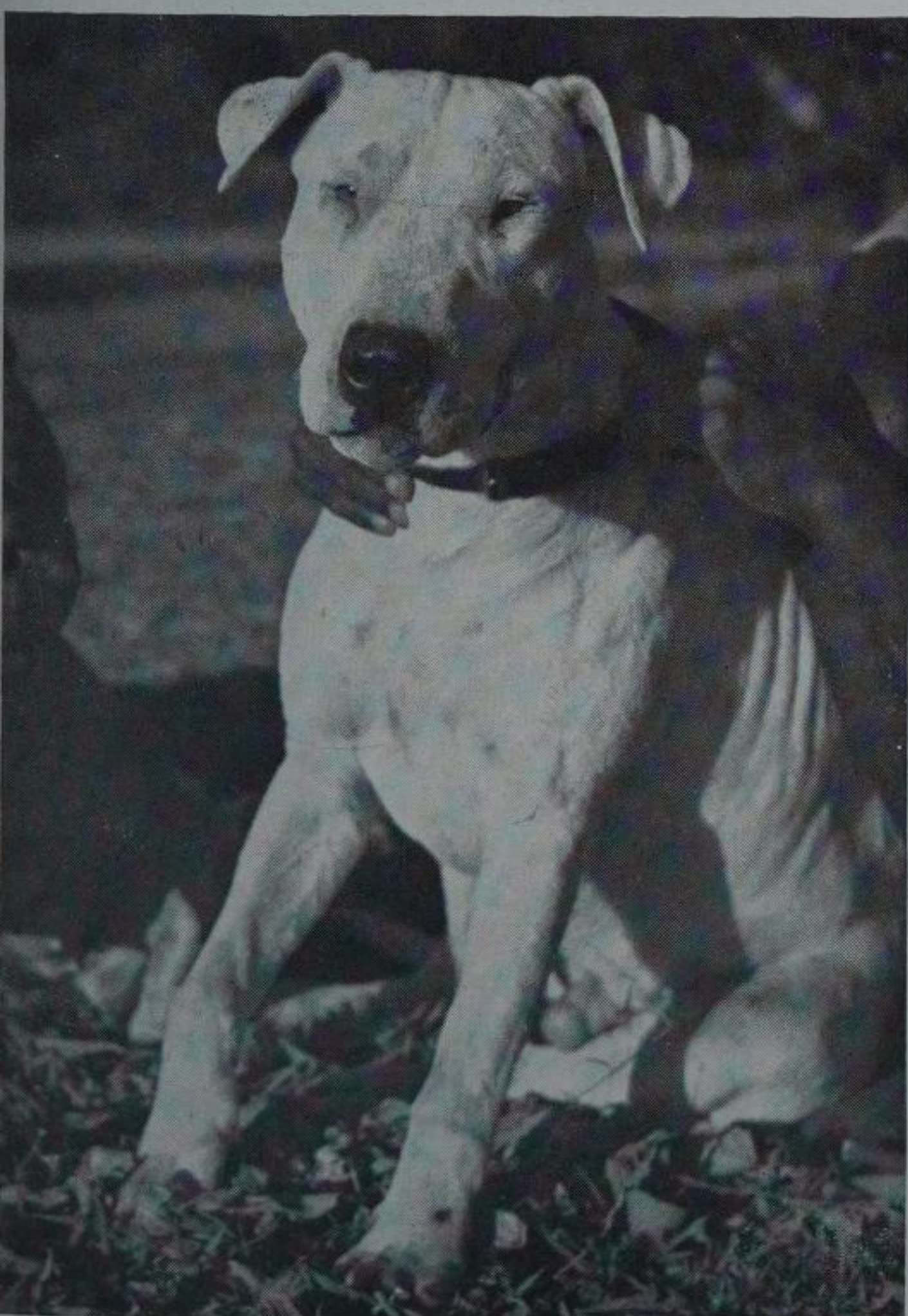
Elephants are the greatest of animals, and peaceable as a general rule. I have many times been close to them without a gun, and they have almost always gone away. With so vast a beast, however, the human being really does feel small. When a bull elephant is slowly advancing down a track towards you you feel practically obliged to concede the road, and there is no better cure for self-conceit than to see how close you can make yourself go to a bull elephant without any means of protection. When you get too close to him he will probably just move away slowly, that is to say if he is a "natural" elephant, unafraid of and unconcerned about man because he has not been persistently hunted. Cows and calves are another matter; they are best not approached too closely. And it is surprising how fast one can run when under the impression that a cow elephant is hard on one's heels!

It was one of those old peaceable bulls that finally taught me a much-needed lesson, that the pursuit of big game without a gun may be decidedly dangerous if too many liberties are taken. I had grown too confident, and I walked up to this big bull with the intention of taking his photograph, showing him towering over me against the sky. The bull elephants where he lives are mostly peaceable and may be found grazing out in the open during the day; for some time I stayed close to this one, and finally he was feeding

on the other side of a table-topped acacia a bare ten yards away. In this position I could not take his photograph, and when he withdrew quietly into a gully choked with scrub I thought I had a golden chance to cross and take his picture as he emerged on the other side. I had judged him wrongly; having been aware of my presence for some time, and growing tired of it, he had gone into the thicket to avoid me. When he heard me follow him in he immediately started to search for me in the most hostile manner. I could not move among the thorns without making some slight sound, and each time I did there were a few heavy crashing steps in my direction, just a little closer each time. I knew at length that another rush must bring him on top of me and stood still, feeling very small and weak indeed. We were possibly ten yards apart, and as we stood there, neither of us making a sound, he slowly raised his trunk. I could see the tip of it against the sky, moving round and round sniffing gently for any taint of my presence on the air. It was a hostile gesture and it seemed unkind of that flexible organ to take advantage in this way.

However, to cut a long story short, the elephant relented; I heard him move off and cast prudence to the winds and bolted out of the thicket myself. Afterwards, just to steady my nerves, I returned and took some photographs of him—but not of him towering over me against the sky.

I am well aware that much of what I have written will be frowned upon by orthodox big game men, game wardens and others who would take the view that such activities might lead to unnecessary fatalities and public animus against the animals concerned. I write not to encourage the taking of liberties, but to show that the African bush is a far safer place than Hyde Park Corner. Many people lose much of the pleasure they could derive from wild life by an unreasoning fear of its larger and more splendid forms—largely the product of the deliberate exaggeration of the dangers of big game to give those who hunt a bigger thrill. The rule is to know something about the animals, and assume that they will be peaceable and will go away as soon as they observe your presence. Liberties need not be and should not be taken, and experience, the gaining of which one seems somehow to survive without a scratch, will soon show what can and cannot be done. Certainly it is unnecessary to believe that you cannot go about in big game country unless you are armed with a rifle.



THE BULL TERRIER, PATCHY. The author found him an excellent protection against rhinoceros