

**HORN OF
THE HUNTER**

Books by Robert C. Ruark

HORN OF THE HUNTER

GRENADINE'S SPAWN

ONE FOR THE ROAD

I DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS LOADED

GRENADINE ETCHING

HORN OF THE HUNTER

Robert C. Ruark



With 32 Drawings by the Author
and 32 Pages of Photographs



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DEDICATION

*This book is for Harry Selby of Nanyuki, Kenya
and for our good friends
Juma, Kidogo, Adem, Chabani, Chalo, Katunga, Ali, Karioki,
Chege, Mala, Gitau, Gathiru, Kaluku, and Kibiriti,
all good men of assorted tribes*

Author's Note

THIS is a book about Africa in which I have tried to avoid most of the foolishness, personal heroism, and general exaggeration that usually attend works of this sort. It is a book important only to the writer and has no sociological significance whatsoever.

**HORN OF
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Chapter 1

IT WAS very late the first day out of Nairobi when Harry turned the jeep off the dim track he was following through the high, dusty grass and veered her toward a black jaggedness of trees. The moon was rising high over a forlorn hill, and it had begun to turn nasty cold. The jeep bumped and lurched and stalled once. She wasn't really a jeep, but a kind of glorified jeep that the British call a Land Rover. We had named her Jessica, figuring that to be a nice name for a jeep, and Jessica, by temperament, seemed considerably more jeep than rover.

In the glare of Jessica's headlights the trees profiled more clearly now. Harry flicked the searchlight upward and said: "Lots of dead stuff. And water, too, down in that donga. I expect we'd best camp here. *Memsaab* stiff and sore?"

The *memsaab* said with considerable feeling that she was about as goddamned stiff and as goddamned sore as a girl figured to get after riding from 8 A.M. over no roads in a goddamned jungle until past 9 P.M. Harry made a little deprecatory cluck, and at the profanity suggested that he had a priceless bottle of scotch someone in Nairobi had given him, which would make a world of difference to anybody. He turned to Chabani, the Wa-Kibuyu car boy.

"*Na kuja* lorry?" he asked.

"*Ndio*," Chabani said.

“*Wapi pombe?*” Harry asked.

“*Hapa,*” Chabani said. “*Kariba.*”

The black boy handed Harry the bottle of scotch. “*Magi kwa bwana,*” he told the black boy, who crawled out of the jeep, and bled two cupfuls of water—now cold from condensation—from the tied canvas bags of water that were lashed to the steel uprights that supported Jessica’s canvas top. The dust and little wiggly things settled in the water. The scotch burnt through the water going down. It stayed warm when it got down, lighting a tiny little furnace in the stomach.

“Painkiller,” Harry said. “Cures everything. We’ll make a nice *campi* here soon’s the lorry comes up.”

We could see the lorry, overloaded and grotesque with a dozen black boys making silhouettes from the tarpaulin-lashed top, lumbering and complaining and wallowing along. She had stuck herself like a contrary cow twice that day already. We watched her lights leave the track and turn in toward us. All of a sudden her lights pointed upward and her black shape lurched and stopped.

“Oh, Christ,” Harry said. “Pig hole. You two wait here with the bottle and one of the water bags. I’ll send Chabani back with some camp chairs and have him do up a fire while we wrestle the old girl out of her troubles.”

He said something swiftly in Swahili to Chabani, who began to untie the dead Tommy ram from the spare tire on Jessica’s bonnet, where it had been lashed down a couple of hours before when Harry shot it just at dusk. Chabani dumped it on the ground and took a *panga*, a big, curved, sawbacked knife, out of the back seat and dropped it on the ground by the dead Thomson gazelle. Then he tortured out the heavy, square green wooden chop box and put two canvas cushions from Jessica’s hard front seat on it. He pointed to the chop box, smiled cheerlessly, and

said: "Sit." Then he took the *panga* and disappeared into the grove of flat-topped thorn acacias. We could hear him breaking dried branches. Harry climbed back into the jeep and drove off to check on the lorry's sad condition.

Jinny looked at me with a very small, pinched face. She was wearing my trench coat and looked very small, although she is not small, and very miserable, although she does not have the face for misery. I poured her another drink into the gay red plastic cup and took one myself off the top of the bottle of Harry's whisky. It didn't taste any nastier.

I looked down at the dead Tommy, at the hole in his shoulder, centered exactly on the point and traversing all the way through him where Harry had shot him with the little Mannlicher. I was glad I had no license for Kenya and that it would be two more days before I would be allowed to shoot in Tanganyika. I wanted to see more of it first.

Harry had shot the Tommy ram swiftly and competently. We had not seen much game that day. Just on dusk we passed a few wildebeests and an odd zebra or two and began to see the Thomson gazelles in groups of a dozen. They were beautiful and dainty with their sharp, straight black horns curving a little at the tip, and the black bars on the gold hides just over the white stomach hair. We came along at dusk into a large herd of a hundred or more, and Harry stopped the jeep suddenly.

"*Toa bundouki*, Chabani," he said. "*Kidogo*."

He turned half apologetically, like a schoolboy asking for permission to leave the room. "If you don't mind," he said, "I think I'll just nip out and shoot one of those Tommies for the boys' supper. They've been lying around town for a month and they're fair starved for red meat."

He got out and held the door open. "Care to come with me?"

I followed him, clumsily imitating the half crouch he used, and after half a hundred yards he stopped and held one hand downward, palm toward me. I stopped, and he crouched on his hams, both feet planted firmly in the short, crisp dry grass. The Tommies were moving off, not spooked but suspicious and shy, at least two hundred yards away. I could barely make out the flashes of buff against the Tommy-colored background. Only a little white blur caused by the flicking of their tails caught my city eyes. I wondered how a man could say definitely he was going to shoot anything and know to himself that he meant it and could produce it.

Harry was aiming swiftly at one of them—I couldn't tell which—and as soon as the gun came up to his left eye he seemed to fire. The little gun made an unconscionable amount of noise, and you could hear the bullet hit like a wet boxing glove on a sand bag.

"Piga," Selby said to himself. *"Kufa."*

He turned to me. "He'll be dead just over there. I saw his tail stop when he took off. Always tell by the tail on a Tommy. When it stops that circular motion, he's dead and just doesn't know it. Got this one through the shoulder."

We walked over to where the Tommies had been, and after about three hundred yards Harry pointed. "There," he said.

I couldn't see anything.

"We'll just wait a bit until the lorry comes up. I usually have one of the Mohammedans in the Rover to make the religious thing, but Chabani is Kikuyu and no Moslem. We'll just let one of the boys leap off the lorry and do a halal—cut its throat—so everything will be nice and legal."

The lorry came alongside, and one of the men, one with a white flat fez, leaped off and took a knife out of a sheath.

"Pandi hi," Harry said, pointing.

The boy raced off with long bounds and bent over something. He touched at it hesitantly with his knife, stood up straight, spread his hands, and made a little shrug.

“Too bad,” Harry said. “It’s too dead to be *halaled*. They’re not supposed to cut the throat unless it’s a wee little bit alive, or the *halal* doesn’t count with Allah or Mohammed or whoever’s watching. Pity. About half my boys are Mohammedans, especially the Wakambas. Moslemism is very popular with the Wakambas these days. Gives them great style. Not that they know what the hell the priest is saying half the time when they go to the *mousquetina*. Oh well. Let’s go and collect the dinner. He ought to be tender. I chose a young buck.”

The Tommy was lying dead. He looked clean and very fresh and sweet smelling and seemed undisturbed by the small bullet, which had taken him on the shoulder and gone all the way through.

“He’ll be fine,” Harry said. “Pity about the Moslems, though. I shouldn’t be at all surprised if there’s not some finger crossing and a few broken articles of faith tonight. Those boys get ravenous for meat when they’re lying around town between safaris. When we get into real game country and start bringing in masses of meat, they’ll all have the bellyache for a week. They eat up to twelve pounds of meat a day, you know. *Each*. All that rich meat is pure hell on the tummy after it’s been used to a diet of nothing but mealie porridge.

“Here, Chabani,” he said as the jeep drove up, Chabani, proud and show-offish, alongside the new *Memsaab*.

“*Hapa*.” Chabani got out, produced a coil of rope off the bumper, and heaved the Tommy onto the hood where he lashed it to the tire. It bled a little into the circle of the wheel. It was the first dead thing I had seen in Africa, and I began to wonder,

with considerable nervousness, if I would be up to the task of feeding fifteen people who considered ten pounds of meat per diem, per each, a bare necessity of living. I knew what I could do with a shotgun. I did not know what I could do with all the fancy rifles I had, owing to never having shot any sort of rifle at anything but a target at the Campfire Club.

I was still wondering as we sat on the chop box, drinking whisky and water and waiting for Harry to come back with the lorry. Chabani had dropped an armload of dried, dead limbs and twigs a few feet away from the dead Tommy ram. He came over, asked me for a match, and then scuffed a handful of the dried grass from between his big flat feet in their tattered tan tennis shoes. He lit the handful of grass with a match, blowing on it carefully, and then started to feed it twigs, one by one, each no bigger than a kitchen match. His little blaze caught, and he fed it more twigs, gnarled ones this time, as big as a baby's wrist. The fire danced and reached up for more food. In a very few minutes he was feeding it logs as thick as his thigh, and in a very few more he was dragging logs so big he couldn't lift them but only snake them through the grasses.

When he had manufactured a blaze as high as his head and as long as the lorry, he flourished a flat shovel from somewhere and robbed his blaze of a heaping shovelful of coals. These he took to a point fifty yards away and built himself a fresh fire from a heap of dead wood he had evidently gathered and left there. When it was crackling, he came back, picked up the *panga*, and began to scythe about him in the clumps of high grasses that accented the trampled-down terrain. He grinned foolishly in the firelight.

Jinny and I had said nothing. She got up, shivered once, and picked up the tails of my trench coat, spreading her legs

and subjecting the back of her stiff, shiny new khaki-panted bottom to the fire, as women have always done. She smiled for the first time since late afternoon.

“This is rather nice,” she said. “I think I could use another drink, though.” She held out her red cup and I dribbled a few more ounces of Harry’s precious scotch into it. “I don’t seem to miss the ice,” she said, “which is possibly just as well. I wonder how long before they’ll get that bloody truck out of the whateverkindof hole it’s in.”

“You’ve been three days in East Africa, Osa Johnson,” I said. “If you’ve picked up ‘bloody’ already, you may as well say ‘lorry’ too. ‘Bloody truck’ sounds like an unpleasant physical disability.”

“We’ve named this dirty little backbreaker, this jeep thing of ours, already,” Jinny said. “If you call a jeep ‘Jessica,’ what do you think you should call a lorry who is going to live with you for the rest of your life?”

The scotch had achieved a definite command post in my stomach, and the fire was beautifully warm and crackly noisy by now.

“Well,” I said, “if a ship is a she and a truck is a she, too, and if this ungainly slut is a lorry, there is only one name for her. Annie. Annie Lorry. Nice, what? Bonnie Annie Laurie, who is in the process of laying herself down to dee.”

“Jesus,” Jinny said. “Alone in the wilds of darkest whatever with a strange Englishman, fifteen blackamoors who possibly eat white ladies underdone, and a husband who makes Scotch-type puns, Annie Lorry, yet. I like it,” she said with the charming consistency for which wives, the world around, are noted. “I wonder how fares it with Annie. She should have cancer of the differential.”

“Not well,” I said. “Here come the children of Israel bearing their chattels.”

Harry was striding along at the head of his porters, carrying a rolled-up something, which proved later to be the toilet tent, on his back. The boys were strung out behind him, loaded with other tents and odd, lumpy-looking packages and angular poles.

“Bloody thing’s bedded down for the night,” Harry said. “We’ll dig her out after dinner. All the boys are starved, and I imagine you are. Also, they’ve all got dreadful hangovers, as have I. City life is not good for country boys, black or white. We’ll set up the sleepers and turn old Ali loose at the cook fire for a little *chacula* . . . and have a drink or so first to keep off the fevers . . . and would the *Memsaab* like a bath?”

The *memsaab* muttered that as long as she was going to die anyhow, she would rather die drunk and dirty.

“She’ll doubtless grow to love it,” Harry said. “Well, cheers, chums. Wonderful stuff, isn’t it? Tastes so nasty and feels so good.”

One of the blacks came and took the dead Tommy away. Another set up a portable table and unflexed three camp chairs—canvas and comfortable. We set the bottle on the table. Harry excused himself and drifted away to supervise the erection of the tents. We weren’t making an extensive camp—no mess tent, no tents for the boys, no tent for Harry. Just a tent for the *bwana wa safari*, which suddenly was me, and for the *memsaab wa safari*, which suddenly was Virginia. A hyena chattered across the donga. I didn’t know it was a donga then—a dry riverbed with just a trickle of water to one side. The hyena squealed, roared, growled, and then laughed in that maniac’s mirthless hysteria that nobody has ever put down on paper correctly.

“My God,” Jinny said, “what was that, a lion?”

“No,” Harry said, sliding suddenly out of the darkness. “That was a hyena. The lion is over that way,” he said with a sweep of his arm. “If you wait a second you can hear him. It’s a cross between a cough and the first mutter of a summer thunderstorm. Now. Hear him? We call it *ngruma*, wonderful word for ‘roar’—*ngruma*.”

“No,” Jinny said. “I don’t hear him and I don’t want to hear him.”

There was a sudden crashing cacophony of assorted noises from the trees. It was a hoot and a squeal and a chuckle and a yell and a yip and a yap and a growl and a roar and a whistle and a clash of cymbals. We just looked at Harry.

“Birds,” he said. “Baboons, monkeys, bugs. And away up the donga, one leopard. Also, there are lots of fairly fresh rhino sign down by the little river. Unpleasant beast, the rhino. Apt to come blundering into camp. Can’t see very well. Knew a bloke once got up to go to the sanitary tent and when he stuck his head out to go back to bed there was this big rhino cow grazing between him and his sleeping tent. Stayed in the latrine all night. Most uncomfortable.”

“My God,” Jinny said.

“Looks about like time for a little *chacula*,” Harry said. “You hungry?”

“Starved,” I said.

“Famished,” Jinny said.

“We’ll be having a bit of the Tommy,” Harry said. “A touch fresh for my taste, but if we don’t get our bit tonight the boys’ll have it gone by tomorrow. And it’s a young one. Shouldn’t be bad. Old Ali—he’s the cook—is a ruddy wonder with game. Juma! *Jumaaaa!*” he yelled. “*Lette chacula!*”

“*Ndio, bwana,*” came back from the cook fire.

A white-robed wraith in a white fez, followed by another banshee in white, writhed up from the smaller grove of acacias.

They cleared the table of bottle and glasses and reset it rapidly with china plates and condiments.

“*Soupi*,” the head boy, Juma, said.

I could recognize him now. He had a happy, evil sort of face, with a pencil-size hole in his ear lobe that the fire shone through and an impudently cheerful look about him, owing undoubtedly to an Irish kind of snub nose. His color was very light, about gabardine. Juma was a coast Swahili. He spoke and wrote Arabic and Swahili—coastal Swahili, impeccably grammatical and unlike the crude pidgin Swahili the Wakambas and Kikuyus and Nandis spoke.

“Very important fellow, old Juma,” Harry said. “Got hell’s own amount of influence with the boys. Priest of sorts. Threatens ’em with Allah’s vengeance and lends ’em money at God knows what interest rate betimes. Between praying and usury, he keeps ’em on the jump.”

Juma and the other man fetched tureens of soup, undoubtedly Campbell’s. The bread was toasted and hot. The butter in its green plastic dish was fresh and sweet. The Tommy chops came smoking from the fire, and they looked and smelled wonderful.

“Fancy a beer?” Harry asked. “We’ve got a couple of bottles in the water bag. Kaluku!” He spoke sharply to the other white-robe. “*Lette beer-i kwa bwana!*” Kaluku bobbed his head and swished his skirts off after the beer. It was barely cool and very pleasant, rather like Australian beer in its heavy body. It was beer that never saw a ball game.

“Local product,” Harry said. “Called Tusker. Bloody awful, I think. I love that Danish pilsner they have at the Norfolk, myself. But this can taste awfully good—well, say a month hence.”

“I ain’t knockin’ it now,” I said. “Pass the Tommy.”

Considering that this particular Thomson gazelle had been dancing on the village green about four hours ago, possibly

contemplating matrimony, he was great. He was not so tough as tender, and he tasted unlike any game I had ever eaten. No rankness, no gaminess, no stringiness. He was succulent and unfit, and I had three helpings of him.

“Best of all, I think,” Harry said. “Except maybe gerenuk that you get up in the N.F.D. Long-necked little beggars, but beautiful to eat. You’ll really get to love Tommy over the long haul. He never gets tiresome on the tongue. This one’s a touch fresh for my fancy, though. I like to hang it at least a day. I love meat,” he said. “Give me cold meat and a hunk of bread, and you can have all the rest.”

We finished the meat, and I noticed that Virginia had not allowed her isolation in the midst of Africa to bother an appetite that always seemed to flourish best where night found her, whether at the Stork Club or some few miles out of Haddon Rig, the lost sheep station in New South Wales, Australia. She would leap slightly when a fresh, new hoot came out of the small, intimate jungle of trees, but as she leaped she chewed.

Juma, the head boy, came and swept away the dishes. He went back to the cook fire and returned with a smoking fry pan.

“What’s this?” Virginia asked.

“Dessert,” Harry said. “Crêpes suzette. Old Ali always makes ’em first night out. Instills any amount of faith in the clients. Good?”

“Saints preserve us,” Virginia said. “Wonderful. How does he do it on an open fire?”

“I don’t know,” Harry said. “I’ve had him for years. He can cook anything. Uses a biscuit tin for an oven. Tell me what you want, and old Ali will produce it.”

“If we eat like this on the first night out in a temporary camp,” Virginia said, “God help my figure after two months of Ali’s fine Swahilian hand with the skillet. I’m about to bust.”

Juma and Kaluku came and cleared away the table. Juma fetched coffee, and I remembered a bottle of brandy I had stuck into the back of Jessica. We sat there facing the fire, listening to the night noises, the hyenas, the birds I did not know the name of, the leopard coughing somewhere up the creek, the bugs swooping and zooming but not biting. The moon had climbed steeply into the sky, and you could see the little hills plainly under it like a long caravan of camels suddenly stopped and still as though waiting beside a well.

It was cold—not bitter, not quite frosty, but chilly dew cold—and the fire was warm and wonderful. I was tired and I was full and the coffee was strong and black and the brandy slid down smoothly. I started to think about just how far I was from New York and newspaper syndicates and telephones and telegraphs and the 21 Club and income taxes and subways and elevators, and then I sat up with a startled feeling inside. I am a hunter, I said to myself. I must be a hunter, or I wouldn't be here in the deep end of nowhere with a city-slicker wife and fifteen strange black boys and a young punk with no beard, practically, who says he is a white hunter. Looking at the fire and listening to the noises, I ran my mind back to what had brought me here, and I wrote a little mental essay for myself as I sat and sipped the brandy.

The hunter's horn sounds early for some, I thought, later for others. For some unfortunates, prisoned by city sidewalks and sentenced to a cement jungle more horrifying than anything to be found in Tanganyika, the horn of the hunter never winds at all. But deep in the guts of most men is buried the involuntary response to the hunter's horn, a prickle of the nape hairs, an acceleration of the pulse, an atavistic memory of their fathers, who killed first with stone, and then with club, and then with spear, and then with bow, and then with gun, and finally with formulae. How meek the

man is of no importance; somewhere in the pigeon chest of the clerk is still the vestigial remnant of the hunter's heart; somewhere in his nostrils the half-forgotten smell of blood. There is no man with such impoverishment of imagination that at some time he has not wondered how he would handle himself if a lion broke loose from a zoo and he were forced to face him without the protection of bars or handy, climbable trees.

This is a simple manifestation of ancient ego, almost as simple as the breeding instinct, simpler than the urge for shelter, because man the hunter lives basically in his belly. It is only when progress puts him in the business of killing other men that the bloodlust surges upward to his brain. And even war is still regarded by the individual as sport—the man himself against a larger and more dangerous lion.

Hunting is simple. Animals are simple. Man himself is simple inside himself. In this must lay some explanation for the fact that zoos are crowded on Sundays and museums that display mounted animals are thronged on weekdays as well as holidays. This must explain the popularity of moving pictures that deal with animals. This explains the lasting popularity of the exploits of Tarzan of the Apes, the half-animal figure created by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Man is still a hunter, still a simple searcher after meat for his growling belly, still a provider for his helpless mate and cubs. Else why am I here? From the moment he wakes until the moment he closes his eyes, man's prime concern is the business of making a living for himself and his family. Bringing home the bacon is the modern equivalent of banging a curly mammoth over the head with a big sharp rock.

Man has found it exceedingly difficult lately to decipher the weird incantations and ceremonies that surround the provision of meat and shelter for his spawn. He is mystified by the cabalistic

signs of the economist. He does not understand billions of dollars in relationship to him and his. Parity baffles him; the administration of ceilings and floors and controls and excises and supports does not satisfy his meat urge or his aesthetic response to the chase, when the hunter's horn of necessity rouses him. These are pretty fine thoughts, I thought. I will think some more.

But he can understand a lion because a lion is life in its simplest form, beautiful, menacing, dangerous, and attractive to his ego. A lion has always been the symbol of challenge, the prototype of personal hazard. You get the lion or the lion gets you.

And he can understand a gun because the gun is the symbol of man's brain and ingenuity, the device of difference between small, weak man and big, brawny, cruel life. But I do not even know whether I can shoot a rifle yet.

And he can understand man, himself, puny ape with outsize brain and weak talons, short blunt teeth, and always ridden by consuming fear and uncertainty. And I am real scared at this moment.

And he can understand a star and a moon and the sun and grass and trees and uncontrived beauty, when modern art and physical formulae and aerodynamics and jet propulsion are cloaked in unreality.

A man and a gun and a star and a beast are still ponderable in a world of imponderables. The essence of the simple ponderable is man's potential ability to slay a lion. It is an opportunity that comes to few, but the urge is always present. Never forget that man is not a dehydrated nellie under his silly striped pants. He is a direct descendant of the hairy fellow who tore his meat raw from the pulsing flanks of just-slain beasts and who wiped his greasy fingers on his thighs if he bothered to wipe them at all. I wiped my greasy fingers on my thigh for practice.

This is the only deeply rooted reason I can produce for the almost universal interest, either active or vicarious, in hunting. As time and civilization encroach more deeply on the individual, as man hunts his meat at the supermarket instead of in the swamps and forests, it is still interesting to note that in America some thirty-six million hunting and fishing licenses are sold annually, that the sale of outdoor magazines and books continues to boom, and that the firms that handle safaris in Africa are booked up four and five years in advance. Oddly, as the opportunity for direct participation dwindles, the interest in man versus animal continues to grow.

It seems to me I heard the hunter's horn earlier than most. I was raised in the country-small-town part of North Carolina. My grandfather was a hunter, and a serious one. So was my father, although he never in his life shot anything larger than a five-ounce bobwhite quail. When I was six years old, they gave me an air gun, and I was physically sick from excitement when I killed my first sparrow. I was even sicker when I killed my first quail with the 20-gauge shotgun Santa brought me on my eighth milestone. Thereafter, I hunted six days a week, and on the seventh I did not rest. I worked out the bird dogs on dry runs with no gun. We did not defile the Sabbath with gunfire in those days. I had few gods, however, that were not to be found in the fields and woods, and I early learned that you did not have to shoot it to enjoy it. Seeing it wild and happy more often was enough.

You might say that *Field & Stream* was my early Bible. I worshiped before the shrines of men like Archibald Rutledge, David Newell, and Ray Holland, a far piece ahead of Ernest Hemingway or Thomas Wolfe. I had good dogs as a kid, and a great many marvelous things happened to me in the woods. For a long time I had a small boy's dream of writing a story about my

dogs and my quail—and of course, me—and seeing it printed in a magazine with a cover by Lynn Bogue Hunt. This was the going-to-sleep dream. I never expected to achieve it, but dreams are not taxed for small boys, not even the wildest ones.

Somewhere along the way, when I was out after squirrels or creeping after ducks or following my old setter, Frank, after bobwhite, I got involved in an even more ambitious dream. I had early fallen under the spell of Mr. Burroughs and his Tarzan. Somewhat later came more realistic approaches to Africa—the Martin Johnsons, *Trader Horn*, *Sanders of the River*. I got involved with the travel tales of Somerset Maugham, and it seemed I would bust a gusset if I didn't get to see jungles and lions and cannibals someday.

I believe I planned to follow the Alger technique. I would return a lost wallet to a banker and get a job in his bank. Then I would marry his daughter, inherit his riches, and one day I would pack up and take a safari into Africa. I would see, and maybe

