

## *The Distal Segment*

### **The Unnecessary Holiday**

Beneath the scorching Kenyan sun  
fast as an antelope I run,  
I zig, I zag, I jump, I skip,  
from bush to bush I nimbly nip,  
forever hoping to confuse  
the beastly leopard that pursues,  
and trying to remember why  
I chose to wear a suit and tie.

At length, exhausted, I recline  
behind a hanging curtain-vine,  
and hope that I shall see no more  
of my intending predator.  
I gasp, I reel, I nearly faint,  
(I may be quick, but fit I ain't),  
and lying helpless in repose,  
I pass into a thankful doze.

But soon enough, on stealthy paw,  
with nostrils wide and hungry maw,  
the leopard comes! He sniffs the air  
and lumbers forward like a bear,  
unsheaths his claws and cuts the vine  
(behind whose tendrils I recline)  
with one fell movement to the ground.  
Oh help! It seems that I've been found...

"Before I eat you," said a voice,  
"I'd like to compliment your choice  
of running gear: I haven't seen  
such lovely pin-stripes since the Queen  
of England came here on safari:  
the Duke was similarly barry."  
"Thank you," I said and doffed my hat,  
"You *are* a well-connected cat."

"But still," the mighty pard went on,  
"Your accent is from Wellington:  
What brought you hither from New Zealand?"  
"I came," I said, "in search of eland,  
of antelopes and wildebeest  
and other things on which you feast:  
You see, of late I've been depressed,  
deprived of company and jest-  
I thought it might be quite a laugh  
to meet a zebra or giraffe;  
I've had enough of human dates:  
I'm making friends with ungulates."

"Alas, alack," the pard replied,  
"Poor chap! you very nearly died  
not knowing that your own sweet land  
(although it may be sparsely manned)  
holds friends aplenty to your taste:  
you should have stayed! Oh what a waste!  
For there, amongst the Beetle Staff,  
you'll find a very fair giraffe:  
the name of this delightful beast,  
who likes old trees on which to feast,  
whose snout elongate hairs adorn, is  
*Lasiorhynchus barbicornis!*"

I turned a paler shade of lime  
to think of all the wasted time,  
the terrible expense, the heat,  
the dust, the flies, the blistered feet,  
the sufferings that I'd endured  
(for which I hadn't been insured),  
when all I'd wanted probably  
was in Karori Sanctuary.  
I turned then to the fearsome pard  
and told him not to be so hard:  
I begged to go, if he would let me,  
back to my home. Instead he ate me.

Later I woke with aching head  
safe in my Wellingtonian bed.  
I stretched, I yawned, I rubbed my eyes;  
I saw no cats of excess size:  
that Merlot at the Conference Dinner  
had obviously been a winner.

Dr Robert Hoare, April 2003

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