

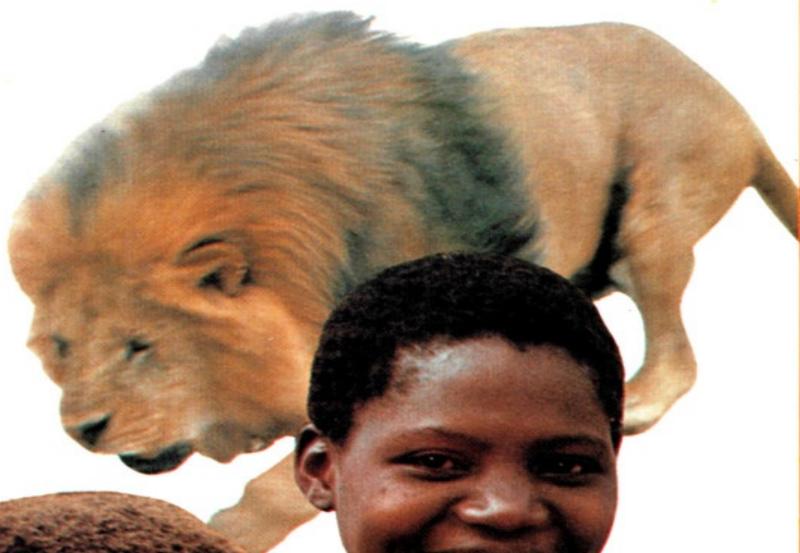
LION HUNTER

An African Love Story

By

PAUL WHITE

THE JUNGLE DOCTOR



Lion Hunter

By Paul White.

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Paul White Productions,
4/1–5 Busaco Road,
Marsfield, NSW, 2122,
Australia.

The ZAP Group,
Unit 6, 116 Woodburn Road,
Berala, NSW, 2141,
Australia.

books@zap.org.au

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Prologue

This is a factual story of life in an East African hospital during the 1940s.

Tanzania was then called Tanganyika. It was war time and before the days of penicillin. Drugs and dressings were in scant supply. Nothing was disposable; everything was used over and over again.

Ingenuity and makeshift helped. Local materials such as raw cotton, peanut oil, bees wax and giraffes' hair found their way into ward, operating theatre and dispensary. A sixty-bed hospital was run for a year at the current price of a four-bed ward for a day. A doctor's pay was \$300 a year, but seldom did a job give more satisfaction. While difficulties abounded, much was done for many.

There were lasting results as well as foundations laid in medical and nursing training, preventive and community medicine and simple pathology.

We Smell a Lion

Daudi stopped and sniffed. “Doctor, a lion has been here. Is your nose awake to that musty smell?” He held the hurricane lantern near to the ground. Clear-cut in the dew-moistened sand were lion’s paw marks. “*Kah!*” muttered my African assistant. “Bwana, not long ago Simba, the lion, trod this path.”

The starlight etched the nearby thornbush. Stark behind it was a stunted hill, warted like a giant toad that seemed to crouch threateningly on that East African plain.

“It’s a good night for goose pimples, Daudi.”

He nodded. “Where we are now is an ugly place; even the crickets fear to sing. The old ones of the country speak with hushed voices of the dark things happening here; of hyenas who turn into men and of hostile spirits that kill and maim...”

The path fell away at our feet. We stumbled into the thick sand of a dry river bed. Here the musty smell was even stronger. Daudi gripped my shoulder. Our eyes and ears wide open, we stood hardly breathing. Nothing happened.

I whispered, “You once told me to have no fear when lions roar, for they have finished feeding.”

Daudi drew in his breath sharply. “*Kah!* Can you hear roaring now? It is well to remember their eyes and noses tell them much more than do ours.” He turned up the lantern and moved forward pointing. “See, he went this way. He...” There was a crash. The lamp hit the ground. Something clawed at my face and I fell over backwards. Daudi hastily struck a match. We saw a wide span of wings swiftly blend with the darkness.

As the light touched the wick Daudi shuddered. “That was Owl, who my people say is the messenger of witches. I’m not really scared of witchcraft

these days but suddenly to be in darkness—*eeh!*” He put his hand over his mouth to keep back laughter. “You weren’t frightened, were you?” The hairs on the back of my neck were standing straight up.

“Look!” Daudi used his knobbed stick to point to more paw marks. We followed the spoor from the river bed, up the side of the bank and along a narrow path flanked by vicious thorn bush. Abruptly the path widened into a clearing. The lantern showed up trampled stalks of millet.

Daudi bent down. “*Kah!* There has been a great struggle here. There is much blood. See how the claws dig deep, and here are marks of toes that have slipped in the sand and over there—is it not the broken shaft of a spear?”

“And here, Daudi, many foot prints moving away from us. See that deep groove in the dust. A heavy body has been dragged along here.”

Daudi whistled softly. “It looks as though the lion was killed, and probably the man as well. Many feet have returned towards the village they call Makali.”

“What about the lion? Would they leave it here?”

My African friend shook his head vigorously. “It is the hunter’s right to eat the heart of the lion. He bites and swallows the meat raw and without chewing it. So it is that the strength and courage of the lions becomes his.” Then he looked up at me and smiled. “No witch-doctor would leave the carcass of a lion for the vultures and hyenas. Lion’s fat is a medicine of strength... and it’s valuable!”

“It won’t do any good for this hunter if he’s injured. We may be able to help. It can’t be for nothing that our truck broke down out there in the thornbush.”

In the grey light we hurried forward. Daudi spoke over his shoulder. “Lion’s fat is a medicine of profit to a witch-doctor—*muganga* we call him. Suppose, Bwana, you have a pain in your chest. You call in *muganga*, who takes a pair of sandals, spits on the soles and throws them to the ground. He looks at them carefully: where the toe points, the marks they make in the dust,

whether the sole is up or down and other things which are secret. He ponders for a while and then he tells the cause of your trouble. You pay a bowl of grain for his diagnosis with the sandals. Then he will say, 'Will I not be given a cow if I make strong medicine?'

Daudi stopped and prodded at a large black patch in the path. "Look, here is much blood."

Tanzania is not far south of the equator. Sunrise touched the horizon and the countryside seemed to light up in front of us on a blood-red background of clouds. A grove of huge bottle-shaped baobab trees grew in a wide gap in the hills and squat houses showed between them. Directly in front was a rather large mud-walled house. Beside it, fenced in by thornbush and stamping restlessly was a herd of hump-backed cattle.

"There is the house and the cows of Dawa, the witch-doctor of this part of the Ugogo country," breathed Daudi.

The smell of trampled dust and manure mixed with the tang of wood smoke from a small fire. Crouched round it were a huddle of men pegging out the lion's skin.

We stopped behind the trunk of a baobab tree. Daudi's voice was little more than a whisper, "This is Makali and there in front of the fire is Dawa himself preparing his lion fat medicine. There are few in this country of Ugogo who do not fear him. He is vicious and cunning and follows dark ways."

I peered through the undergrowth at a stocky man with dangling earlobes. He squatted beside the great beast's carcass, scooping out handfuls of blood-stained fat that dripped greasily through his fingers as he slopped it into a clay pot.

"I'm not sure I like the way he does his dispensing, Daudi." I wrinkled up my nose. "And I'm quite certain I wouldn't pay a cow for that!"

Daudi's eyes twinkled. "But you don't understand, Bwana. The strength of the lion goes through your skin when that medicine is rubbed on, and out goes your pain or your cough."

“And what if it doesn’t?”

“Then Dawa explains that the spell cast against you is unusually strong. He makes still another medicine and you pay a goat, as well as the cow.”

I gripped his arm. “Come on, Daudi, we must find out exactly what happened.”

Lion Fat

As we approached the fire everyone looked up, and a couple of mangy dogs snarled at our heels. For a moment there was a hostile pause. In Chigogo, the language of the Central Plains of Tanzania, I said “*Mbukwenyi*. Good morning.” A few men echoed the greeting.

“How did you sleep?” I asked, following the polite pattern.

To this came a mumbled and none-too-friendly answer. The witch-doctor stood up, a greasy mess of lion’s fat dripping from his clenched hands.

I asked, “Tell me, Great One, who slew the lion?”

He looked at me for a long minute then shrugged and said harshly, “See for yourself. He is over there in the house beneath the buyu tree.” He turned on his heel and went back to his grizzly task.

“Truly,” said Daudi as we hurried down the path, “his work may be a joy to flies but it brings no comfort to the nose.”

A crowd of people were standing outside a mud-roofed, wattle-and-daub house. A frenzied woman rushed through the door screaming the alarm cry. She stumbled past us gasping, “He’s dead! He’s dead!”

I broke into a run pausing at the door to shout, “*Hodi?* May I come in?”

A gruff voice answered, “*Karibu*. Come in.”

In the dim light of the windowless house we saw a tall figure on the floor lying on a cowskin. Around him squatted old women chanting a death song as they rocked to and fro on their heels.

I went down on one knee besides the hunter. He was badly mauled. There was no pulse but I could feel a faint heart beat. “He’s alive, Daudi, but only

just. We need much hot water and some blankets and we need them fast. Also a hot, sweet drink.”

My assistant turned to the dazed relations. “The Bwana is a doctor of skill and he has the medicines which bring life. He says your relation here still lives. If you bring hot water and blankets perhaps we can start him back on the road to health.”

Two stools were brought. On one I put everything I had that would help in this emergency: pocket pack of emergency drugs, a hypodermic syringe, a safety razor blade and a handkerchief. Turning up the lantern I sat on the second stool and examined the injured man. His face, neck and chest had been deeply clawed and were oozing blood as was his thigh. Lion’s teeth had torn his left shoulder and arm. Shock was the main problem and blood loss was severe.

“Here’s the water, Doctor, and the blankets. They’re not very clean!”

Into the syringe went two pellets of morphia. I drew up some of the water. “Daudi, don’t ever do this unless it’s an absolute emergency. This water must be swarming with germs but unless we give him this medicine quickly he’ll die. It’s better to have a few germs inside a living man and control his shock and pain than to do nothing and have a dead one.” I covered him with the cleanest of the blankets, using two kerosene tins to keep it from touching him. “We need dressings, Daudi. A handkerchief isn’t much good. Our shirts will have to go.”

He grinned. “Mine is khaki and tough material. Yours is older and will tear easily.”

He had put a clay pot of water on the fire. Soon it was boiling. Off came my shirt. I tore it so that some parts could be used as dressing, others for bandages. Into the pot it went. Using wood ashes instead of soap, I scrubbed my hands, sterilised the razor blade as best I could and set to work to deal with the damage. It was no place to do medical work. A cockroach scuttled across the floor and the flies were a menace.

A boy came in with a lump of honeycomb in his hand. Crisply Daudi

whispered instructions. "Put that into a gourd and pour hot water over it." As he supervised this he put pieces of wrung out shirt into my hand. Behind him faces peered and people mumbled excitedly as I stopped the bleeding and bandaged wound after wound.

Then there was a burst of laughter. Daudi speaking in English said, "They have great interest in what they behold. Never have they seen so much white skin all at once." I became acutely aware of my shirtlessness!

The injured man was making an effort to speak. I held the gourd of sweetened water to his lips. "Try and drink," I urged. He gulped some down. "More," I whispered, supporting his head. He drank and muttered thanks. Quite unexpectedly I felt something sharp scraping down my ribs. I staggered back. "*Eeeh!* What's going on?"

Daudi's voice was full of laughter. "One of the old women thinks you have pipeclay on your skin like the boys at the time of initiation. She tries to scrape it off and has surprise!"

The hunter's life depended on getting him to hospital fast and to do this we had to gain the good will of these people. My skin was as good a talking point as any other. I smiled at the old woman and said in Chigogo, "*Bibi*, Grandmother, have you any doubts about the colour of my skin now?"

She backed away shaking her head. She peered at my legs and thighs. "It's the colour of the belly of a frog." She faced her friends and cackled. "How strange it all looks."

Laughing, I turned to them. "What we need now more than anything else is four strong men and a hammock. To save the life of your relation here he must be carried to the hospital at Mvumi."

There was a lot of talk. "Who will pay a cow to carry a man already half dead."

"Is there any profit in this thing."

The injured man's lips moved. "Are there not cows in my herd."

Daudi sprang to his feet repeating these words then, in a scathing tone, “Is it that you wish him dead so that you may share his cattle among you?”

The villagers argued among themselves but in the end went and collected the cow.

In the long delay that irritated me beyond measure, I coaxed the sick man to drink more of the hot sweetened fluid. His pulse grew stronger and he muttered, “The pain is less but my head goes round and round.”

At long last they brought the cow and with it a long bamboo pole. We put a blanket under the man and over the pole and pinned it in position with tough finger-length thorns. The carriers lifted gently and then shouldered the pole. Slowly our safari moved on its way to the hospital.

Dawa did not look up from his medicine-making as we passed. Daudi urged, “Do not waste time looking at lion fat. Move with speed. It is thus that life is saved.”

The sun blazed down. After an hour’s walk we paused in the shade of an umbrella tree. “Put him down gently,” ordered Daudi.

As they did so the sick man muttered, “Pain.”

Pillowing his head on my thigh I injected. “That will take the teeth and claws from your pain. Rest a while, then drink again. This matters greatly.”

His pulse was racing. After a time his lips framed the word *malenga*, water. He managed to swallow several mouthfuls then lying back he said huskily, “That lion sprang at me from the darkness. I drove my spear at him but he clawed me...” he panted for breath. “His teeth found my arm...”

“Your spear found his heart,” grinned a muscular pole carrier called Mawega.

“Come, let’s move with speed.” Daudi and I adjusted the hammock on the pole and once again we were on our way.

I said softly, “Daudi, if we can have him in hospital and start transfusing him in two hours we have a reasonable chance of saving his life.”

As we strode along in the scorching heat, Mawega burst out in a song of praise of the courage of the man in the blanket. When he finished he shouted, "His name has been Chisanga, a little bead. From today it shall be Simba, the Lion." His fellows roared their approval.

"Save your wind," gritted Daudi. "Shorten the journey with feet that move faster."

From inside the blanket came Chisanga's faint voice, "I like the name."

I thought, "May you live long enough to be called by it."

The carriers moved faster as they saw the hospital in the heat haze some ten kilometres away. Two hot weary hours later Simba lay between clean sheets in our hospital. In those two hours he had lost ground fast. Only one possible treatment stood between him and death—blood transfusion.

The bearers who had carried him in were squatting in the shade. I joined them and said, "We can save Simba if you will give him some of your blood. There is little pain and no danger in this work. Your blood can save the life of this brave man—your relation."

For a moment they stared at me open-mouthed then the tallest of them shouted angrily. "We refuse. We refuse completely. It is not our custom."

Pleas, scorn and argument all had no effect. Voices were raised. There was considerable hubbub. Scores of people ran towards the hospital. In the excitement the question came again and again, "What's happening?"

"What's the trouble?"

"Who's been hurt?"

Among the crowd were some teachers and girls from the school near the hospital. One teacher, named Perisi, asked, "Bwana Doctor, what is this blood transfusion?"

"If someone has lost much blood a bottle-full collected from someone else is

run into their veins. It is a way of saving many lives.”

“Bwana, if you took some blood from me would I be able to teach tomorrow.”

“Yes indeed. You may feel a little dizzy for half-an-hour or so but nothing else, Perisi.”

She nodded. “Then take my blood, Bwana.”

“But,” objected Mawega, “you aren’t even a relation of his.”

“*Kah!*” said Perisi. “Would I watch anyone die when I can help?”

Quickly I made the compatibility tests. All was well. Mboga, Daudi’s right-hand man, had prepared everything for collecting the blood. He whispered, “I know of this Chisanga, Bwana. Simba is indeed a proper name for him. Baruti, the hunter, whose leg we mended, told me there is none he would rather have with him in the jungle. He is a man of laughter and skill and courage.”

All went smoothly and within half-an-hour I held a large pickle bottle full of blood. “Rest for a while, Perisi, while I give this to our lion hunter. They’ll bring you a cup of tea. You’ll feel all right soon.”

“I’m all right now,” she smiled. “But it’s my blood; may I not see you give it to him? Bwana, this is a small thing to ask.” Readily I agreed. She sat, chin in hands, eagerly watching her blood run into the veins of the muscular man who was perilously close to death. A quarter of the bottle was safely in. Perisi lent towards me and whispered. “It is working. I can see life coming back.”

I felt his pulse and nodded. I heard Mboga mutter, “He is a man, that one. This is work of great value.”

Perisi looked at him with a smile. With the bottle half empty Simba yawned. “Lie still, lion hunter,” I warned. “Don’t move your arm.” He opened his eyes a little and nodded a small nod.

“It is a thing of wonder,” breathed Perisi.

There was still a small amount of blood left when Simba moved his head and looked at me. “Bwana, what are you doing! What is in that bottle?”

“It’s blood, blood that has been given to save your life.”

He wrinkled his forehead and said slowly, “Blood... given? Who gave it? Who?”

I was juggling with tubes, needles and the pickle bottle. I pointed with my chin towards the girl sitting underneath the window. “Perisi there, she gave it to you.”

“But why?”

Perisi had been sitting fascinated while the transfusion was being given. She spoke quietly. “Did not the Bwana Yesu Kristo, The Lord Jesus Christ, give His life for me to have everlasting life? Shall I not give a bottle of blood so that you may not lose your ordinary life?”

Simba looked dazed and closed his swollen eyelids. “I cannot understand.”

“Don’t try,” I told him. “Later on you will.”

As the apparatus was disconnected my fingers felt for the artery at his wrist. It was beating as regularly as a clock. I turned to thank Perisi but she had quietly slipped away.

Repairs

“The sleep medicine works with strength,” said Daudi.

“Good. We’ll operate to deal thoroughly with his injuries. Lion’s bite is a bad thing but even worse are the thousands of germs that have found their way into those wounds. I hate to think of the little brutes deep down, breeding every twenty minutes.”

“Truly, germs are the enemies we cannot see but after all, Bwana, lion’s teeth are cleaner than hyena’s.”

“Maybe, but our problem is tetanus. Who knows what was on those claws? It gives me the creeps to remember the cowskin on that floor, and the piles of manure on the other side of the wall, and the flies...” I shuddered. “In my home country there would be an anti-tetanus serum in the refrigerator.”

“Here,” sighed Daudi, “we have no refrigerator and therefore nothing in it. Is there no other way?”

“The best thing we can do is to clean each and every wound most thoroughly and go as deep down as we can. We’ll want the big teapot, a length of rubber tube as long as your arm and that large glass syringe. We’ll flood out germs and rubbish like a thunderstorm cleans up the countryside.”

“Mboga will have it all ready soon, Bwana.”

Steam shrouded our operating room. Simba, unconscious, lay on the table. Mboga (whose name literally means *the vegetable*, hence his nickname *Spinach*) grinned. “Not a *dudu*, a germ, now lives inside or outside this grandfather of all teapots. Within it boils gently the pink medicine that brings misery and death to *dudus*. There will be mourning for every one of their tribe that lurks in the hidden places where claws and teeth have been.”

“Behold!” said Daudi, who had arranged all the instruments for me to

operate, “behold, our Spinach is full of words and wisdom today.”

“I wish I had as much confidence in potassium permanganate and normal saline as he had, Daudi.”

Mboga had the ability to roll his eyes. He did so. “You use words that leave no footprints in my mind.”

For a long time we trimmed and tidied, irrigated and syringed and then bandaged. Before we carried Simba back to the ward I said, “The risk to his life is much less now. Let’s ask God’s help in the days ahead.”

We did. And Mboga added, “Lord Jesus, help him and the others in the ward to understand about You as I read the Bible to them each day.”

Seven days raced by. Daudi stood at my door. “In the matter of Simba, Doctor, it’s the day to remove his stitches. His temperature is normal, his pulse normal, but he speaks of tightness in his neck, he...”

I jumped up. Through my mind flashed the horrors of lock jaw. We hurried into the ward. Daudi removed the necessary bandages from our patient’s face. The wounds were healing. My fingers ran over his neck muscles, his forehead, his face. On one side there was a tightness and a small swelling.

Mboga chuckled. “His jaw moves with strength. You should see him at the time of food.”

“Show me what your jaw will do, oh hunter of lions.”

It moved freely. “Any pain?”

“Not these days, Bwana.”

“Is it stiff?”

“A little, but only where you sewed me up.”

Daudi and I looked at each other with relief.

It took some time to remove the scores of stitches. Putting down the scissors I said, “Now we have your life safely inside your skin, we need to work on your eyes. How long has this trouble been with you?”

“It started seven harvests ago but this year it has become worse. For months now my eyes are red, they itch, tears run out of them and they give small joy.”

“Mboga, keep putting the black drops into both eyes in the morning and midday and now the clear ointment from the small tube as well.”

Another week went by. Simba was propped up in bed with all his bandages removed.

“What’s the news?”

Mboga answered, “The news is good. He eats well. He laughs much...”

I broke in, “All his wounds heal quickly. A few skin grafts and he will be up and about within a month.”

“His eyes improve more slowly than his lion bite,” said Daudi.

I nodded. “Simba, your wounds are now a smaller problem than your eyes. But if you have patience and will put up with some more discomfort we will have them back to what they used to be. But you must help.”

He gripped my hand. “Bwana, was there no pain in my legs and shoulder? Do I not understand that because of you all here, I am alive? I will follow your words, pain or no pain.”

“*Kah!*” growled Mboga. “It takes much time to wash out his eyes with that small dropper.”

“Stop grumbling, Spinach. Use the small teapot with a thin rubber tube from its spout as we did the big one on the day of the lion fight. Then he can learn

to wash out his own eyes.”

“*Yoh,*” complained Daudi’s understudy, “but I have fear that he will make a mess all over the bed and the ward floor.”

“How do you like this?” I laughed. “Here is an idea that will help you *and* the garden. He can sit out among the tomatoes and the more eye lotion he spills the better they will grow.” Simba chuckled and thumped Mboga on the back.

“He recovers speedily,” grinned Daudi.

Recover speedily he did. The skin grafts were successful. Eye drops and eye ointment did their work until one morning the report read, “Eyes appear normal.”

His eyelashes, however, were still giving trouble. They turned in and every time he blinked they raked his eyeball. Twice a week I plucked the damaging hairs. As each came out he produced a lion-like roar to the joy of his ward-fellows.

“It is easier to face many hungry wild creatures of the jungle than one doctor with those iron claws in his hand.” He turned to me. “I can drive spears into animals but it is against the custom to do the same to doctors.” He lowered his voice, “You give but little pain, Bwana, but with my new name it is expected that I will do what lions do.”

Mboga stood waiting to put in the midday eyedrops. For good measure Simba opened his mouth and gave a final bellow as the first drop found its target. This was too much for Mboga. Into the wide cavity went a dropper full of astringent medicine. The ward shouted its mirth. Simba coughed and spluttered and his bed shook with his laughter.

Mboga followed me out of the ward and said, “That man is full of questions. Matayo, who grows paw paws, talked to him for a whole afternoon. Daniel, the blind man who knows chapters of the New Testament off by heart, sits there and *yoh!* how Simba listens. His interest in God grows.”

At first Simba came to church in bed, carried by Mboga and the other men

who nursed him. Now he was able to limp down with his hand on Daudi's shoulder.

One morning I found him spelling out, letter by letter, part of Mark's Gospel. He looked up. "Behold, Bwana, with my repaired eyes I am learning so that God's book may speak to me."

"A thing of value, Simba. Who is teaching you?"

"Oh, those from the school," he said vaguely. Mboga looked at me and grinned.

Simba went on thoughtfully, "Behold, my fears grow less as the words of this book find their way into my heart. And Jesus... it is a thing of wonder to hear about Him."

That afternoon we took the first step to deal with the damage from his turned-in eyelashes. It was a delicate piece of surgical fancy-work I had not attempted before.

Simba, unaided, made his way to the operating theatre. Going through the doors he sniffed. "*Kah!* These places smell."

Seeing me, he grasped Daudi's arm and with a broad smile made his knees knock together. "*Kumbe!* I am frightened. He will attack me with his small knife. He will hurt me! I have never had an operation on my eyes before."

"*Kah!* if *you* are frightened, what about me? This is the first time I have ever done this operation."

Everyone in the operating theatre laughed. I waited till there was quiet and said, "We rejoice in laughter; but remember these eyes belong to my friend Simba, and it's my responsibility to try to fix them. Clumsy hands will not do this work well. Let's ask God to give special skill as I repair these eyelids."

As I finished praying Simba's deep voice added, "Thank you, God, for the Bwana Doctor. Thank you for good medicines and please help me to understand about You better."

Not a muscle twitched right through that operation and it was not a simple one. Daudi nodded as I put in the last stitches. “God has answered our prayer. That looks good.”

Next morning Simba lay in bed, eyes bandaged, but cheerfully singing at the top of his voice.

“*Nyamale*. Shut up,” urged Mboga. “You’ll tear your stitches.”

“*Kumbe!*” came the retort, “whose stitches are they?”

“They’re mine!” I exclaimed, coming through the door. “Mine, I say. I put them in.”

“*Kah*, Bwana, I didn’t know you were there.”

“Perhaps not,” threatened Mboga, “but the Bwana has his largest needle and it’s threaded with string. This time he won’t sew up your eyes only, but your mouth as well.”

Chuckles came from every corner of the ward.

I scrubbed my hands and watched Mboga’s junior assistant pouring the water carefully at the roots of the tomato plants. Mboga smiled. “Never a thing goes to waste here, Bwana. All the used water goes to the vegetables, all the blankets go sides to middle when they wear, the old sheets become first pillowslips and then end their lives as bandages. Truly we are careful, *kabisa!*”

“Is there another way? We have so little of everything and even today we haven’t enough money to pay next month’s wages. It would give me great happiness if the people of my country could see Simba here. They live so far away they don’t know. They can’t understand that we’re almost down to our last shilling.”

“Bwana,” said Daudi, “make it clear to us.”

“Right. We repaired the lion damage for seven shillings and now we’ve given him back proper eyelids for ten more.”

“That’s exactly right. The whole lot for less than a pound or two dollars. The price of a large dish of rice.”

Simba laughed at this. “*Kah!* me, worth a tin of rice.”

The staff grinned broadly but I was gripped by the seriousness of things. “Simba, if you were merely so much skin and flesh and bone I might agree, but what about your soul? Many things: lions, mosquitoes, germs, can kill your body but your soul lives on. God says so in the Bible.”

Daudi unbandaged Simba’s head. With forceps I lifted a gauze pad. “The stitches are all in place. No sign of *dudus*. Everything is as it ought to be. Try opening your eye.” Slowly he did so. “All is well. It will heal with only a small scar.”

The pad and bandage were put back. He groped for my hand. “Thank you, Bwana. I have much to be thankful for. Behold, I will pay for this work. I will bring a cow.”

“You can pay for repairs to your legs or your eyes,” said Daudi quietly, “but what of that part of you that lives when you have no more use for your body?”

“What shall I do then?” demanded Simba.

“See clearly with the eyes of your mind. You cannot pay to have sin cut from your soul with knives or to have it bound up with healing ointment. But there is a way. Jesus is that way.”

“What he says is true, Simba. Perisi gave some of her blood to save your body’s life. Jesus, God’s son, gave His life to blot out your sin, to take away your guilt and to give your soul the great life.”

He nodded. “With my repaired eyes I can soon read God’s book for myself and think of these things.”

“Then comes the big step, Simba. You ask Jesus to take control of your life and you go His way—you become His man.”

He nodded. "There is much to be understood."

One morning when the stitches had been taken out and his eyelids healed, Mboga held a torch above our patient's forehead. "Behold, Bwana! His eyes are as they were when he was a boy."

Simba was unusually silent but there was a small smile round his lips. He shook hands with us all and said, "*Kwaheri*. Goodbye." We watched him striding down the path to Makali.

"*Kah*," muttered Mboga, "three months ago they carried him, dying, up this path and look at him now! He is strangely silent, Bwana. I wonder what goes on inside his head."

I nodded. "And in his heart."

Return

“He’s back,” laughed Mboga. “He came when the corn was green and he returns now in the days of harvest.”

I looked at the calendar. It was some three months. Mboga was excited. “Bwana, do you not hear the song of a goat?” I was aware of a variety of sound in the hospital courtyard: laughter, babies crying, crows in the baobab trees, children playing and many voices. There was the hot smell of wood smoke and fine dust but above it all the aroma of billy goat.

Daudi was at the door. “Doctor, Simba is here with a gift for the hospital and a mouth full of words.”

“*Hodi?* May I come in?” called a well-known deep voice.

“*Karibu*, Come in, Simba. What is the news?”

“Good, only good, Bwana. With me is a gift to bring joy to the stomachs of the hospital and school.”

“A thing of praise. We are grateful.”

“I have also other things; but hear my words. These days a thing of profit has come to those like Baruti and myself who know the ways of the creatures of the country. A *Mzungu* with a red beard, whom they call Bwana Zoo, has come to the Ugogo plains. He has much money and he pays many shillings for animals and birds and especially snakes and lizards if they are not damaged.”

“*Yoh!*” laughed Mboga. “And you too love these creatures and creepies. What did you trap?”

“A hundred shillings. He gave it to me for a mongoose and her two babies. ‘Catch her husband,’ he told me, ‘and there will be a hundred more.’ Six eggs

and the habit of mongooses to be full of curiosity and I had that money in my bag too. Bwana Zoo is a man of enthusiasm. Then I showed him the bird they call Honey Guide. 'Two hundred shillings,' he said, 'if we can be led by it and I can take pictures.'

"I watched Matayo's place near the spring of water where he grows paw paws. The bird came. We saw it. We followed it. Bwana Zoo took many pictures. We found the bees and the hive and *yoh!* did they sting us! We left much honey and comb for the cunning bird. Twice that bird worked with us. The second time we worked in much silence while he used the machine that catches voices and sounds. *Yoh!* he was full of excitement."

"*Ngheeh!*" laughed Daudi. "And your bag filled with shillings."

At that moment Mwendwa, a senior nurse, came running to the door. "Bwana," she panted, "come quickly, babies!"

Some time later when I returned, Simba was still telling snake stories to a ward full of listeners. "Bwana, I am telling about the biggest snake we caught.

"In the early part of the day when it is cold, snakes are sleepy and they do not move fast. We came to a small hill with many large grey stones. We moved quietly for it was a place of snakes. Then we saw this large one. *Yah!* it was as thick as my leg and long, *kah!* as long as a giraffe." Solemnly he paced six paces.

"This European lover of reptiles whispered to me, 'Grasp it by the neck and lift'; to my two companions, 'Lift it off the ground and straighten it out. I'll take the tail. Carry it then to this open place and we shall put it, head first, into this sack of great size.' With feet that made no sound we crept towards that coiled up, fear-producing brute. Bwana Zoo raised his hand. I leapt and held with hands strengthened by fear. He held the tail, and did it struggle! Stones and sand flew everywhere. One man fell into a cactus. There was not time for laughter. Bwana Zoo, had to fight to hold the tail off the ground. *Yoh!* It was work but we got it into the sack." Simba rolled his eyes. "Never let go a snake's tail too quickly. The Bwana did and, *yoh!* did we have trouble!"

Again Mwendwa's head appeared round the door. "Bwana Doctor..." A

chorus of voices came, “Run, another baby.”

“*Kumbe!*” came a deep voice, as I hurried away. “Your work is as bad as catching snakes.”

Over my shoulder I shouted, “If you caught as many snakes as we catch babies in this hospital you’d have 800 in your bag in a year!”

At sunset Simba sat on my doorstep. “Bwana, I have special news.” I invited him to come in and brought a stool. He sat and stretched his legs. “It is joy to return and tell you that my eyes are working well and through them God speaks to me as I read the Bible. Also many things I heard when I lay recovering entered my memory and stayed there. *Kah*, would death not have swallowed me up but for the blood that Perisi gave? I said ‘thank you’ with my mouth before I left but behold now I am saying it with gifts.”

Daudi came running down the path. I groaned, “Not another baby?” He shook his head. “But I have heard news of a *sikuku*...” He saw Simba and stopped.

I brought another stool. “Come in. I am hearing of our lion hunter’s doings.”

Daudi hesitated, but Simba smiled. “This is for your ears also, Bwana Daudi. I am speaking of gifts.” He produced a calico bag, undid the string and poured onto the floor a stream of Tanzanian shillings.

“*Kah!* You are *Mugoli*, the rich one!”

Laughing he shook his head. “I am *Mumoti*, the happy one.”

“*Hongo!* Do shillings give happiness?” asked Daudi.

Again Simba laughed. “These shillings are not mine at all.”

“What?” demanded Daudi. “Then whose are they?”

The tall hunter stood up and said quietly, “These are God’s shillings.”

Seeing our amazement he went on, “One day as I lay in the ward, you, Bwana

Daudi, read from the Bible.”

“I remember that,” nodded Daudi. “It was the day when some boys stole many mangoes from the garden. They ate too many and *yoh!* were they sick!”

“Truly, we started talking about stealing and then you spoke about robbing God. You said that it was the custom of those of old time to give God one dishful of grain out of every ten winnowed and one calf of every ten born in their herd. You explained that those who thank God with empty hands are really robbing Him.

“You were there, Bwana, and you read the words that stayed in my mind. God said, ‘Put Me to the test in this and you will see that I will open the windows of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you won’t have enough room to store it.’”

“True, Simba, but that only works for people who have become members of God’s family.”

“That I understood when I was here, and was not my life saved? So here is my gift to help save someone else from pain and perhaps death. Also there is this.” From his canvas bag he produced two lengths of the colourful cotton material that many African women wear. “Behold, this is my gift for Perisi.”

There was a look on Daudi’s face that filled my mind with questions but nothing was said. I had learned the wise saying, “Hurry, hurry has no blessing.”

Two days later I came into the ward. Mboga handed me a letter written African-fashion. It read, “The Bwana Doctor is invited to eat of the goat that is the gift of Simba, the snake catcher.”

“So this is the mysterious *sikuku*. I like feasts, Mboga. When will the food be eaten?”

“It will be at the time when the sun sinks behind the hills, Bwana.”

“Thank you, I’ll come. My stomach will rejoice to taste of Simba’s goat stew.”

Sunset is the danger time where mosquitoes are concerned, and mosquitoes can mean malaria, severe sickness and even death. In the late afternoon I put on long trousers and long boots that gave leather protection from insect bite up to my knees. A fire was blazing. There was the nose-tickling smell of meat cooking. Mboga was making music on his *ilimba* and several of his friends added rhythm from their drums. The fire lit up many laughing faces. The nurses were there and some teachers from the school, notably Perisi. She was wearing one of the new lengths of cotton cloth.

I greeted her. She replied and smiled a most attractive smile. “Perisi, was it worth doing what you did for that snake catcher?”

“It was a bottle of blood well used, Doctor. I did not feel the loss of it much then, and not at all now. I hoped then that by saving his ordinary life he might understand about eternal life and perhaps find it.” Simba was standing looking into the huge simmering pot. “*Heh!*” she laughed. “He has joy in living. His stories of snake catching make my skin creep. Truly tonight is a time of joy. Did you see the gift he brought me?”

“*Ngheeh!*” I nodded. “Saying ‘thank you’ is a good thing but so also is tying it up into a parcel.”

They lifted off the pot of stew and the kerosene tin full of boiled rice. They bought me a three-legged stool and a moment later a steaming bowl of rice and savoury goat. The drum stopped beating and Mboga put down his *ilimba*.

“Before we eat,” I suggested, “shall we talk to God? Simba, have you something you want to thank God for?”

The tall hunter stood up. “I want to thank God for my life which you saved here in the hospital. I thank Him not only for the life that is within my body but for the life that goes on and on.”

The Arrow

The feast was over. The moon was rising. The plains of Central Tanzania showed up with hills and thornbush like outlines on an etching. Away to the west was the Great Rift Wall and, far beyond it, Lake Tanganyika. A voice came at my elbow. “Bwana.”

I could see the long shadow of a tall muscular man leaning on a hunting spear. “What’s up, Simba? Have you eaten too much goat stew?”

He groaned, “My trouble is higher than my stomach and I do not know what to do.”

“Come and sit on the roots of the buyu tree and tell me with as many words as you wish.”

“*Ngheeh!* Bwana, there will be profit in doing that.”

I sat on one of the gnarled roots which was as large as an elephant’s leg. Simba squatted in a patch of moonlight running sand between his fingers. “It is the story of the man once called Chisanga, whose wisdom was made small by the pride in his head and the beer in his stomach. He told himself, ‘Men fear your anger and your strength, and women...’ *Yoh*, he could have his way with women. He, Chisanga, was one of the great ones...”

He paused, looked at me and shook his head. In the distance a jackal yelped dismally. Bats flitted by in the starlight. With a sigh he went on, “Then he saw a lion in the corner of a corn field. In the hands of that man of small wisdom was a spear. The lion had fed well. Its belly bulged. The beer shouted in Chisanga’s mind. Here was his chance to show his greater strength, his special courage. He ran forward and struck. The spear tore into the beast’s ribs but did not stop him. Fire seemed to fall on that foolhardy man and then came darkness.”

Simba stood up, walked up and down and then burst out, “Bwana, I’m

talking words and words and words. They have been boiling for many days in my head and there are more.”

“Say them, Simba. The story is only part told.”

He nodded. “I was close to the death of my body. My soul also was near to the great death. Here in the hospital was the way back to life. Here I listened to the words about the snake called Sin and its power and poison. And hearing I understood. And then there was the blood Perisi gave. I didn’t deserve it, I did not pay for it but it saved my life.”

“True, it did save the life of your body and this gave you time to hear and listen and believe.”

He nodded. “Till then I had not even heard of Jesus but now He has changed everything. I am a new person. I am His and His only.

“Bwana, in the days before I met you, behold I had a wife whose name was Matata. She cooked my food and helped me dig in the garden, but she was a woman of words. When I went out hunting she would complain. If I stayed at home, again she would complain. Behold, life had no joy in it because of her many words. *Yoh*, I was wretched! And then she went to see her relations who live a day’s journey westward. She was gone for a week and then news came that she had the stabbing disease.”

By this I knew he meant pleurisy and pneumonia.

“I made a day and night safari through the jungle. I travelled without stopping, but the disease was too great for her. I arrived only in time to see her as she made her last great journey.”

He sat down beside me. The drum in the distance was slow and sombre. Below us hyena again howled. “Ugh,” grunted Simba, “*Mabisi!* Creepy scoundrels, hyenas. They eat the sick and the newly-born. They drain away my joy... Bwana, these days I have loneliness in my heart, and I say to myself, should I not marry again? What should I do! My mind goes round and round. *Kah!* My thoughts are full of clouds and mists.”

“But, Simba, you have ideas?”

He nodded. “Things are different now. I married Matata because I needed a woman to cook for me and to brew my beer. Behold, she had strong shoulders, and could carry much wood from the forest for the fire. Also she could cultivate well. My relations said ‘She is a strong woman, and a strong woman who is a good cook and a good gardener will be a good wife.’ But, Bwana, these days things are different. I... I...” He waved his arms vaguely and put his hand over the middle of his chest.

“Listen, Simba, when you see the lightning you know there will be...”

“Thunder, Bwana.”

“And when you see the baobab trees come out in leaf you know...”

“That the rains are coming.”

“Right, and these days I have used my eyes too! Do I not see the signs of something growing in your heart? It started when first you lay in hospital dying and your life was saved by Perisi’s blood.”

Simba nodded. “Again and again I ask myself, why did she do it? She is not like the women of my village. It is God in her life. As I walk the paths through the thornbush, as I dig in my garden, my heart calls out for Perisi.” He moved about restlessly.

“Simba, two people, both members of God’s family and both travelling the same path in the same direction with the same purpose. This is the way of satisfaction in marriage.”

He stopped and faced me. “You told me once that when your mind does not know what to do, find out what God has to say.”

“That is always the best way and the Bible says, ‘Do not harness yourself in an uneven team with unbelievers... Light and darkness have nothing in common. Christ is not the ally of the devil nor has a believer anything to share with an unbeliever.’”

“Truly, Bwana, they are words of wisdom,” said Simba.

“They are words of wisdom and more—they are orders for those who follow the way of Jesus Christ. But those who follow the wishes of their own minds without thinking of the words of God, they find much trouble.”

“How I know it, Bwana. When I approached the father of Matata I had no fears within my heart, but now... my heart trembles within me, my knees feel weak. *Eeeh!*”

“*Kumbe*, is there any profit in standing back waiting for the lion to jump at you? Is it not better to go yourself and talk with her relations? See what dowry they want.”

“It is not our custom to do these things, Bwana. Daudi has already done that, and her father says the dowry will be thirty cows. I have but ten.”

“But you can make more money so that you can buy more cows. So why don’t you go and talk to Perisi? Wouldn’t it be best to find out whether she would be willing to be your wife? This may not be the way of the tribe, but it is the way of the heart.”

The lion hunter stood silent for a full minute, then he blurted out, “My heart calls for Perisi, but this is a hard thing. Behold, my tongue refuses to move. Did I not see her this evening, but there were no words. It is much easier to hunt a wild animal with a spear or to catch a snake with my forked stick. That, Bwana, is action, but...”

From the direction of the school came the alarm cry. “Bwana, come quickly. There is a cobra in the dormitory of the junior girls.”

Simba jumped to his feet. “That is the place where Perisi looks after the smaller children. Run!”

Run we did and in a matter of minutes there was a dead snake in the room where the small girls had burrowed down into their blankets and lay shivering with fear.

Simba hooked up the dead reptile with his spear. “All is well,” I shouted, “the time for fear is over; behold, the snake is now with its ancestors.”

“*Assante*, Bwana, thank you,” came Perisi’s quiet voice.

“*Kah*, it was not I who did it but this *fundi* snake catcher, Simba. And behold, he would have words with you, Perisi.”

“I will wait for him on the veranda, Bwana.”

We walked through the door. Simba tossed the dead snake far out into the peanut gardens. “The ants will deal with him,” then he hurried to where Perisi stood watching. In a soft voice he spoke to her. She replied, then turned and walked away through the door.

Targets

Daudi and I were carrying large bottles of medicine from the dispensary. He put down a huge bottle. “*Yoh*, here comes Simba. He looks full of words.”

“He has great courage in the matter of lions but these days his tongue is filled with reluctance.”

“Bwana, you should understand that in our country it is not the custom for a man to love his wife. She is cook, water carrier, gardener, child bearer but little more. But with Simba it is different. He is in love, deeply in love.”

“Three days ago, Daudi, he and I went fast to the girls’ school and killed a snake. He greatly wanted to speak with Perisi. I arranged it. They spoke together with few words. Then she went into a room and shut the door and Simba jumped the fence and ran as if *kifaru*, the rhino, was behind him. I shouted for him to stop but his feet brought up dust.”

Daudi laughed. “Sechelela is an old woman of considerable wisdom. She understands these things. She talked with Perisi. She too has the trouble. She sighs. Food no longer speaks to her. She says that for many days her heart has been calling for Simba.”

The hunter was near to us. We greeted him and spoke of the weather, the crops. He would have gone on and on but I interrupted. “Words, words and words. Tell me what happened the other evening when you bolted like a scared antelope.”

Simba drew lines in the dust with his big toe. “Some people say clearly what they think about a matter, others talk in proverbs. I needed to think so I ran and sat among the great rocks.”

“Then she must have said something to you which was not ‘No.’”

The tall man sighed. “She listened to my words and *yoh!* they came on slow

and heavy feet. Then she looked at me and said, ‘When I planted my maize in the garden, behold, I had no corn, no cobs to roast, for the shoots were still small and green. My mind asked would it grow or wither?’ She said that, Bwana, and then walked through the doorway and shut the door. Do you wonder I ran to where I could sit and think?”

“Even a child could tell you what that means.”

“It could mean many things—so many things.”

Daudi turned to me. “Bwana, this is the African way of saying she wishes to be sure that Simba has real faith in God. The days of his belief are few. He has done little for God. How is she to be sure that if she married him she would not find trouble?”

Simba kicked at a stone. “What must I do?”

“I’ll tell you.” Daudi put the other bottles carefully on the ground. “Near the place where you killed that lion is the village of Makali. The chief is a man of the old ways. He asks, ‘Why have a school? It is not our custom to drink the medicine of the hospital. Have we not our *muganga*, our own medicine man?’

“No one comes here from that village. Instead children are blinded, babies die, people suffer. It would be a thing of profit to have a welfare clinic and a school at Makali. It...”

Mboga, *ilimba* in hand, came within earshot. He paused as Simba threw up his arms. “But who would go there? It is a place of danger. Spells would be cast.” He spat. “It is a place where Shaitan, the devil, has great freedom.”

“You, Simba, could go there.”

“I, Bwana? But...”

“You faced a lion and killed a cobra. Do you fear the people of your own village? When you fought that lion you did so alone, but in this fight you have God as your leader. His words to you are that you can do all things

through Christ who gives you strength. Take these words and prove yourself His man. Always remember that God's book is the food for your soul. Read it and remember: no food, no strength."

Simba picked up his spear and the calico bag in which he kept his special belongings. "Bwana, I will go now and do this thing."

Mboga started playing his *ilimba*. "Hurry has no blessing. Come, you slayer of wild beasts. Mzito has cooked *ugali* enough for us all. Also she and I agree that it is time you brought meat for our cooking pots." Abruptly he was serious. "If you think to do work alone or with others in that evil place, you need to pray and plan."

"He's right," said Daudi. "And we will help."

Simba nodded slowly and walked away with Mboga.

Three days later, bowed down under the weight of a buck, he came to the hospital. "Stew with our *ugali* tonight, Bwana. Tomorrow at Makali I will start building a house that could be used to start a welfare clinic and even teach people to read."

"And who will do these things?"

He smiled. "Behold, tell Perisi that the seed is safely planted."

A month later Mboga spent his day off at Makali.

He reported, "Simba's house is being built. He has stone foundations and is making mud bricks. The walls will be strong. The chief has small joy in his work but Simba hunts with success and brings meat to the village and the people rejoice. He is a man of laughter and there are those who have wonder as they see what has been done for his eyes and his legs. His mouth is full of words of praise for the hospital and he sings songs that bring food to their ears."

In the early afternoon Daudi called me. “Bwana, one comes who is a man of importance at Makali. He is Moto, the sub-chief; the first one to come in because of Simba’s work. Many are amazed to see him alive and so changed.”

I shook Moto’s hands in traditional greeting. Sitting in the shade of a pepper tree, he told a story that was all too common: He had been working in his garden and bruised his shin with a hoe. The bruise became a sore, the sore an ulcer. Only too well I knew what followed although he did not tell me. Medicine man’s manure poultice, the ulcer spreading, the pain increasing.

“*Kah!* Bwana, it pains when I walk. It pains to sit. It pains to lie. Day and night it throbs and aches. There is no joy in a leg like mine. Have you medicine to help? Simba says that ulcers are a small affair at this hospital.”

“Truly, we have medicines to help ulcers. Come to the place where we deal with them.”

He followed me into a treatment room. On a shelf were piles of bandages and pots of ointment. Mboga had had a busy morning. I asked him to bathe the leg and to clean up the ulcer which was as big as the palm of my hand and to call me when all was ready. That ulcer was an ugly sight.

Mboga screwed up his face. “*Phew!* it is not a comfort to the eyes or a pleasure for the nose.”

A tight smile came round the chief’s lips. “It is a joy for flies but misery to me.”

“Swallow these, Great One.” I handed him two pills and a gourdful of water. “They stop pain and then will come injection medicine. We must treat your trouble both inside you as well as out.”

He nodded his approval. “A thing of wisdom, Bwana. I have praise for your work.”

I painted on a germ-killing purple dye. Then over the ulcer went ointment on a shaped piece of old linen.

Moto frowned. “*Kah!* it will fall off.” I smiled and unlocked the cupboard, taking out one of the last three rolls of elastic sticking plaster we had in the hospital. “Great One, this is a special bandage. It stays in place all by itself. It keeps the *dudus*, the insects, out, and stops the skin from getting itchy. You can leave it covering your ulcer for three weeks and behold, in that time there will be much healing. But you MUST NOT TAKE IT OFF.”

Moto blinked. “But how will I know what is going on? How will I know it’s getting better?”

“You must take my word for that. Have I not seen many people with this trouble?”

He spat at a large black beetle, shrugged and limped off in the direction of Makali clutching the pain-relieving pills tied in the corner of the cloth he wore round his ample middle.

“My bones tell me he won’t do what we ask,” said Daudi.

Mboga was watching the beetle struggling back onto its feet. “Words of truth, Bwana. My bones speak the same words, only louder.”

A week later Daudi came in shaking his head. “It is well there are two doors to this room. Outside that one is old Moto and out there,” he nodded in the other direction, “is Simba with a smile so big it must hurt his mouth. He has words to tell you.”

Quietly I went outside and gripped the hunter’s hand. “Bwana,” he laughed, “my ribs ache with laughter when I think of Moto. I told him of your strong medicines for ulcers. He listened with both ears. He came here and returned full of praise. Your medicines stopped his pain, he liked the purple stuff and was amazed at the cloth that stuck on all by itself. Four days went by. His fingers itched to see if the ulcer had healed.”

Daudi groaned. “My bones spoke truly.”

Simba’s smile seemed even wider. “Then he tried to drag the sticking plaster

aside so that he could see, but it would not move. He gripped the end and pulled. It came off this time but it stuck together. He tried to undo it. But it was stuck with strength and his hands were not the hands of skill. He saw that he had ruined your special bandage so he decided to take it right off.”

Mboga chuckled. “And it stuck to the hairs of his leg?”

Simba laughed. “Did it stick? You should have heard the noise. ‘*Yah! Yah! eeh!*’ he yelled as the hairs came off. So I spoke with scorn, ‘Come, be a man, pull it off. You—a strong man—making a noise like a child in the village.’ Behold, this caused him to pull strongly. He yelled again and sat there groaning. People crowded round and said it looked as it had looked before. He had strong anger and shook his fist. ‘That medicine does not work.’

“‘Behold,’ I said, ‘when you pay a goat for the medicine of the tribe do you take it or leave it in the gourd? When you plant corn do you dig it up in four days to see if it is growing?’

“He mumbled words no one could hear. ‘*Yoh*’, I shouted, ‘and why did you pull off the special bandage in four days when you were told to leave it for three weeks?’ He looked at me with his mouth open.

“‘Behold, I wanted to see what was happening to the ulcer.’

“‘Did not the Bwana say that you should not do so?’

“‘He said so, but I wanted to see.’

“‘*Hongo!* and if your ulcer goes wrong now, is it the effect of your work or the fault of the medicine?’

“‘*Heeh*, I talked to him with strong words. Behold, he is here.’”

It so happened that that very day I had been sent a parcel which was wrapped inside with cellophane. I had been thinking how to conserve my supplies of sticking plaster, and I had bought some of this cellophane to the hospital and sterilised it. It seemed to me that here was exactly the sort of case that I required to try it out. First I listened to a long story from Moto, which was

not particularly truthful, although it was rich with drama. When he had finished I said, “Behold, and when you pulled the cloth off, was the pain any better?”

“Bwana,” he said, “there was no pain.”

“Oh,” I said, taking a couple of hairs on his leg and pulling them.

“*Yah*,” he yelled, “that hurts. Of course it hurts.”

“*Koh?* and did it not hurt when the bandage pulled out the hairs?”

“Bwana, I... er... well, you see... I... er...” he spluttered.

I looked at him and grinned. “Now, if I do more treatment you must promise to follow my words. Promise... if you disobey, then no more treatment.”

“Truly, I will follow your words.”

“Right.” Taking some of the cellophane I covered the ulcer. “You can see through that; you can see the ulcer?”

“*Heeh*, Bwana!”

Above and below the plastic material I put elastic strapping. The chief looked at it in amazement. “*Kah*, that’s wisdom. I can see the ulcer. I can see the medicine and yet, the *dudus* can’t get into it.”

“Right, now come back and see me in three weeks.”

He nodded. I went out of the room and there was Simba. I took him aside.

“Did you see what happened? When Moto did not follow my words he got into trouble.”

“*Heee*, and Bwana, did he get into trouble!” He rubbed his eyes. “*Yoh*, I laughed till I cried.”

“Simba, that will happen to you.”

He looked at me with surprise. “*Kah!* Why, Bwana?”

“It will happen to you and to me and to everyone if we do not obey the words of God.”

Simba nodded slowly.

“Listen, I will give you the words that Jesus Himself spoke to a young man who came to Him and asked how he could get life that never ends, the life that has in it deep joy, the life that is never easy, but always worthwhile. ‘Behold,’ He said, ‘you must love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, with *all* your mind, and with *all* your soul and will *all* your strength.’ ”

Simba nodded again. “Bwana, I read that the other day, and then Jesus said, ‘You must love the other man as much as you love yourself.’ ”

“Truly, those are God’s instructions to His own children. And they are true of the village of Makali. Behold, not only will you do useful work for God there but if your great wish is to do what He orders, then if that is part of His plan the other things you desire will happen.”

“*Kumbe*, Bwana,” said Simba, “I see it. It is better to trust God than to get impatient and start pulling off the plaster to see what is happening.” He grinned. “But it isn’t easy. Sometimes in my head I hear a voice that says, ‘There is much beer being drunk in the village. Why should you be here when there is laughter and fun?’ Then it becomes a whisper and the words are sly and very much of the old way.”

“And what do you do?”

“Bwana, I reply, ‘Shaitani, you are talking to the wrong man. You’re looking for Chisanga. Look at my scars. I’m Simba. Claws and teeth speak loudly in my memory. Once I was in your tribe. But no longer. Now I am of God’s family. Jesus controls me now.’ ”

“Does he leave you then, Simba?”

“If I close my ears to him and start talking to Jesus, yes. If I am sorry for

myself and let doubts fill my thoughts, then he talks with cunning words...”

“What then?”

“*Ngheeh!* What then? Does not this happen to you?”

“Oh, yes. It happens to me often and I find it helps to say what Jesus said, ‘Clear out, Shaitan.’”

“But it isn’t easy, Bwana.”

“It isn’t, Chisanga, *eh*, that is to say, Simba!”

He laughed and gave me a friendly thump on the arm.

Despair and Disease

Sechelela was at work in the baby clinic. She smiled at me, put a baby back in its cot and pointed with her chin towards the window sill. “A letter for you, Bwana. I think I know the writing.”

I tore open the envelope. “You were right, Seche, and it has interesting news. She wants to come to the hospital and learn many things quickly, especially baby welfare.”

The African senior nurse nodded. “I have seen this coming for many days. Perisi has been at the school since the day she was born. There was much trouble at her birth and her mother died. The work of the village midwives that day would have filled you with anger. There was no need for her death. The baby was exhausted and they said she was ‘no person’ but we took her and looked after her. She lived and thrived and became the ‘school baby.’ The girls looked after her.” Sechelela laughed softly. “It was as though she had a hundred mothers. Because of what they learned looking after her many of the young women now know the ways of baby welfare. Is it not a good thing that she should now have special training and teach others?”

“Her father for many years took no interest in her. Was she not fed and clothed and taught at the school? But these days, when there is talk of marriage he smells riches so he speaks loudly. He demands that she return to him. If she goes back to his house her life could be spoiled.”

“*Hongo*, he must be a man of greed, Sech.”

“Truly, he cares only for money, to buy things his body calls for, especially beer. Soon there will be angry words spoken about this matter. If she comes to the hospital it will be much safer for her. Are we not here to see no harm comes to her. Also, Mazengo, the chief, encourages educated girls to be trained.”

That afternoon I saw a graceful girl walking up to the hospital. Sechelela

looked over my shoulder through the ward window. “Perisi comes to talk to you. *Yoh!* is she not food for the eyes? And behold, her hands are full of skills.”

I nodded, “And her head is full of wisdom.”

She called, “*Hodi,*” at my door. For a while we chatted about people. She obviously cared for many who were in hospital. Then changing to English she said, “Bwana, I read books about preventive medicine and welfare and nutrition. I am a teacher and I could teach my own people in a way they would understand. The need burns within me. Let me gain experience here at the hospital so that I may do this and I will be able to save much sadness and pain.”

“Have you no other reason, Perisi?”

She faced me squarely. “I have other reasons, Bwana. My father would have me marry one of his choosing, a man named Karanga. This man has many cattle and follows the old ways.” She shrugged. “He already has four wives. In a marriage of this sort there would be no joy and my life would be nothing.” She put her head in her hands and sighed. “Already he has seen my father and they have agreed on a dowry of twenty-eight cows and twenty goats.”

“So you wish to come to the hospital and have special training? A year of that and what then?”

She lent forward eagerly. “It is my desire to do this and...” She smiled. “It may be that during this time someone else may come, someone who will offer my father the same sort of dowry. Someone whose wife I could be, with joy. Someone who has the same thoughts in his mind and the same love of God.” She looked down and started to push a pebble round with her toes.

“I understand, Perisi. Remind yourself of God’s words that ‘the ways of a good person are controlled by the Lord.’ ”

“That is my prayer, Bwana. I want to do what He says and I want to be useful to my people. That is the sort of life I want to live.”

“Very well then. I will talk to those of the school and if they agree you will come to us and learn what we have to teach.” I watched her walk down the path to the school and said under my breath, “That girl can do more for the women of her tribe than you can ever hope to do.”

Towards me ran a messenger clutching an envelope. I read:

Bwana, I am following with three children. One is burnt badly.
She has great sickness. The others needs hospital help. Simba.

I made what preparations I could. They arrived as the sun set. The burnt child was in a blanket pinned up with thorns to a bamboo pole. Simba carried pick-a-back a pathetic small boy with a broken arm, while a twelve year old girl followed, her head and shoulders hidden under a black cloth.

As he undid the blanket Simba nodded towards this child. “She has a great lump as big as her head between her shoulder blades. Behold, Bwana, I collected the children from Makali who are ill and brought them to you. See this one...”

I held up a hurricane lantern. The terrified eyes of a little girl, limp with shock and pain, stared up at me.

Simba said gently, “She was knocked into the fire by her drunken grandfather.”

I bent over her. She let out a feeble scream and gripped Simba’s finger. He whispered, “Don’t be frightened, small one. This is the place where they stop pain.”

I had a syringe ready and quickly a pain controlling drug was at work. The burns were extensive. At once we treated them and battled with shock. It did not take long to set and splint the broken arm. I had barely finished examining the girl with the tumour on her back when Daudi gripped my arm. “The burnt child is unconscious.”

We ran fluid into her veins. For a while it seemed to help, then the pulse became weak. “Simba, this is an emergency. Only one thing can save this

little one—a blood transfusion. You understand this matter, will you explain it to her father while I prepare?”

“I’ll do that,” offered Daudi. “You treat the others.”

The broken-arm boy smiled as I gave him a fist-sized lump of raw sugar, but Chilatu, the child with the tumour on her back, was intensely sensitive about it. A little quiet talk and a close examination showed me that a simple operation would rid her of what she called her burden.

Suddenly I was aware of loud aggressive voices, and one in particular shouting. “I refuse, I refuse absolutely.”

“Bwana, they are full of refusal. I have spoken with many words but they will not listen. They say it must not be done. I tried to explain but they are determined. ‘Give us the strong medicine you gave Moto for his ulcer.’”

We did this and it was tragically obvious that this was not enough. We went back to the ward together. The child was losing ground. Suddenly Simba stopped. “I’ll give the blood if...”

I ran back to the relations. “Simba here will give his blood if you agree so that the child may live. Another hour’s delay and it will be too late. He wants no money, no cows, nothing.”

The father came close to me. Through closed teeth he hissed, “We refuse. The words are finished.”

“Bwana,” said Daudi, “this is final. The door is shut.”

At dawn my sleep was torn apart by the wailing that tells of death. Walking despondently towards my house came Simba. “She died, Bwana, and they have gone—all of them. The girl with the burden on her back and the boy with the broken bone. This is failure. Nothing but anger and trouble wait for me in Makali.”

Four hours later I found Simba slumped under a baobab tree, his eyes closed,

his teeth chattering. His skin seemed on fire. His pulse raced. “Come up to the hospital. You’re sick.”

With an effort he looked up. “I didn’t sleep last night and behold, my head throbs and throbs. My heart is empty. I have tried to be useful, to help people but it is all *bwete*, worthless, a waste of time.” He put his head down and groaned. “I prayed and nothing happened. God didn’t change those people.” The malarial attack shook his body. He shivered so violently I had to support him as we neared the hospital. Huskily he blurted out, “Bwana, I have done small good in my work for God. How can I show Perisi that I have any worth? *Kah!* would it not have been better if you had not saved my life?”

“*Hongo*, the biting of *mbu*, the mosquito, clouds your wisdom. Medicine, sleep and food will help greatly.”

Mboga covered him with four blankets and grinned as I injected a stiff dose of quinine. Simba gulped, “*Kah!* that needle feels like a spear.”

“It is a spear, it is bringing no joy to the *dudus* of malaria. Even at this moment they are fleeing from the medicine but they will be caught as surely as you catch the snakes that you hunt.”

Daudi brought two aspirin tablets and a gourd of water. “Tongue out, pills on, swallow.”

Simba grinned weakly and produced a feeble lion’s roar. “*Kah!* that’s medicine which chases pain. This is a good place but *yoh!* I’m cold.”

Daudi put a thermometer under his arm, held it there for a while and lifted it for me to see. The fine silver line was high above normal. He was about to shake it down when Simba, his teeth chattering asked, “What are the words of the glass nail?”

“The what?”

“He wants to know what his temperature is,” laughed Daudi. “The glass nail is the thermometer.”

“*Hongo!* the words of the glass nail are these, that you stay in bed for perhaps three days.”

“Does it say that you need to stick that spear of yours into me again?”

“It calls for the spear twice, perhaps three times.”

“*Kah!*” Simba wrinkled up his nose with disgust. He pulled the blankets tightly round him.

Mboga was standing near the doorway. “My wife, Mzito, talked to the child with the burden on her back,” he said. “She showed her where the Bwana removed an even bigger one from between her shoulder blades. Don’t worry, her words will not be forgotten.”

Simba pulled the blanket down a little. There was a glint in his eye. He opened his mouth. I pulled the blanket back. “No more words from you, lion chaser, go to sleep.”

At that moment a drum started to beat. It was coming closer. Mboga went to see what was happening. He hurried back. “*Yoh!* it’s that fat nuisance, Mafuta. How could a pest like that have a daughter as good as Perisi?”

A strident voice came through the window. “*Kah,*” it said, “these *Wazungu*, Europeans, behold they are people of...” There was a sound of someone spitting.

I looked at Daudi and raised my eyebrows and grinned.

“Bwana,” he whispered, “it would be good to listen a little longer.”

The voice was going on. “Behold, for many years they have kept my daughter from me, and now, when it comes to the matter of her marriage, they are making trouble. But I, Mafuta, will show them my great strength, and they will flee as does the hyena when the lion appears. I will let them know who is Perisi’s father.”

When he heard the girl’s name, Simba lifted his head. “*Heh!* who is that?”

“Lie quietly. Behold, Perisi’s father has arrived. It would sound to me as though he has been drinking much beer. Let us listen to his words and learn from them.”

I went to the door and greeted a grossly fat man and a boy beating a drum. The beat stopped abruptly. Mafuta spat and demanded, “Where is my daughter?”

“*Kah!*” exploded Daudi, “You insult us by not greeting.”

Mafuta spat again. “Give me back my daughter.”

“Your daughter is not here. She is at the school.”

Anger gripped Mafuta. His face seemed to swell, and his eyes were bloodshot and his neck muscles were tense.

“*Yoh,*” murmured Daudi. “His blood pressure surely rises.”

I turned to a group of old men who crouched in the shade. “Wise ones of the tribe, will you hear the *shauri* in which this man wishes to dispute with me?”

“This is the way to do it,” nodded Daudi. “A *shauri* is welcomed if it is a court case before a judge, an argument between people in the village or a situation like this.”

The tension had eased. The fat African sat down and I started my tale:

“*Katali*, long ago, there was a man who lived in this country of the Wagogo and, behold, his one possession was a calf; a calf without much strength whose legs wobbled when she walked. The man had no way of feeding his calf, and he found no joy in being a herdsman. One day he said, ‘Behold, I will go to another country and see if there my fortunes will improve.’ So he went away from his house. And his neighbours found the calf walking, uncared for, in the jungle, and they took it to be in their own herd. Behold, they fed it, and gave it healing leaves and herbs. Its legs strengthened and it became a creature of strength. In the time of drought water was carried for it. In the days when there was no grass to be found it was fed with grain from

the store of those who were his neighbours.

“Harvest after harvest passed. The calf had become a cow. Perhaps the best cow in the whole herd. One day the traveller came back from his great safari. He came to the village.

“He said to those who lived near to him, ‘Return to me my calf.’ So they said to him, ‘Which calf?’

“ ‘Why,’ he said, ‘the one that I left behind me.’

“ ‘*Hongo!*’ said the neighbours, ‘behold, your calf was sick, you left it to die, and behold, we fed it with our flocks. We watered it with our herds. While you rested in the shade we carried water from the wells to give it drink. While you sat in the places near the sea and ate mangoes we took it out to the grazing.’

“Behold,” I turned to the group of old African men who were sitting in the shade, “tell me, Great Ones, who owned that calf, the man who went on the journey or the people who looked after the cow? Give me your judgement.”

For a while the old men talked in whispers, their heads close together, then one of them, leaning on his spear, said, “Bwana, the calf belonged to the man who went on the journey, but behold, he could not have it back until he paid his neighbours the price of its food; and should he also not make a gift to those who looked after it?”

“*Heeh,*” said Daudi, “those are words of true wisdom.”

Turning to the snarling Mafuta, he said, “Behold, your daughter Perisi was sick and likely to die. You left her alone in your house. She was taken by those of the school, medicine was given to her, she was fed and taught, and now when she reaches the age when she can marry, behold, you come to collect the cows of her dowry.”

Mafuta struggled to his feet, stuttering with rage. “*Kah,*” he said, “I’ll...” But exactly what he was going to do was lost in one enormous hiccough.

There was a scuffle in the ward. Simba was shouting wildly. Daudi fitted a needle to a syringe. “Hold him, Mboga, he could do himself damage.” There was a thump and a crash. Samson, a huge man of surprisingly few words who worked in the dispensary, ran past me. On the floor lay a dazed Mboga. Samson briskly tucked in the blankets and spread his considerable frame across the bed and grunted out to his tall friend. “Lie still, lion cub.” And to us, “He’s held.”

Daudi injected. “Five minutes and he should sleep.”

I nodded. “Relax, Simba. Mafuta has strong anger. Do not travel the same path. Think. Jesus said, it’s the meek who receive what God has promised. Meek people aren’t weak people nor are they angry people. Think about this as sleep comes. God does not speak idle words.”

Samson stood up. A moment later we watched Simba’s eyes close.

Shuffling footsteps went past the window. We looked out at a fat figure stumbling down the path hiccupping noisily and waving his fist in the air.

Betrothal Drums

A chorus of snores bounced back from the white-washed walls of the men's ward. I could see only one head. All the others were bundled under grey blankets, the local answer to the attack of the world's most deadly creature, the mosquito.

Simba, who had been looking up at me, said huskily, "Bwana, I have shivered, I have sweated, now I feel strong as a wet cloth."

The battered alarm clock told us it was 2 a.m. Through the window of the pathology room we could see Daudi looking down a microscope. "Before long, Simba, we'll know how the fight against malaria is going inside your body."

"*Kah*, Bwana, I am mixed up in many fights these days. I nearly lost against the lion. I lost with the sick children." He sighed heavily. "And now do you hear those drums?"

I nodded. On the cool night wind came a pulsing hectic rhythm with shrill tongue trilling from women.

"What does that tell you, Simba?"

"Another fight that I'm losing. Those drums tell of a betrothal. The direction they come from is the one Mafuta went yesterday. Perhaps even now the matter finished, the number of cows for the dowry decided and Perisi is no longer free." He sighed again and slumped back on his pillows.

I felt his pulse. "*Kumbe!* you're sick. Fever has its teeth in you. You think thoughts of no joy at all when you're sick or tired or angry."

"Lie quietly, you say, but how can I when those drums pound at my heart; when I know that down there," he pointed with his chin towards the school, "the same will be happening to Perisi?"

Huskily, through clenched teeth his voice came, “I will deal with this by myself. I will fight for her.”

“*Heeh*... I know what you'd do. Look at the man down there in the bed third from the end. Did he not do the same, and get a knife stuck into him? And behold, I have others here who have had spears through them, or into them, and then behold, they spend some time in the *chidindilo*—where the door is locked—the place some call King George's Hotel. Is this the way that you would show Perisi that you no longer have your back to God?”

“*E-e-e-h*, I don't know what to do, Bwana, but I must do something.”

“*Hongo!* Simba. You speak the words of those who wear charms about their necks and rub themselves with lion fat. They get joy from the work of rubbing. Their skin shines. But their pain remains. People such as these like to hear the witch-doctor muttering his spells and throwing his shoes to see why the spirits have attacked.”

Simba nodded slowly.

“It is more interesting to those of your tribe to see this than to see us take a drop of blood from a man's finger, look at it under a microscope, discover disease and then come with a syringe and inject the medicine that cures. But our way works.”

Simba nodded vaguely. “Truly, Bwana, but listen to those drums. They speak things to an African's ear that yours will never hear. *Hongo!* my heart has no joy.”

“No joy perhaps but let it beat with confidence. You belong to God's family. You're going His way. His word is, ‘delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you your heart's desire.’”

The light went out in the pathology room and Daudi walked towards us. He yawned. “*Eeh*, the hunter has been hunted. His blood is full of malaria *dudus*. And he will now be loaded with quinine to bring misery to the little brutes.”

Simba took no notice of the injection. He stared at the window. "I wish I knew how God will bring help in this matter. To me it seems impossible."

He shook his head then suddenly the rays of moonlight, reflected crosslike on the mosquito wire, caught his attention. Amazed he propped himself up on his elbow. "*Kah*, look at that—right over the village where it is all happening. Does it not look as though the Lord's cross is above it?"

"It's only a trick of the moonlight and the wire gauze, Simba, but believe me, God is there as He is here. When we pray, God sets to work."

He sank back on the pillow. There was a warm friendship in Daudi's voice. "Go to sleep knowing that our Father, God, is working."

Walking home through the millet field, I had exactly the same feeling.

Next morning news came from the boy who beat the hospital drum. "There was a *sikuku* last night in the village among the buyu trees. Much beer, much dancing, some fighting and this morning many with headaches. Also I hear that Karanga, the chief there (he is a man with many wives) has given betrothal gifts and also received them. He gave Mafuta a ring made from gold."

Daudi raised his eyebrows. "The giving of a gold ring is a new thing. It is not a custom."

"Gold rings can lead to much trouble."

Again those raised eyebrows, a shrug and the ominous words, "That is not what my bones tell me."

In the ward Simba was totally covered by a blanket. Daudi laughed. "Unwrap that man, Mboga, and prepare him for a large injection."

A muffled voice said, "Go away, I'm sick."

"Then he's not hungry," said Mboga. "A good thing that, for now I shall eat

that bowl of porridge that Perisi has sent up from the school.”

Simba sat up. “*Yoh!* I commence to feel better.”

“See what food does to a sick man,” I chuckled.

“You laugh, Bwana, but my thoughts are a little higher than my stomach. Behold, Perisi is a woman of understanding. Also an excellent cook.”

Perisi herself was waiting in the shade of a pepper tree. “Bwana, will my work at the hospital start soon?”

“You’ve started already, Perisi. You brought about sudden improvement for one of my patients this morning.”

She smiled and then her face became serious. “I could not sleep last night. I heard the drums. Their message brought heaviness to my heart.”

“We heard them here too. We have asked God to deal with the matter.”

“I also prayed, but I can see no way out of the trouble.”

“That is not your responsibility or mine, Perisi. We pray and keep on praying. We trust Him and follow His words exactly. He will show us the path to travel.” She nodded.

Daudi brought the empty porridge bowl. “His words are that his stomach sings,” he laughed.

Perisi smiled and as she walked up the path my African friend put his hand on my arm. “Behold, is it not an unusual thing in our tribe for men and women to love one another as those two do?”

Dowries

The hysterical voice shouted, “I must see the Bwana. I must see him NOW.”

He was answered by so quiet a murmur that I could not pick out the words. “Tell him it is I, Mafuta. Am I not in danger? Am I not in pain, fierce pain? He must come to see me now—*now*—NOW.”

Daudi replied, “Well surely it is your custom to visit the witch-doctor if a spell has been cast against you.”

“What witch-doctor will listen to me when the spell has been cast for a man of much wealth?”

“Had you remembered also, Mafuta, that any witch-doctor will first ask for a cow before he will do anything?”

Mafuta saw me through the doorway. He pushed Daudi aside and, left hand outstretched, stumbled towards me.

“Gently now,” I stepped quickly aside, “what is your trouble?”

The hand was pushed close to my nose. “See, look, *yaya gwe*, oh my mother, the pain, the swelling, the misery.”

His third finger was swollen and sausage-like. It looked angry in the extreme. The fat man was stuttering in his eagerness to tell me about it.

“*Kumbe!* I was given...” He peered, open mouthed over my shoulder. A tall haggard figure wrapped in a blanket stared balefully at him.

“Simba,” I ordered, “back to bed. This is no place for you. You will...”

Samson walked out of the dispensary. “Bed, Bwana!”

I nodded. He swung Simba off his feet and said softly, “Bed, little one,” and

carried him back to the ward.

Daudi was rocking with laughter but Mafuta had a wild look in his eyes. “Bwana, listen...” Suddenly his legs gave way. He slumped down onto a stool.

Mboga came in. “I’ll tell the Bwana. He was given a gold ring by that rich man, Karanga. It is on his finger now. It is a betrothal gift.”

The plump hand was thrust forward. Turning his hand this way and that I could see nothing. The ring was completely hidden by swelling. Daudi pointed to the nails. “*Kah*, they are strange looking!”

“Look at his eyes. They’re definitely yellow. Would you put out your tongue,” I asked.

Mafuta did so. “*He-e-e...*” said Daudi shuddering, “put it back.”

He changed to English. “It is his habit to drink much beer.”

“His liver shows this, Daudi. I would not be surprised if he has considerable trouble. This yellow colour is jaundice.”

The fat man’s feet were swollen. The skin over his shin bone dimpled as I pushed with my thumb. “Sit quietly in the shade. Keep your hand in cold water and swallow the pill Mboga gives you. Then, after a time the swelling will be less and I can remove the ring your friend gave you.”

Mafuta spat. “*Kah!* he is not my friend. Was it not he that caused this spell to be cast against me.” A deep rumbling noise came from his bloated stomach. “*Hongo!* has he not sent the spirit of a savage snake to torment me?”

Daudi again spoke in English. “Surely a strange way to speak of the man who only yesterday was betrothed to his daughter. It looks to me as if...” Up went his eyebrows.

I nodded. “Whatever happens we must keep Simba away from him.”

Samson was standing beside Simba's bed. "He's deep in sadness," he whispered.

"Bwana," Simba slowly turned towards me, "the work of Shaitani, the devil, is strong in the country of Ugogo. His hand is against me." He groaned. "Greatly against me."

"Listen. Since the days of your fight with the lion you have become a son of God. He's your Father in heaven. He says to trust Him."

"I thought I had, but how am I to know that God can overcome these evil men?"

"In the book of Good News, Simba, it tells how Jesus and those who followed him, crossed a lake. When their boat touched the shore, towards them rushed a fierce-looking man with eyes that told of a mind full of trouble."

"*Yoh!* I know that look. It brings fear."

"*Ngheeh*, those who were with Jesus felt the same. This man was so strong that no one in the place could hold him. He knocked people about, he broke chairs, he tore ropes into shreds. He wandered through the place where they buried the dead. It was his custom to gash himself with sharp stones and to shriek in a way that terrified people.

"When he saw the boat land, he rushed down at them, shouting wildly. The disciples ran for the boat. Jesus stood still. Suddenly the devil-possessed man threw himself at Jesus' feet, shouting, 'What do you want of me, Son of God?' And then in a voice full of awe, 'In God's name, I beg you do not torment me.'

"For Jesus had spoken and said, '*Icisi*, evil spirit, come out of the man.' Jesus went on, 'What is your name?'

"It was the evil spirit that replied. '*Wenji*, very many, for there are a lot of us.'"

Simba was sitting up, his hands round his knees. "Here is the word to give

you strength. The spirits begged Jesus not to send them away from the country. They knew He had power over them. They knew God is stronger than Satan. They begged Jesus to send them into a herd of pigs. Jesus did so, but the man who a little while before had been wild and dangerous was changed. His eyes were calm. In an ordinary voice he said, 'Bwana, Jesus, let me come with you.' But the Lord shook his head. 'No, go back to your people and tell them what Almighty God has done for you.'

"The man did what Jesus told him. The people of his village were astounded. Many of them started to follow God's way."

"Behold," said Simba softly, "God is greatly stronger than Shaitani. He orders and the evil spirits obey."

Samson, noted for his few words, tapped his friend on the shoulder. "Who fears hyena when lion is his friend? You need faith, lion hunter."

Simba's teeth started to chatter as another bout of malaria shook him. "God will work in this matter. I shall ask him and keep on asking."

"He has promised he will hear your prayers and answer them. You are trying to help people to know Him. He won't break His promise."

Later I went back to the operating room. Mafuta sat quivering with fright. I was relieved to see his finger less swollen and the ring was visible in a grove of unhealthy flesh. His mouth gaped. "Don't hurt me..." His jaundiced eyes stared at the glass-cutting file, two pairs of dental forceps and the pocket knife with its screw driver, horse shoe pick and assorted gadgets.

Samson held his arm and his wrist. Mboga's eyes danced. "He may move but his arm won't."

The small file worked splendidly. "Be careful. Go gently. *Yaya gwe!*" Mafuta quavered.

Then as the ring was cut and I grasped each end with tooth extraction forceps, he let out a tremendous yell, startling Daudi. "Did that give you

pain?”

“No-o-o, but I thought it was going to.” He looked down utterly amazed to see the ring held in the forceps. His groans changed to a gurgle of satisfaction and before I could stop him he grabbed my hand and kissed it.

My helpers rocked with laughter. The fat man was blowing gently on his damaged finger and I asked, “Tell me, was it easy to put that ring on your finger?”

He nodded vigorously. “There was no difficulty.”

“But it was difficult to get off?”

He rolled his eyes and muttered. “Danger, pain...”

Daudi drew me aside and spoke in English. “You don’t understand the fears of witchcraft. See the charm round his neck, that small piece of carved wood on that greasy string? That is to protect him. He knows that Karanga is a rich man of cunning so he fears him and pays a goat for a charm that has strength to keep away hostile spirits. He also has no joy because he believes that Karanga’s witch-doctor makes stronger magic than his. Now he is convinced, for this happens to his finger.”

“*Ngheeh*,” nodded Samson, “and he trembles within himself.”

“You talk in the language of the *Wazungu*, Europeans,” complained Mafuta, “and I want help.”

“We are giving it to you,” Daudi replied. “Have we not removed the ring that gave you trouble? Now we tell words of strong helpfulness. Listen with open ears. There are two paths. One leads to God’s country. It’s uphill often, and sometimes narrow, rough and steep. Those who tread this path and enter His great and splendid village ask Him to be their king. He loves them and protects them. It is a place of contentment and safety and joy and purpose.

“The other path—wide and smooth—leads to Shaitan’s country where he is chief. He beckons and smiles and promises gaiety, laughter and feasting but

to the many deceived by his words and poisoned by the dainties of his cooking pots the path leads steeply down to misery and loneliness and death.”

Mafuta furtively fingered the charms around his neck.

Daudi went on. “And you, Mafuta, what profit is there sitting in the centre of this village of danger and pain.”

“Truly, these are wise words,” mumbled the fat man getting to his feet and shambling away.

Daudi threw up his hands in frustration. “Bwana, telling him the words of God is like pouring water on hot sand. Listen to him.”

At the gate Mafuta paused, waved his clenched fist at the path in the direction where Karanga lived and shouted, “I will make trouble, much trouble for that one who wishes to be the husband of my daughter. He will reap trouble.” He stamped his feet. “He cannot cast spells upon me without reaping trouble.”

Excitedly Mboga grabbed my arm. “The ward window, see, Simba’s face *yakwizina muno*.”

I looked across at Daudi who obligingly translated. “It shines with amazement.”

It was well after midnight. A mosquito buzzed angrily close to my ear. I woke, lighted a lantern and hunted it down. There was the sound of running feet and a voice shouted, “It is I, Daudi. Mafuta is screaming that spells have been cast and there is a devil inside him. He froths at the mouth and clutches his stomach.”

I dragged on some clothes and raced with Daudi to the hospital. The ungainly form of Perisi’s father rolled on the floor groaning and moaning out what sounded like *u-ki-ki-ki-ki, yaya gwe, o-o-o-oh!* finishing in an ear piercing scream.

Examining him was more than a problem. Although he squirmed and wriggled there was no doubt that he had really severe pain under his ribs.

“Gall bladder?” questioned Daudi.

“That’s his special enemy. Within him there is a small tube, thick as an eye dropper that runs from the liver with a branch to the gall bladder. This finishes up in the pathway of food. Sometimes when people are too fat, little stones grow in the gall bladder. If a stone strays down that small tube it produces pain, wild pain, on its way out. If the stone is small the pain is small, if it is larger the pain is great. We will now give him medicine through a needle that makes the tube relax and perhaps the stone will slip through and the pain will stop. If this happens he will quickly feel better.”

Mafuta was mumbling, “*Kah... kah... ooh!*” There was a glazed look in his eyes. In a voice like someone talking in their sleep he said, “The feet of the witch-doctor walk round my house.” He drew up his knees and started to groan. “*Ooi, yahay, yah, yah. Koh!* does he not stamp with his feet upon the ground in front of my door! *Koh!* It is a spell, a spell that will kill me! WILL KILL ME!!”

Frenzy seized him. Daudi sprang forward but not in time to stop the sick man rolling to the floor. He landed heavily and lost consciousness. It was not easy to bring him round. He lay groaning and muttering.

“His pulse is there, Daudi, but it’s behaving queerly. With a flabby heart like his anything could happen. We must keep him quiet. This is most important.”

At that moment the door flew open. In rushed one of his relations, taking no notice of us. “*Yaya gwe!*” he yelled, wringing his hands. “There is great trouble. Karanga has anger towards you. He has called *M’ganga*, the witch-doctor. I saw him creeping into the Chief’s house. *Heeh*, are we not in trouble?”

I whispered to Daudi, “Are *we* in trouble? He may collapse.” I filled a syringe in case, but instead of collapsing he sat up and roared like a bull. “*Kah*, my

daughter, Perisi, will never see the inside of Karanga's house. I am the one who should have anger. Was it not his ring which caused me much pain and trouble?" He paused and a cunning look spread over his face. "She shall marry another man and it will be he who fights this fight."

Mboga was near to me. "Run with speed and bring Simba. You may have to help him walk." He grinned and ran.

Daudi whispered. "This is a matter of amazement. This is a complete change in the path his mind travels. It would be wise to leave this matter to us. We know the ways of tribal custom."

Simba stepped into the doorway. I moved over into the corner.

"*Mbukwa*. Good day," said Simba.

Mafuta looked at him from his bed. "*Mbukwa*," he replied, a gleam coming into his eye.

Simba turned to me. "Bwana, since taking your medicine, I have regained my strength. Behold, it is time that I went hunting again. Behold, I will become a rich man if I continue to bring meat for the village and sell animals to Bwana Zoo."

Mafuta sat up in bed. He looked distinctly interested when he heard the word *money*. Daudi was whispering again in my ear, "Bwana, you take Simba outside and I will do the negotiations. That is the way we do it in our tribe. Do not go far away, and behold, I will tell you what happens."

This is what he told us a few minutes later. "Bwana, old Mafuta wants this matter to be fixed, and fixed at once. So I said to him, 'What better husband could Perisi have than a hunter who could defend her, and in defending her, would protect her father?' Also here was one who could pay the full dowry of thirty cows, and Bwana, he has agreed."

Simba grasped Daudi by the shoulder. "What?" he shouted. "Say it again."

"I will," grinned my assistant, drawing back. "If you stop breaking my collar

bone.”

The whole conversation was gone over again slowly. Then Simba turned to me and said, “Bwana, truly this is nothing but the hand of God. This morning there was no hope, everything seemed hopeless. Now it’s happened.”

“Truly, but there’s a fight in the air. This Karanga is not going to be easy. And I believe these witch-doctor people will have every assistance that the devil can give them, for the simple reason that you are trying to serve God. If the devil can upset God’s work in any way, he’ll do it.”

“*Heeh!*” said Simba, “so far the devil has not made a very good fight of this.”

“Carefully, Simba,” I urged, “*Shaitani* knows many tricks.”

Daudi was being practical. “Let us make the first payment of cows and then the betrothal is finished.”

“But,” said Simba, “my cows are a day’s safari away.”

“Then buy some others,” said Daudi, “Bwana will lend you some shillings.”

“*Heeh*, but I have thirty-two shillings myself.”

“Well, Simba, in these days of the tax collection you can buy cows for ten shillings each.”

For a quarter of an hour they discussed cows—the humpbacked, sturdy little creatures that produce pitifully little milk but are most important in the money picture of Tanzania.

When Daudi came back to the ward I said, “To me it’s a strange custom for a man to buy his wife with cows.”

“Truly, you do not understand,” replied my friend. “You don’t buy a wife with cows; rather it is a sign of good faith between two families, or it should be. A man cannot leave his wife and get his cows back unless she has broken the tribal laws. Also, if a man ill-treats his wife, behold, she may be taken back

to her father's house by her people, and the cows may not be paid back."

"But how can they fix these things, Daudi? Surely there must be many fights."

"Ng'o, Bwana." Daudi shook his head. "The Chief hears the *shauri*, the case, and judges it."

"Mmmm, there is more in it than you see at one glance with European eyes."

Daudi laughed. "You're beginning to understand, but don't you think we ought to go and tell Perisi about this matter? After all, she's more in it than anyone except Simba."

Together we set off towards the school, and stopped under a tree to thank God for answering our prayers. For a while we were quiet, then I said, "Daudi, it says in God's Book that if we abide in Jesus, that is, keep very close to Him, and walk in His way; and if His words abide in us—that is, if we obey what the Bible says—then we shall ask what we wish and it will *happen*."

"That is true, Bwana, we have seen it today."

"But, Daudi, God does not allow the path to be easy always, and I can well imagine the devil even now planning to upset things, Simba's faith particularly."

"But why, Bwana? Why does God allow this?"

"*Kah*, Daudi, a man who hunts only rats never gets great courage, nor does he learn jungle craft. It's hunting lion and leopard that builds skill and strength."

Daudi nodded. "It's to make our souls fit and strong and usefully active."

"That's it. Temptation is like that; it's a challenge to make us use the special things available to those who have become God's children."

A schoolgirl came running up the path with a note in her hand. Panting, she stopped. I read it and handed it to Daudi. Slowly he read it out loud:

“Perisi has suddenly collapsed. Please come at once. She looks deathly.”

Struggle on the Brink

The girl lay wrapped in blankets, shivering violently. The whole bed, with its criss-cross rope mattress shook. Her pulse bounced and raced. “Fever,” said Daudi.

“It’s fever all right, but I have an odd feeling inside me that it isn’t merely malaria. Would you bring a tablespoon of the white mixture and do a blood slide?”

He nodded and hurried away.

Sechelela had come down from the hospital. “Seche, Perisi here is very ill; high temperature and pulse you can hardly count. Have you heard if she has been visiting any of the villages or been on safari?”

“Is it not a week ago that she went across the swamps to the Ruaha river? That is mosquito country. They come up in clouds at sunset. There are also snakes and *dudus* of all sorts down there.”

“If it’s bad malaria country, I suppose it’s most likely that this *is* malaria and yet—somehow...” I shook my head in doubt.

Daudi returned with the medicine and his slides and needles. We propped up the sick girl. She swallowed with difficulty and said huskily, “Bwana, in the house where I stayed, there were not only mosquitoes but ticks, many of them. They came out at night. I found fifteen on me in the morning—large ones the size of the end of my finger.”

Sechelela nodded her head. “Perhaps she has two fevers at once?”

“That’s what we shall know soon,” said Daudi opening his box with its glass slides, needles and small bottles. “Now, talking of fingers.” A quick stab and a drop of blood was obtained. Briskly he prepared the slide. “It will not take long for the microscope to tell us the story of this trouble.”

Again from the pillows came the tired voice. “Beside the river in a place of trees, there were many tsetse flies. *Yoh!* they fly fast and bite with strength.”

Up went Daudi’s eyebrows. “We have in the back of the medicine cupboard one box of ampoules for sleeping sickness—one box only.”

“Examine that slide carefully. We cannot afford to miss anything.”

Both Daudi and I searched, moving the microscope systematically up and down in the way that a field is ploughed. There were a few, insignificantly few, tiny purple signet rings, that show malaria, inside the pink peach petal-like red blood cells. There were no minute corkscrew-like organisms which are the cause of tick fever.

Daudi was carefully examining pictures and diagrams in the tropical medicine text book. “These trypanosomes of sleeping sickness look like a sausage with a sail.”

Startled, I looked up. “Don’t tell me you saw some of those.”

My assistant shook his head. He wiped the lens, cleaned it, and put the microscope into its box.

“Daudi, we’ll treat the malaria but this is only part, a small part, of her illness. The miserable truth is that we have no means of diagnosing her trouble and she is losing ground fast.”

It was dusk as I came away from the hospital. Crows were flying overhead; others, perched on the baobab tree, seemed to jeer at me. From behind me a stone whizzed, the black beady eyed bird squawked and flapped into the air. Simba’s voice came, “Bwana, what is the news?”

Following the Swahili pattern, I answered, “The news is good but she is dangerously ill.”

“What can I do?”

“Simba, will you pray and ask God to help me to know how best to deal with her sickness.”

“I will do that with strong asking.”

“Also don’t forget that it says in the Bible, ‘If two of you agree in anything you ask, it will be done for you by My Father who is in heaven.’ Jesus himself spoke these words. He does not lie. We agree in this, both of us. Let us both ask God.”

We prayed together. Sometime later I watched his strong lithe figure swinging through the greyness of early evening.

Out of the hospital gate waddled an odd looking figure wrapped in a magenta blanket. “Bwana,” a high pitched voice implored, “Bwana, help me. You must, YOU MUST. My daughter must not die, she must not. If she dies what will happen to my wealth? Is she not worth many cows? Who will pay a dowry for a dead girl?”

I stood staring at him. “You overweight, selfish, worthless, old rascal,” I thought.

His voice became more wheedling. “Give her strong medicine, the strong medicine you use for yourself. She is only a woman but there are those who would wed her and they will pay me cows. And I, Mafuta, will give you a cow, a large one, if you will give her the best medicine, the strongest that you’ve got.”

While he had been saying all this, Daudi had come within earshot. Words surged up inside me but fortunately I did not have to use them. Daudi got in first. He gripped the blanket and pulled the man wrapped in it roughly towards him.

“Back to bed, you vulture,” he hissed through clenched teeth. “Do you want to taste the Bwana’s hot anger? He doesn’t want your money. He doesn’t want your cows. He has happiness to fight for the life of your daughter, but not for the reason of your greed.”

In disgust I turned on my heel. “He makes me sick, Daudi. He’s not concerned for Perisi. His thoughts are all on the wretched cows he’ll collect

for her dowry.”

Simba’s silhouette was dark against the night sky. He was thinking only of helping the girl he loved.

A week went by—a week during which Perisi slowly grew worse. With no clear-cut diagnosis I used ‘shot-gun therapy,’ trying this medicine or that treatment and hoping one of them would strike at the cause. But nothing useful happened and Perisi steadily lost ground.

One night I couldn’t sleep. It was hot and humid. Lightening rippled round the horizon. The moon was large above the baobabs.

Dressing quickly, I picked up a knobbed stick and walked up towards the hospital. Outside Daudi’s house was a group of cheerful people. Mboga was playing an *ilimba* and everyone but Simba was singing. He was busy putting in fancy decorations to the music with a *kudu* horn.

A convenient shadow gave me the opportunity to see and not be seen. Perisi’s problem suddenly became clear in my mind. The wise words of a famous medical teacher flashed into my memory, DON’T EVER FORGET TYPHOID. That ugly infection could mimic any fever and drag many into the grave.

A spate of ideas and foreboding flooded my thinking. I turned and ran up the hill.

Tight Rope

As I pored over the temperature chart I became more convinced of the diagnosis. Quietly I thanked God that we had treated her as infectious, otherwise we might well have had an epidemic. In the dim light of a hurricane lantern Perisi looked gaunt. Her eyes were sunken, her cheek bones stuck out rather sharply, her lips were dry and cracked and she was barely able to speak. Feebly she moved her arm. It was wasted like the limb of a famine victim. We neither had, nor could, obtain any special medication. Good nursing and scrupulous medical observation were our only weapons.

Old Sechelela was the answer. She would look after Perisi in a way that nobody else would or could and Simba could be readily on tap to fetch and carry and call.

Minutes later the African head nurse sat beside me while I outlined the things she was to look for. "Seche, if she has a shivering attack, or has sudden pain in the stomach, or if her pulse starts to race, send for me at once be it day or night. These are days and hours of great danger."

It was midnight when I opened the operating theatre door and collected the surgical instruments that would be required for an emergency operation. Surgery in the day time was far from easy, way out in the thornbush jungle with our limited equipment; but to work at night with only electric torches for lighting was infinitely more difficult.

Pouring ether into a pickle bottle I assembled and tested our bush anaesthetic machine which, apart from the pickle bottle, consisted of a football bladder, the foot pump of a car, part of an old stethoscope, two eye droppers and some metres of rubber tubing. Primitive certainly, but it worked.

At last I was satisfied that everything was ready to deal with an emergency at a moment's notice. I yawned, stretched and moved towards the door.

Outside a deep voice called, “*Hodi.*”

“*Karibu.* Come in, Simba.”

He stood, his face twisted with worry, and demanded, “Bwana, do you really believe that God is stronger than Shaitan?”

“I do. Why?”

“These days the whole country near here is full of muttered words. It is whispered in Karanga’s village that dark spells have been cast on both Mafuta and Perisi. Bwana, all that has happened is believed to result from these spells. It is the way we think, the way I have thought all my life till lately. Even now my mind is full of fear, for those spells bring death. I’ve seen it happen many times. Fear covers the village like a grey cloud.”

He stopped and looked down. “And I feel that cloud reaching out at me. I’ve asked God to take me into His family but...” He covered his face with his hand and groaned.

“Simba, remember the matter of the betrothal and the ring? Remember Mafuta’s sudden change of mind? Was this not the work of God?”

The broad-shouldered hunter shivered then he gripped my arm, looked me in the eye, and shook his head doubtfully.

“Have faith in God, Simba, not doubts. Who is filling your mind with these thoughts? Is it not one of Shaitan’s most trusted tempters? The devil’s power is small when God fights. Remember when lion defends, who fears the teeth of hyena? Though, believe me, there is no joy in hyena’s laughter.”

Simba’s eyes were wide open. He rolled them and said, “*Hongo!*”

I tapped him gently on the chest with my forefinger. “Listen and I will tell you what happened when Elijah was working and Ahabu was the king.”

Simba sat down, his chin in his hands.

“Behold, in those days there were many witch-doctors who spent all their

time worshipping and offering sacrifices to their god whom they called Baal. Now there were many people in those days who said that Baal was stronger than Almighty God. So Elijah called the people together, thousands of them. They were all there in front of him. On one side five hundred witch-doctors who worshipped Baal, the god of lightening. On the other, entirely by himself, was God's man, Elijah.

"In a loud voice he challenged those who followed the false god: 'Let us each take an ox and prepare it for an offering—then let us each call to our god and ask him to bring fire to burn up our offering. The god who answers, he will be the god for everyone to follow.'

"The people talked together and said, 'That is a fair thing, a way of wisdom.'

"Elijah told his five hundred rivals to choose their ox. They did, and killed it and put it on the altar. Then they started to dance and sing and beat drums with strength. They shrieked and screamed. They cut themselves with spears and knives and sharp stones and frothed at the mouth. Those who watched told each other, 'Flames will surely come.' But no fire came.

"Elijah stood on a great stone and jeered. 'Make more noise. Perhaps your god is asleep, or on safari.'

"The five hundred were furious. They yelled and howled. They gnashed their teeth. They clamoured, 'O Baal, Baal, hear!' But there was no answer; no lightening. They went on dancing with frenzy.

"At the time when shadows grow longer Elijah's voice rang out—compelling, 'All of you, come here.' All the people came close to him. He built God's altar with twelve great stones and dug a deep trench around it. On the stones he put wood, on the wood a slaughtered bullock, and then he called for four great pots of water. 'Pour them over the meat and the wood and the stones,' he ordered.

"They did. The water filled the trenches."

"*Kah!*" exclaimed Simba, "but the water would stop the wood from burning."

“That is why Elijah did it. He wanted all to know that God is almighty.

“Then everything was ready. In the hushed silence Elijah lifted up his hands to heaven, and cried, ‘O God, show them that *You* are God, that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your command. Hear me, O God, hear me, that the people may know that *You* are the God of gods.’

“Vast, blinding flame engulfed the sacrifice—the wood, the stones and the water in the trench, wiping out the lot. The people were terrified. Thunderstruck. They cried:

“ ‘He is the God. God, He is the God of gods.’ ”

Slowly Simba nodded his head. “Bwana, is that story true?”

“Yes, Simba. What’s more, the God who lived in those days is the God who is going to help us win our own battle against evil.”

We knelt together and told God all about the whole situation. We asked for Perisi’s life to be saved.

As we got up from our knees we saw a figure with a hurricane lantern hurrying towards us. Sechelela’s voice came out of the darkness: “Bwana, quickly. Perisi has sudden, severe stomach pain.” There was a tremor in her voice. “I’ve never seen her look like this—never.”

Simba walked into the shadows and Sechelela in a low voice went on, “She lies there like one dead. She breathes hardly at all.”

As I bent over the girl, her lips shaped the word, “Pain.”

Medical examination made it all too plain that we needed to operate immediately. In typhoid there is always the danger of perforation of the bowel. In this jungle hospital with its makeshift equipment and the pitifully few medicines, she had, humanly speaking, one chance in ten of recovery. And then I began to feel as Elijah the prophet must have felt. Calm confidence came to me. I made the arrangements for her to be brought to the theatre. Standing outside was Simba.

“Bwana, what’s happened?”

“Simba, it’s as though the water has been thrown over everything, as in the story I told you. This seems the darkest hour. Perisi’s life is at the very door of the village of death, and yet, with all the difficulties, somehow I feel...”

Simba interrupted. “Bwana, so do I. Behold, is it not what the Bible calls, ‘the peace of God which passes all understanding?’”

I opened the door of the operating theatre. Simba barred my way. “Bwana, I must help in this operation.”

“There is nothing you can do. Nothing.”

“Wait. There is one thing he could do better than anyone else,” said Sechelela. “If we put a mask round his mouth and a cap on his head and a gown over his body he could stand on a box and hold your big electric torch. He would hold it with strength so that it would not waver right throughout the operation.”

“Let me do that, Bwana.”

“Right, you shall. But there must not be one flicker of that torch through the work. Seeing everything clearly is most important; but this could take two hours.”

He shrugged. “I can do it.”

Outside, the primus stove was roaring away underneath the steriliser. Daudi was putting out the instruments and dressing that I would need. Perisi was carried into the theatre and carefully placed on the table. Picking up the ether bottle I sat down beside her. Her lips moved and the words came faintly, “Perhaps I will die?”

“Do not forget, Perisi, that as I work tonight, the hand of the Lord Jesus is on my hand.”

“Bwana,” she said, looking up at me with the shadow of a smile, “and I can feel His hand holding me. But what of Simba?”

I heard a sharply taken in-breath behind me. “Perisi, he is here. It is he that will hold the light for this work.”

I put out my hand and drew the strong African down beside me. “Bwana,” she said, “Tell him that my heart still calls and calls.” And then she recognised the face looking over my shoulder. Although she could see only his eyes, there was something in those eyes which spoke more than eloquently.

I picked up the anaesthetic mask. “As you sleep, Perisi, and as we work, let us have this word from God in our hearts: ‘Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.’” Simba’s hand closed over hers.

I think everyone in that jungle operating theatre prayed as the minutes ticked by on the alarm clock which stood on the window-sill.

The operation was intricate, but at last it was done. From start to finish I had been able to see splendidly. There was not a flicker in the beam of that powerful electric torch held directly over my left shoulder. As I put in the last few stitches the batteries obviously were failing.

“Bwana,” said the deep voice behind, “do not wait for those who will come with a stretcher. Behold, I can carry her in my arms to the ward as you would a child.”

I walked beside him as he carried the girl he loved back to the ward. I could hear the words he kept whispering over and over again. “*Gwe go Mulungu u mulungu lungu*—Almighty God, Almighty God.”

With gentleness he put the girl down on the bed and stood back while Sechelela arranged the bed clothes.

“Wait outside, Simba, I’ll be with you before long.”

Our first enemy was shock. We set up a device to run fluids into her veins and give injections to control pain. Her pulse was a wisp of movement. A blood transfusion would help greatly. Both Daudi and I were exhausted. He covered a yawn and then suddenly seemed excitedly awake. “*Yoh!* why did

we not think of this? We know Simba's blood is compatible with hers, we could..." He put his head on one side and smiled. "I could see you were thinking about transfusion."

"You're right, Daudi. I must be too tired to think clearly. Will you fix up the things we need and I'll collect and give."

Simba was lying asleep on the cold concrete of the veranda. I shook his shoulder. He sat up startled. "What... is she...?"

"She needs to be given strength that comes from someone else. Blood, Simba."

He flexed his splendid muscles and laughed. "Once they said that because she had given me blood, I would be able to have power over her."

I knew that after a haircut or nail clipping the hair or nail slithers were burnt or put down a deep hole or secretly buried for fear of a charm being made that would be damaging, but blood transfusions hadn't struck me.

"Now, Simba, if you give her blood you both can have power over each other."

The tall man looked down at me. "You say *if*, Bwana, *if I will give blood. Yoh!* Take a bucket full." His face beamed. "I asked God for a special way to help. Holding the light was a small thing but giving blood, that is special, me direct to her."

An hour later the transfusion was running well. It was daylight. Perisi was asleep. Every moment of sleep was precious if she was to recover.

"Sleep is what we need." I smiled at my two African friends. "That was a night full of action. We must all be ready for a lot more in the days ahead."

Daudi and Simba nodded. Simba yawned and walked wearily down the path. He was barely out of sight when startlingly came a piercing shriek, that eerie earsplitting sound that tells of death or disaster. It came from the men's ward. We all raced in that direction. The hair-raising sound came again and

again. At all costs that sound had to be stopped. It could well shock Perisi out of sleep.

We found Mboga struggling with a wild-eyed Mafuta. “Bwana,” panted the generally good-natured Mboga, “for no special reason he suddenly started this *chenga*. I tried to stop him with my hand but he, hyena that he is, bit me. This towel worked better.” There was a hint of a twinkle in his eye.

“Let’s take the towel away for a minute. And you, Mafuta, don’t you dare raise your voice. Not even a little.”

“But, Bwana,” he whined, “Perisi is going to die. And when she does will I not be a poor man and if I am poor what will I do?”

“He’s going to *chenga* again!” Mboga sprang forward, towel in hand, and the wailing voice ended in a gurgle.

I hurried to the dispensary and mixed a strong dose of sedative. Samson came back with me. “Drink this,” I ordered, holding out the glass to Mafuta.

“But I don’t want...”

“Drink it,” Samson’s deep voice was compelling. The fat man took one look at him, reached for the glass and swallowed.

“Stay with him, Samson, till he sleeps. He must not disturb anyone again.”

Samson’s nod was a complete answer.

“Bwana,” breathless, a nurse stood beckoning at the door. “Seche wants you quickly.”

The old African nurse was standing outside the closed door of Perisi’s room. She put her finger to her lips. “She was disturbed. She lies there muttering.”

I went across to the bed. Perisi was conscious and whispered, “My mouth is dry.” She ran her tongue round her cracked lips. Gently I gave her sips of water. “*Heee*, that’s good.” She sank back on her pillows. “This pain, I can’t sleep. It is a pain of strength.”

“I have medicine for that. Sleep will come swiftly.”

The last drops were still in the syringe when the door opened enough for me to see Daudi beckoning urgently. I tiptoed across to him.

“It’s Mafuta, Bwana. He has collapsed. Pulse gone, heart sounds weak...”

Full of concern Mboga was propping up the heavy figure. In a moment an injection was given. Perisi’s father lay back on his pillow.

Stethoscope and blood pressure machine were needed now. As soon as I had taken out the earpiece questions were fired. “Was this because of his struggle and shouting?”

“Partly, but his collapse is the result of many things. His life has been full of happenings that breed trouble. These are the words of God: ‘If we sow the wind, we reap the whirlwind.’ And again, ‘Make no mistake, you can’t laugh at God. Whatever a man sows, he’ll reap.’ Mafuta is now collecting the harvest of all the things he has done. What a crop it’s going to be unless he asks God to forgive him and wipe out all the mess in his past days.”

For two days he lay there deeply unconscious. Mercifully, some fifty paces away his daughter slept with fluid and nourishment running into her veins.

I snatched an hour’s sleep and, feeling dazed and weary, went back to the ward. Mafuta’s pulse was a little stronger, but it was becoming obvious that he had suffered a severe stroke.

Crisis

All that morning Mafuta lay there breathing in a way that I knew was ominous.

A weary Daudi faced me in the late afternoon. “His soul is still in his body,” he sighed. “Yesterday I talked to him and told him that the way of riches was a slippery one. He would not listen so I told him a story.”

Mboga nodded and said, “No one fears a story. It is a good path to use. What did you tell him, Daudi?”

“It was Jesus’ story about the man whose gardens were large and whose crops were the best he had had for years. He said within himself, ‘Soul, you have plenty of good things for years to come. Eat, drink and have a good time.’ But God said to him, ‘Foolish man, this very night you will be asked for your soul.’

“I told him all this but he would not listen. I told him the biggest sin of all was turning your back on God. But he spat and said my words were *taka taka*, rubbish. And that was less than a day ago.” He sighed.

“Let’s take a look at him again and then I’ll see Perisi.”

Mafuta’s blood pressure was critically low and even as I held his pulse his soul left his body.

A man who had been squatting near the door abruptly stood up and hurried away. “Who was that, Spinach!”

Mboga went outside and came back with the news. “He is Karanga’s man. It will soon be known all over the countryside that Mafuta has gone to his ancestors. This will mean trouble for I heard that Mafuta had accepted three cows as part of the dowry and that already he had sold them. Karanga will demand these cows back and it will be the responsibility of Mafuta’s relations

to pay them back unless he still wants to marry Perisi.”

Daudi was puzzled. “I heard that the only relation that Mafuta has, a man of small courage, has already made a hurried safari. He feared that the trouble that always followed the fat man would come his way. And so Karanga can claim Perisi, unless...”

“Yes, Daudi, but isn’t that where Simba comes in? Behold, if there are no relations, who will receive the dowry?”

“*Kah*, if there are no relations, then the foster parents, the people who looked after the girl, they would have the right to claim the cows. Is she not one of their family?”

“Right, and who looked after her from babyhood up?”

“Why, the people of the school.”

A dark shadow of a man with a spear fell across the wall. The mellow glow of sunset made him look immense.

“*Kah*,” whispered Mboga, “who is this? What now?”

A well known voice called, “*Hodi*.”

I replied, “*Karibu*.”

And as Simba walked in purposefully I heard Daudi mutter, “It is well that he is not opposing us.”

The tall hunter greeted us. “I have heard the news through the voices of the drums. I have come to help.”

“We need you. Behold, there are no relations to look after Mafuta’s burial and no one to pay back to Karanga the cows that have been received from him.”

Simba nodded. “And I heard that tomorrow Karanga plans to come. He will demand to see Perisi. He can be a man of anger.”

“There are also ways to quench anger, lion hunter.”

Next morning I saw an imposing procession winding its way up the hill. In the middle was a stout man wearing a fez and a check tweed coat over the long flowing nightshirt-like *kanzu* that some Africans wear.

Daudi tapped at the door. “Bwana, here comes that man of trouble.”

“Would you please see that the hospital gate is locked and ask Karanga to be good enough to come here to my office that we may drink tea and talk together. Also ask Samson to see that Perisi is not disturbed.”

Shortly after I shook hands ceremonially with Karanga. Daudi and Simba sat beside me. We talked of many things African fashion. Every minute that passed Karanga became more impatient until he burst out with, “It is my wish to speak with the woman Perisi, she...”

Simba jumped to his feet “Bwana, *Mutemi* Mazengo, the great one of this country, is coming. Shall I bring more chairs and more cups?”

I nodded.

Karanga looked agitated. His fingers fiddled with the buttons of his coat. He muttered something angrily to the man at his side.

“He’s trapped,” whispered Daudi. “No one goes against the judgement of the *Mutemi*, King. Also he will fear to tell lies for the great one knows well if words come from a twisted tongue.”

Everyone stood as the regal old African leader came in smiling. He greeted, shook hands all round and accepted a cup of tea.

Again there was small talk for quite a time, then he said, “A word has reached me that trouble has come to this hospital.”

“*Mutemi*, it is a thing of joy that you have visited us this morning,” I replied. “We have indeed a matter to settle and your wisdom will be of great value. Is that not so, Karanga?”

Surlily came his answer. “*Heeh*, that is so.”

“Tell me the whole matter,” ordered *Mutemi*.

I did so. It was obvious that he knew all about it already but he listened carefully and then said, “It is our custom that the cows must be paid back by the relations of the man who has died unless the man who has paid them still wants to marry.” He turned to Karanga with his eyebrows raised in a question.

“*Kah*,” snapped back the reply, “if I did not wish to marry her why should I have paid over the cows?”

Mazengo spoke quietly. “But the doctor tell me that the woman has great sickness and is even now walking close to the gates of death.”

Karanga spat on the floor. “These are the words of a European who does not desire this woman to be my wife. Is there not another whom he favours?”

Simba’s face was without expression. I felt that things were going badly.

Suddenly Sechelela’s voice came from outside. “Call the Bwana. Perisi has ceased to breathe.”

“Excuse me,” I exclaimed and ran to the ward. Crouching beside the bedside, I listened to Perisi’s heart. There was the faintest of beats. Her pulse was a mere thread.

There were hurrying footsteps. Simba stood framed in the doorway and peering over his shoulder was Karanga. He hastily turned away.

I picked up the syringe already filled against emergency. The injection worked fast.

“Will she...?” Simba’s voice trailed away.

I nodded. “But she will need another blood transfusion.”

“There is plenty of that within me, Bwana. Work fast.”

We did. Half the bottle had gone safely into Perisi's vein when Sechelela arrived. She whispered into my ear, "It would be a thing of wisdom to return to the place where the talks are being held. Karanga sits in the shade. He saw Perisi and says nothing can save anyone as sick as she is."

I smiled. "Grandmother, your words are heard. Will you please help Simba watch the place in that tube where the blood can be seen. If it stops call me with speed."

Karanga started to his feet and almost ran towards me. "Bwana, she has great sickness?"

I nodded.

"*Kah!* There is no profit in a wife who has no strength."

"You speak truly. Even today she has been close to death."

"Bwana, I want my cows back by sunset tonight."

Daudi stood beside me. "The matter can be arranged, for this is the judgement of *Mutemi* Mazengo. But it would seem that the man who died has already sold the cows and they have been driven away but..."

Karanga's eyes flashed angrily. "Get them back and hurry to do so."

"There could be value in remembering the proverb that hurry, hurry has no blessing, for behold, one of the cows was lame and the other had sickness in its stomach. I suggest you have patience until tomorrow when I will see that three better cows will be brought in their place."

Two of Karanga's followers spoke softly to him. Daudi winked at me.

"Bwana, I will agree to your offer if the cows are brought to my house tomorrow before sunset." He spoke confidentially. "I would also have words with you in another matter." His attendants walked out. He looked hard at Daudi but I insisted on him staying. Karanga shrugged and said, "I have four wives but none of them bears a child. All of them are of the *wambereko*, the barren ones. Is there a medicine for them that will work to help them?"

I questioned him carefully. His answers were such that I sat back and said: “They tell me you are a man with a fine herd of cattle, splendid creatures.”

“*Hee heeh*,” he agreed, “they are good cows indeed.”

“What happens then if the cows do not conceive or if the calves are weak and sickly?”

Karanga laughed. “I would change the bull.”

“Do I hear you right? You would change the bull rather than give medicine to the cows?”

He nodded vigorously. “Of course, it is the way of ordinary common sense.” There was a degree of scorn in his voice.

“And suppose, Bwana Chief, there was a man who had four wives and they could give him no children. Would the way of wisdom be to pay other dowries and have more wives?”

“Yes, of course.”

“You would not see a fault in the man, rather than his wives?”

He struggled to his feet, breathing heavily. “Are your words that it is *my* fault? That I, Karanga, am to blame?”

“Your own words spoken just now are that it was a matter of common sense to change the bull.”

Shaking his fist Karanga roared, “Am I a bull?”

“We have medicines and tests for this sort of thing,” shouted Daudi to his retreating back. He grinned. “We will see him in this matter before long. He has no joy in the thought you have sowed in his head.”

In the room where Perisi lay, Sechelela’s smile reassured me. The last of the blood was running smoothly on its life-saving way.

Simba squatted on the floor watching every drop. There was silence as I removed the needle and put a little square of sticking plaster over the place where it had been.

The heart sounds were strong and the pulse easily felt.

“Set your heart at rest, Simba. Your blood is good stuff and working well. Your next job is to drink two large cups of tea with sugar and then to send those three cows to Karanga.”

In English Daudi’s laughing voice broke in, “Do you realise, Doctor, that Karanga means peanut!”

I yawned. “Behold! what a day it’s been. Surely all things work together for good to those who love God.”

Simba gripped my hand. “Words of truth, Bwana, and the next part is, ‘To those people He has called, to those who obey Him and do His work.’”

“It’s true. Off you go, lion hunter, and the things of today will remind you that there is no doubt that we are in His hands.”

At dawn next morning I ushered a baby into the world. Sechelela was sitting in a patch of sunlight. She could hardly keep her eyes open. “Bwana, the news is good. Our girl has slept for twelve hours. A few minutes ago she woke. She says she’s hungry and is better than I’ve seen her for weeks.”

Convalescence

Three weeks later I stood on the veranda and looked beyond the operating theatre. Out of the thornbush and into the glare of the plains came two figures—a tall man, and a small person. I couldn't make out whether it was a boy or a girl. Each of them seemed to be carrying a load on their backs.

When they started to climb the hill to the hospital I could hear the cheery voice of a man, chanting a hunting song, joined by the treble of the girl who walked beside him.

Daudi stood beside me. "*Kah?* that must be Simba and he has great joy."

"Behold, perhaps he is bringing us something which will bring strength to our hearts, Daudi."

"*Heh*, Bwana, and to our stomachs also."

At that moment round the corner of the hospital building came Simba, over his shoulders a buck that he had shot with his bow and arrow. Behind him, a girl, whose face was familiar. On her shoulder was no burden of venison, but a huge lump, rather bigger than her head. I recognised her as the child from Makali who had disappeared when there had been rumours of witchcraft. But when her relatives heard the news that Perisi was alive, and that Simba was going to the hospital with meat on his shoulder, they agreed that the girl should accompany him. At first her father had hesitated because he felt that he might be asked to pay for the operation and medicines. This, of course, was the usual thing with the witch-doctor. But Simba laughed, and said that the load that he carried on his shoulder would be so used that the load on the young girl's shoulder would be removed forever.

He put the buck down at my feet.

"Bwana, you have already met my friend, Chilatu?"

“*Mbukwa*, Chilatu,” I greeted.

She looked down shyly. “*Mbukwa*, Bwana.”

Simba put his hand on the child’s head. “Bwana, we have walked many miles from right over there.” He raised the pitch of his voice and pointed with his chin towards a group of baobab trees in the distance. “*Heeh*, behold, will I not sit in the shade and watch others prepare the meal, and then we will have stew.”

Daudi and Samson carried the animal behind the kitchen on a sheet of old iron and started doing some primitive butchery. Simba was standing as though he had no interest in things, but I could see his eyes roving round the place. Suddenly on the veranda of the women’s ward, walking slowly, and with some difficulty, I saw Perisi.

Simba dropped his voice so that only I would hear. “She walks, Bwana. *Kah!* look at her. *Ooh*, she’s thin. *Heeh*, surely she needs all the meat that I can obtain for her.”

“Words of truth, oh successful hunter,” I laughed. “Come over and we will greet her.”

We walked across, and as was usual said, “*Mbukwa*.”

She replied, “*Mbukwa*.”

The greetings went on for quite a while as African greetings do, and then I said, “How do you feel these days, Perisi?”

“Bwana, how should you feel when you have been sewed up like an old shirt? *Kumbe!* my skin bites when I stretch it.”

I laughed. She sat down on a three-legged stool, and leant against the cool stonework of the wall. Simba crouched down on his haunches and suddenly I found it necessary to go and inspect the peanut gardens. The burning heat of the afternoon sun seemed to billow in waves over the dry earth. There were a collection of crows sitting restlessly on the bare limbs of a baobab tree.

I smiled to myself and wondered what Simba was saying to Perisi.

Then I heard another voice behind me. “Bwana.” I looked round. It was the girl who had come with Simba. “Bwana, when will you bring help to me?”

I looked at her shoulder, covered with the threadbare black cloth. Lifting it I felt the great unsightly knob that was on her back. To my satisfaction it was not attached to her spine or to any vital structure.

She spoke rather wistfully. “Mzito, Mboga’s wife, told me what you had done for her. Please do it for me too.”

I walked with her across to the ward. Sechelela came out. “Seche, see that Chilatu has a very good bath.”

The old African woman wrinkled her nose and smiled at me. “*Heh*, Bwana, it shall be done.”

“And while you’re doing it I will see how soon I can find the opportunity in our operating theatre to remove the burden from her shoulders.”

I went and checked up on the instruments that would be required for what did not look like a very difficult operation, but one which would bring tremendous relief. Simba had told me that she was the laughter of her companions because of her *chigongo*, the burden on her back.

Newly bathed and with a towel round her shoulders effectively hiding her tumour, Chilatu ran to Perisi and sat down on a stool at her feet. Simba watched as the girl listened, her eyes wide. Then she was eagerly asking questions.

Suddenly she jumped to her feet and her arms were round Perisi’s neck. Then, seeing Simba, she ran to him. “She has told me about a man called Pilgrim who had a burden on his back like mine and she told me how he got rid of it. She told me about Jesus... I’m beginning to understand.”

Simba nodded. “Tomorrow when the Bwana works you will understand still more.”

The next day Simba carried her into the operating theatre, and at sundown, as she came out of the anaesthetic she looked up into the smiling eyes of Perisi, and the first words that came to her lips were, "It's gone. My *chigongo* has gone."

"Yes, Chilatu. Truly, it's gone! Rest now, little one. There are many stories of Jesus that I will tell you these days as you and I get strong."

She came to the door. "Perisi," I said, "you must lie down. You've been doing many things these days. You have much strength to gain."

She nodded. "I will; for I have great satisfaction in my heart. These days I have learnt many things. Do I not hear how Simba tells the words of God as he goes from village to village? He has joy in his heart and laughter in his mouth, and, Bwana..." she dropped her voice, "behold, when he and I work together, those will be days of great happiness."

Bargaining

“Head still,” ordered Mboga. “There are many who have lost an ear when their hair was being cut. Now hold your breath.” Deftly he cut a parting in Simba’s hair with a razor blade and handed him a mirror. Simba carefully examined the scars on his face and the eyelids where I had operated.

“*Yoh!*” burst out Mboga, “look with wide open eyes at the work of lions and doctors but have you no word of praise for those who cut hair?”

I came out of the pathology room. Simba was quite unaware of Mboga and his talk. He stood up and turned to me. “Bwana, I need your help. Will you come with me to the school to a *shauri* about Perisi and the dowry?” Mboga grinned and put away his scissors.

As Simba and I walked along the path to the school, I looked at the tall muscular young man at my side. He was leadership material. My mind raced through a list of constructive things he and Perisi could achieve as a team.

Simba stopped under a flame tree. “Bwana, my mind boils like goat meat in a pot.” I laughed but he was completely serious. “You know Mafuta demanded twenty-eight cows and twenty goats for the dowry?”

I nodded. “I’ll try a bit of bargaining. Shall I offer twenty?”

He shook his head. “If only Bibi will agree, my thoughts will bring profit to many and special joy to Perisi. She has many ideas and plans. She is a well-educated and English books speak to her. But I have never been to school and only these days can I read.” His words flooded out.

“What do you want me to offer?”

“Twelve very good cows, no bulls. Also I will build a shelter for them and supply food for one year. I have a friend, Luka, who has only one eye but behold, he knows the ways of cattle.”

“And the goats, Simba?”

“Goats, as you have told me often, eat the grass, roots and all, and damage the country. I will kill them and there will be meat for the school and the hospital, and we will sell the skins. Many will profit.”

I gripped his hand. “*Kah*, lion hunter, you don’t need to go to school to have good ideas. This is splendid thinking.”

We pushed open the school gate, stood in front of the door, and called “*Hodi*.”

“*Karibu*,” came the headmistress’s voice. We went in and sat on three-legged stools.

For a while we talked about the weather and the price of rice, then I started the *shauri*. “Simba comes asking for the hand of Perisi.”

“Is he the right sort of person to marry one of the best of our teachers?”

The man beside me lent forward. “Bibi, the Bwana has come to talk of dowries and cows, but how can he answer your question? How does he know what is in my heart?” He paused and since no one spoke he went on. “My life has turned round. When I was Chisanga, the hunter, I walked with my back to God. These days I am a new person; Simba, they call me and I must travel God’s way. I love Him and I try to do what He says. Perisi and I could do much for God together. She has the knowledge but I have the strength to work with her and learn.”

I looked at the English woman who sat opposite us. She had worked for 20 years in East Africa and was in tune with its customs and ways. There were tears in her eyes as she said slowly. “She has great love for Jesus and we have great love for her. She...”

In a cold, business-like voice I interrupted, “Simba offers twenty goats and twenty-eight cows for this capable girl who cooks well and digs diligently.”

Simba drew in his breath and leapt to his feet. “Bibi, those are not my words.

He...”

The headmistress smiled at the tall African. “He is having his own strange sort of fun.” She turned to me. “Now, Doctor, do your work properly and tell me exactly what Simba has in mind.”

My friend slowly relaxed and sat down. I leaned forward. “Bibi, if you had all those animals round the school it would be a nuisance to you. If the goats were brought to you as meat and the skins sold to pay for books this would be useful. Also there would be meat to help Perisi gain strength. If you were given twelve cows and had a cattle yard and shelter built; if there was a man paid to look after them for a year; here is both the school’s milk supply and the opportunity for teaching some practical dairying.”

Simba nodded his head vigorously. “All this I will do, Bibi. I will do it with happiness. All this will happen while Perisi is getting her strength back and after that will come the wedding.”

“Is that a deal?” I asked in English.

“It’s a deal—and what a splendid one,” came the reply.

Simba looked at me puzzled. “Is there trouble? Why speak in *Chizungu*?”

“She agrees.” I laughed and put my arm round his shoulder. “This is a matter for thankfulness, but carefully now, break no bones.”

Gently he took the headmistress’s hand. “Bibi, my heart sings and my head fills with plans.”

“*Kumbe!* my heart is full of music,” said Simba as we walked back to the hospital. “This Mvumi is a town of joy. On my first visit I was carried up that road. Many thought I was dying; but in the hospital I found life and I heard the words of God, and I found the bigger life that lasts when the body has gone. And now to my life has come love.

“Everything is arranged. Difficulties seemed to be everywhere. My thoughts told me that Perisi would never be mine. But now my own legs carry me

along this path. I live. I have strength and behold, when I build our house I will have a companion whose heart turns in the same direction as mine.”

We walked in silence for a while. Then Simba stopped beside an oleander bush. “*Kah*, Bwana, you have come from your country to tell my people the words of God and to help them; shall not I tell my own people the words of God? Shall not Perisi and I in our own home show them the better way? She will learn the words of health, and the way of helping babies. I will learn more and more of reading, so that in our village we may be the ones to act as the signpost to point our own people to God. As that signpost,” he pointed with his chin to the Mvumi Hospital, “shows the road to healing and health, so Perisi and I in our place will point the way to Jesus, the Son of God. At night we will sit round the fire and tell the people the stories of God. Have you heard Perisi? Has she not a well-trained tongue? Does it not move sweetly and smoothly as she tells a story?”

We came to the hospital and went in through the gates. It was nearly dark, and on the veranda sat the dispensers and nurses. Amongst them I could see Perisi. She was a different girl from the one who had hobbled round a fortnight before. She was strong, and well on the high road to health. I pointed her out to Simba. “Behold, she is gaining strength.”

At that moment they started to sing—Daudi and Mboga, their voices blended in an African tune of a hymn which went to familiar words. Simba listened to them and as they finished he said, “*Kah*, Bwana, it is a good thing to sing your thankfulness to God. My voice is not good for singing as theirs is, but behold, I will live my thankfulness.”

“That’s the best way of doing it, lion hunter. God does not often ask people to be ready to die for Him, although sometimes that is necessary; but He does ask them to live for Him. Behold, that is where you and Perisi can do big things.”

We came up to the group sitting on the veranda. “Behold, the matter of the dowry is finished,” I said. “It is my hope that before long the cows will be paid over and we will hear the drums of the village beating with joy for the wedding of Simba and Perisi.”

“Bwana,” called Sechelela, “come to the children’s ward. A boy has swallowed a safety pin.”

To our considerable relief we found it under the pillow. As I came laughing out of the ward I saw Perisi. I stopped. “What’s up? You’re crying. Have you pain again?”

She shook her head. “There is no sorrow in these tears. I have heard all about the *shauri*. Truly Simba spoke with wisdom...”

“And your heart sings. I know. Did you ever think that God, too, has joy when He sees and hears these things.”

Next afternoon I came upon Simba hard at work. A pile of saplings, thick as a broomstick and long as a leg were beside him. He was stripping lengths of acacia bark off thicker Y-shaped posts while on the ground was a pile of dried grass.

He smiled up at me. “I have an idea, Bwana. I’m building a model house.”

Two days later he proudly showed me his handiwork. For an hour he and Perisi explained to me all the bright ideas they had put into the model Gogo house. There was practically nothing they could not make from vines, grass, trees, sand and soil.

“It’s splendid. You’ve got something to show people. That is better than a *debe* full of words.”

They smiled at each other. “You encourage us,” said Simba. “We have joy in your praise.”

Solemnly I nodded. “There is only one thing wrong with it.”

Their faces fell. “What is it, Bwana?” Perisi sounded disappointed.

“It’s too small to live in,” I laughed. “Where are you going to live when you’re married? Simba, do you want to make many safaris to and from Makali and

then have no place of your own to live?”

Simba’s large hand came down hard on my shoulder. “It is true wisdom that grows inside your head.”

That evening I heard that Daudi, Mboga and the others had offered to help. In two weeks, there was a full-sized house with most of the new improvements. “*Yoh*, it is a house of worth, Simba.”

“It is, Bwana. We will live here till I have built another house at Makali. Today I have this house. Soon I will marry a wife and I will bring her here.”

Marriage

There was a little mud-roofed African building at the hospital where folk did their ironing. An umbrella-shaped palm tree spread its branches ten feet up over the entrance, shading those who worked inside. I was at work looking at blood slides, checking up on people with malaria, when I saw Simba walking down the path towards the ironing-room. Under his arm were sundry garments, and he was dressed entirely in a yard-wide strip of ancient blanket which was tied round his middle. He was carrying a gourd full of hot coals. These he put into one of the charcoal-type irons that are used locally. He waved it round in the air until it was hot and the coals glowing inside and then began to iron the clothes that he had brought with him. Every now and then I looked up from the microscope and watched Simba.

Firstly he set to work on a pale pink Shirt. He seemed to be in considerable trouble when it came to the collar. He put the shirt carefully aside, and then started on a pair of pale pink shorts.

I put the microscope away in its box, looked through the window and said, "*Kah!* Simba, why have you chosen that colour?"

The African hunter laughed. "When the grass is green, behold, the trees are green. In the days of dryness, the earth is brown, and so also is the grass. Behold, have I not given Perisi clothes of the pale red colour? Should I not wear the pale red colour also?"

He was intensely serious, so I had to restrain my mirth a little. He carefully blew the ashes out of the iron, placed it in the right position, and put the ironed clothing over his arm.

"Bwana," came a breathless voice at the door. "Quickly, come over to the children's ward. There is a baby with convulsions!"

As I ran, I saw Perisi. "Perisi, quickly! Come with me. Convulsions."

In a trice we had the child in a hot bath, and forty minutes later a mother, with tears streaming down her face, took her baby into her arms. The danger was over.

Perisi stood behind me. “That woman will listen to my words now. Does she not come from the village where Simba and I will live? It will be wonderful when I can help people there in a way that they never thought was possible before.”

Perisi sat herself beside the woman on the steps of the hospital veranda. An hour later they were still talking.

At sundown as I walked through the hospital gates Perisi was waiting for me. “Bwana, I have joy in my heart. That woman has said to me that when we start our ante-natal clinic and our school she will be one of those who will help, even if it is only carrying water. She said that what she has seen today has come as a great light.”

“Perisi, how do you feel yourself? Have you recovered from your sickness? Is your strength what it used to be?”

“There is some weakness in my legs, Bwana, but it is a small thing. Sometimes it feels as though there were ants crawling inside me where you sewed me up, but that, too, is a small thing. Each day I have more strength.”

Three days went busily by: scores of out-patients, injections by the hundred, and babies and babies and babies. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when I heard the big drum. I had a mask over my nose. On my hands were rubber gloves. We were facing a complicated piece of obstetrics.

I turned towards old Sechelela. “*Hongo*, I was looking forward keenly to being at the wedding of Perisi and Simba this afternoon. *Kah!* this is a thing of sadness... but for those who help babies into the world clocks mean nothing.”

As soon as I could I hurried down to the village on the side of the hill. When

I arrived there, Daudi met me at the door of the church. He was best man.

“Bwana,” he said, “we waited till you came. Behold, both Perisi and Simba said they could not have this wedding until you were here. Did you not save both their lives, and behold, they want you to play the organ.”

Now, a thousand-and-one African *dudus* and an assortment of rodents had not improved that organ. Nor was my technique particularly polished, but as I coaxed the well-known music of the ‘Wedding March’ out of the ancient musical instrument, I saw walking down the middle of that church, between crowded forms, my two African friends who were on the threshold of life together.

Somehow I missed the first part of that wedding ceremony. My thoughts went wool-gathering over the last months. I could see below the pale pink shorts that Simba wore, the scar where the lion had attacked him. There was a slight puckering beneath the eyes where my not-too-expert surgery had changed what would have meant early blindness into normal sight. And I felt the perspiration coming out on my forehead again as I thought of those grim days when Perisi’s life had been in the balance. I became alive again to the present situation as I heard Simba’s deep voice replying to the African clergyman:

“Yes, I will,” and then the words in Chigogo repeated softly but firmly in Perisi’s voice.

In my mind I translated the Chigogo words into my own home tongue:

“To live together in God’s way, in the holy state of marriage. Will you love him, obey him, honour and protect him and keep him in sickness and in health...?”

There was the briefest pause. Perisi, a smile on her comely face, looked at Simba and he smiled back. Slowly and distinctly she said, “I will.”

Till the Teeth Come

“Weddings are all very well,” smiled Mwendwa, “and babies are nice, but rather thoughtless. Why should three of them choose to arrive on Perisi’s wedding day?”

“A difficult question truly, Mwendwa, but why bring it up now! All that happened two weeks ago. She and Simba are coming today to live in their special house which will have great usefulness later on to give new ideas for buildings in the Ugogo country. But today it’s back to work for our newlyweds.”

“Look at that crowd under the pepper trees waiting for the welfare clinic. We need Perisi, Bwana.”

There were at least fifty women with babies sitting in the shade with a score of small children and not a few dogs.

Abruptly the talk and laughter stopped when a wrinkled-faced woman with grizzled hair slunk in through the gate, leading a goat. She tied it by the back leg to the furthest pepper tree and sat down with her back to us.

I caught Mwendwa’s attention. “Surely, that is the brewer of beer and maker of mischief we know only too well?”

The reply was in a whisper. “Truly, that is Majimbi herself, and the goat means she has made important medicine and been paid for it.”

Sechelela walked out of the women’s ward carrying a box of baby weight cards and a handful of coloured pencils. Behind her was Perisi, laden with the baby scales. As the old nurse arranged the materials on the shady veranda, she said out of the corner of her mouth, “You have seen who I have seen?”

When I nodded her eyes twinkled as she said, “*Kah!* I would rather have the

creature who is with her,” she pinched her nose, “and all he brings with him, than that maker of malice and trouble.”

Perisi was ready to start the clinic. She called, “Marita Malugu.”

A cheerful girl swung her child off her back and stood quietly as the weighing took place. “*Swanu*, good, she grows with speed.” Perisi drew an upward line in red. “See, since her birth she has progressed well.” She picked up the second card. “*Cizugu Matonya*.” A thin woman moved forward. Perisi took a six-month-old child, weighed her and put her back into her mother’s arms. She picked up a blue pencil, drew a line downwards on the child’s weight card and said, “The news is not good. His stomach has no joy and so his strength is less than last time. Remember, no porridge till the teeth come.”

The hard-faced crone under the pepper tree sneered, “What do you know about it, you who’ve had no children of your own?”

Perisi smiled. “Is it necessary to lay an egg to know whether one is good or bad?”

This drew a flood of angry words. Sechelela looked up quickly and snapped, “Enough of those wicked words.”

Muttering, Majimbi undid the goat and dragged it angrily through the gate. Sechelela shook her head. “It’s an evil thing to speak words of witchcraft and make threats as she has done.”

But Perisi went on with her routine as if nothing had happened.

Some of the mothers, especially those whose babies had been born at the hospital, had come for medicine, to listen to the words of *afya*, health, or just to let us see their children. Again and again I heard Perisi say, “Always remember, only milk until the teeth appear. Nature’s way is the best way to feed your baby and to bring peace to his stomach. That is how to keep the cheerful red marks going up on your card as your child gains weight and becomes stronger. When the teeth come through *then* give gruel. It’s best when made with milk.”

Mwendwa treated coughs, inflamed eyes and a variety of skin troubles. Malaria, tropical anaemia, vitamin lacks—all were passed on to me.

When the baby clinic was finished we put away the books and went to inspect that day's batch of new arrivals. Sechelela led the way to a corner of the ward. "A quiet day, Bwana. Four infants arrived without trouble, but then their mothers had come to the hospital for months to drink our medicines or to be examined. All of them know the way to feed a baby. They're all our people."

"You know, Seche, trouble loses most of its teeth when people follow the ways of wisdom."

She chuckled. "It isn't easy for our people to travel new ways. Think of what you would say if someone from a far away country came to you and said, 'To eat eggs for the first meal of the day is not a way of wisdom. To have a bath every day is bad for you and soap is something not to be used. To wear shoes is not a good idea.' What would you say?"

Perisi smiled at me. "Answer with honesty, Doctor."

Sechelela nodded. "That's exactly what our women say. You say to them, 'Come and drink the hospital's medicine,' but they have never been used to doing that. You say to them, 'Put the baby in a cot. Don't leave him on the floor.' But they've never done that before. You say, 'Give the baby no porridge to eat till he has his teeth,' but they say, 'Did not my mother do that and my grandmother and my grandmother's grandmother? Why should I change my custom because you say so?' " She chuckled, "They don't leave it at that. You have no idea the stories the people tell about you."

"What do they say, Seche?"

The old woman drove her points home by tapping me on the chest with her forefinger. "They say that in the hospital we break all the customs of the tribe. They tell stories of what you do that makes their hearers shake with fright."

"But, Seche, they can come and watch what we do. Everything's open for them to see."

“Truly, but they still tell strange things. You take an eyedropper and put drops into the babies’ eyes and what do they say? ‘He pulls out the baby’s eye, draws it out long, squeezes it, and puts it back again.’ ”

“But that’s absurd. Surely they can see the eye dropper. Pulls out a baby’s eye and squeezes it—what rot!”

The old nurse nodded her head. “To you and me, yes, but what of the old women who used to make their money by helping mothers? Telling frightening stories is a good way to keep women from coming to the hospital.”

“But are we not beginning to overcome the lying tongues of these people and their weird stories? More and more mothers are arriving each month and there seems no end to the number of babies being born here.”

Sechelela sat down. “Listen to your grandmother. A lot of good things are happening here. We train the young women of Tanzania to be nurses. Many of those who have gone to school have confidence in us and so have their husbands. Those are the ones who come.”

“They’re seeing results. It’s good to help control sickness and weakness and stop pain but it’s so much better to have the great answer, the Good News.”

Mwendwa broke in. “And those of us who belong to Jesus can show what it all means by caring for the people who are here. Perisi especially is one of these. Some scorn her, some threaten her, but they all see she has no anger and she shows no fear. And do not forget, Bwana, that in three months she will start talking the ways of health at Makali. Do you not know that Makali means the place of fierceness?”

“I know only too well. Simba has been telling me many stories about the trouble he has already met and he knows the difficulties that will come in the days ahead.”

Sechelela’s finger tapped my chest again. “You call me ‘grandmother,’ and I am speaking to you as one. Listen, my grandson, you are merely a man. Have you thought of the troubles that could be in Simba’s house? Who will cook

the food if Perisi has many babies to look after? Who will go to the well for water if she is busy talking of baby welfare? Who will dig in the garden?" She threw up her hands. "Think of all these things." She shivered. "These are matters that upset marriages. I can feel it in my bones that something bad is going to happen."

"Cheer up, grandmother," I laughed, "what you need is some quinine. Mosquitoes have been biting you. Those two have asked God to take control of their lives. Already they have prayed about these things and planned how to deal with them." Together we went into the ward.

Perisi stood ready with the temperature book. I bent over the first bed. "*Lusona*. Congratulations." The tired mother looked up at me.

"*Lulo*, thank you, Bwana." Then in a quiet voice, "See in the cot down there, my seventh child, and the only one born alive."

"Nearly four kilos: eight-and-a-half pounds," said Perisi in a matter-of-fact way. "This baby is very well, a boy with a powerful voice."

"He's a fine infant. We'll help you to keep him well."

The mother nodded. "I shall bring him each week for weighing and he will be fed without porridge."

"Till the teeth come," laughed Mwendwa.

I visited the other eighteen beds in the ward, and the ten patients on the veranda, looking at babies, checking temperatures or chatting with the mothers. Simple advice and ordinary medicines meant the difference between life and death to hundreds of babies.

"Here is one who listens to the words of the old women of the village," muttered Sechelela as she turned to a woman who was swinging her child onto her back.

"Remember, Mamvula, don't give that child porridge till after the days of planting."

“*Yoh?*” snorted the woman. “Then how will he gain strength?”

“She speaks with wisdom,” said Perisi. “Whoever saw a cow feed its calf on porridge?”

“Am I a cow?” snapped back the woman.

“No, indeed,” laughed Perisi, “but cows have special understanding when it comes to their young. A baby full of milk is stronger than a baby full of porridge. See,” she pointed to a smiling woman who carried a healthy, contented baby on her back. Then gently she turned to a sad woman holding a pathetically thin six-month-old in her arms. “Porridge from the early days of birth brings a child no joys.”

A junior nurse hurried over to me. “Bwana, Moti is in the small room at the end of the ward and her baby is in trouble.”

The three-day-old baby was being violently ill. A red light seemed to come on inside my head. “Perisi, watch that baby and let me know exactly what happens. I will arrange a drip to put fluids into his small body. Maybe we can avoid an operation.”

At ten o’clock that night Mwendwa reported, “The baby vomits—*kah*, it is like water gushing from a tap.”

By dawn it was clear that the child needed surgery of a sort that I had never before attempted. It was a dangerous, delicate operation. I breakfasted quickly and opened my surgery and anatomy books, tracing out each step.

The baby’s mother stood at the door. “Bwana, can you really help? Behold, my heart is heavy. I have longed for a living child and now...” She put her head in her hands and wept.

Sechelela came in and comforted her. “We will help you. Do not fear, Moti. See, in these books are the words that tell the doctor all about this sickness.”

I looked up. “It is all here, Moti. There is trouble in the little one’s food pathway. In a place half as long as your thumb, the path is not open as it

should be, but closed tightly. Food cannot get through. That is why he vomits in this violent way.”

Moti raised her tearful face and nodded vaguely. I picked up a well-worn and hard-worked Bible. “These are the words from God himself. ‘Do not be afraid. I am with you. I am your God. Let nothing terrify you. Do not be afraid. I will help you.’”

This time she understood better. “So, Bwana, when you do this work you will know that you are not alone; that you have God’s strength as well.”

“That is true, Moti. Let us talk to Him now.” We knelt down and I prayed, asking God to help save the life of the baby.

Even though it was early morning, the operating room was uncomfortably hot. As I started I turned to Mboga. “Have a towel ready, please. Sweat in the eye does *not* help.”

We both knew that operating on a tiny baby was a tricky business. Layer after layer of the child’s anatomy was opened. At last the trouble spot was in view. Mboga’s towel came into action.

I took a deep breath. Now for the vital step. My scalpel must free the strangling grip of those tough, hostile fibres. To go a nail’s breadth too deep would be fatal; but the baby would die if I did not cut deep enough. I let that breath out with a sigh of relief. I had done exactly what was needed.

Daudi’s voice came urgently. “Doctor, he’s stopped breathing.”

With my mouth to the baby’s mouth, a gauze swab separating our lips, I breathed into his lungs. It only took a minute but it seemed like an hour before the infant coughed and started to breathe again. Hastily, I did all the sewing-up necessary, and watched Perisi carry him back to the ward. Quietly I prayed, ‘Thank you, God.’ I knew I had not been working alone.

But there was more trouble to come. That evening, after sunset, the child collapsed.

“Moti, here again is danger. He needs not medicine but the blood of a person, the right person, to be run into his small body.”

“Will mine do, Bwana? Quickly,” she urged, “he is so small and so weak.”

By the light of a hurricane lantern I ran her blood into his veins. As this was happening a tiny hand grasped his mother’s finger. Tears ran down her face. “Bwana, I would give my life for this child.”

“We know that, Moti.” I tightened the child’s bandages. “Remember, that’s how God loves you. Jesus actually died to give you this life that could come no other way. Because of what He did, you can be forgiven.”

She nodded. “I am understanding it now.” With the tips of her fingers she stroked her baby’s arm. “After today it is clearer to me than ever before.”

Perisi looked at me and smiled.

Fatigue covered me like a blanket but at midnight I woke, the days activities sharply before me. Yawning I walked to the hospital. At the ward door I was met by the smiling night nurse. “The news is good. Look at them.”

Perisi and Moti were sitting beside the cot, both sound asleep. The baby lay quietly, his pulse regular and apparently quite normal.

“Thank you, Lord,” I said again; and repeated that prayer many times over the next week.

One Tooth Less

Daudi and I were servicing our surgical instruments. Abruptly, my African friend put down the oil can. “Have you ever had murder in your heart, Bwana!” He shuddered. “My mind has often itched to kill that one who sits with her head in her hands under the pepper trees.”

He started walking up and down the room. “It was at the time of planting, when I was eight, that whooping cough came to our part of the country. My brother, M’bili, with whom I played happily—he with whom I herded goats—he was the first in our house to cough with strange noises like a young rooster. Day and night he coughed. One morning, in fear, he put his arms round me and gasped, ‘Hands I cannot see press on my neck and stop me breathing.’ Then he coughed till his nose bled and his eyes were red with blood.

“My mother followed the old ways. She had ten children and fed them from birth on porridge. She listened to the words of the *wadala*, the old women, and the midwives. She feared my brother would die, so she followed their words when they said, ‘He is being strangled by teeth that grow at the back of his throat. Call Majimbi, she has skill in this matter.’” Daudi stopped and faced me. “It was then that I understood *tula malaka*.”

Slowly he turned and looked moodily through the window. “Then that harridan, Majimbi, came. She stank of stale beer. She and those with her seized my brother. She forced his mouth open, clawing into his cheeks. He couldn’t close his mouth. He couldn’t bite her. She drove her fingers down his throat, scraping hard with her nails. I saw her face. I can still see it. Her lips drawn back showing brown jagged teeth. He screamed and then choked with vomit and blood.

“I watched it all and then full of fear and terror I ran deep into the forest and hid. All day long I lay there, shocked and trembling. At sunset I too started to cough and as I crept back I heard wailing in the village and knew that my

brother was dead. That night I held the blanket tightly over my mouth so that no one would hear my coughing. But soon I too started making croaking noises and feeling those hands that choke. I heard them call Majimbi. I was too weak to run or fight. I too felt her fingers, hard as rusty nails, in my cheek. Then there was fire in my throat. My breathing stopped. Suddenly all was darkness... darkness." Daudi's voice broke. He looked as though he was walking in a nightmare. Then slowly he relaxed. "There were days filled with pain. To cough was the father of all pains but slowly I lived again.

"Five years later, in the days of my initiation, when I crossed the path of childhood to becoming a man, I cut myself a knobbed stick. The handle was thin but the end of it was the size of Simba's clenched fist. I had lived through twelve harvests then and in my heart was murder.

"If there had been a chance I would have used my stick to crack in that dreadful woman's skull. I hated her. I hated what she had done to my brother and to me and to many others. I hated her until I understood what Jesus said about hating being as bad as murder and about loving your enemies."

"*Yoh!*" Samson raised his eyebrows, "and now do you love her?"

There was a twinkle in Daudi's eye. "She comes to us now because she has trouble in her face. One of her awful teeth. I heard her complaining about an enemy in her jaw."

"What now?" I asked. "What is our next step? Should we help her or let her suffer?"

"You help her, Bwana. I will get the instruments ready." He smiled. "Help her, but pretend for a small minute that you can see teeth down her throat."

It seemed that this was not an original idea. Sechelela was standing, hands on hips, looking at the cringing woman. "So you've come to the Bwana, Majimbi. You complain loudly of misery in your face and so you come here for help. One day you curse us and say our work does harm, not good, and the next you come and seek our help. You who remove teeth from other people's throats, can you not remove your own?"

Majimbi saw me looking through the window. She whined, “Have pity. Take no notice of her. She hates me. Help me. The pain is killing me, killing me.”

“*Yoh!*” exploded Sechelela. “And what of the children who you have tortured and killed with your filthy fingers and your evil medicines?”

“Bwana,” moaned the medicine-woman, “have pity. Help me.”

I walked towards her. “Of course I will help you, but first I must understand your trouble.”

Majimbi was on her feet. She pushed Sechelela to one side and almost ran towards me.

“Sit there in the sun.” A stool was brought. “The large tongue depressor please, Daudi, and the big torch.” These were put into my hands. Firmly, I pushed down her tongue, which rebelled strongly. “Say *aah!*” I urged. She spluttered and tried to talk but the depressor was firmly in place. Samson stepped behind her, his large hands cupping her head. Her throat, red and angry-looking, was in full view. The beam of light shone into her gaping mouth. “*Yoh!* look, Sech,” I called, “see, she has teeth in her throat. I shall need to *tula malaka* and scrape them out.”

Terror came into the woman’s eyes. She dashed the stool into Samson’s shin and dragged her head away gasping, “No, no! I refuse completely.”

Samson’s hands gripped her shoulders. His voice was gravelly. “You who know so well the value of this treatment, you who give it to others again and again, do you refuse it?”

She gulped but said nothing.

“Is it that you think our medicine is worthless!” taunted Sechelela.

“*Kah!*” snarled Majimbi, “shut up. Shut your mouth! You...”

I spoke sternly. “Then I take it you do not want my help.”

Her malevolence changed to pleading in a split second. “Bwana, do not look

at my throat. Take away this tooth, this one.” She prodded with a dirty finger an obviously hostile back tooth.

Daudi brought out the dental instruments on a tray. I picked up the syringe full of local anaesthetic. Majimbi screamed and would have run away but for Samson’s large hands on her shoulder.

“Gently,” I urged. “There will be three pricks no sharper than a thorn and then no more pain.”

“Do not lie to me,” she screamed.

“It is the complete truth,” I assured her. She snarled back at me.

Samson bent over her, his deep voice soft, “And if you bite the Bwana, I’ll bite you.”

A quarter of an hour later, fifteen busy minutes for both Samson and myself, she said, “*Kumbe!* Bwana, you are a *fundi*, an expert.” She clasped the tooth in a piece of cotton wool.

“You have seen the better way. You have lost your pain and felt nothing in losing it. Give up the medicines that you have seen do no good.”

“*Heee*, Bwana, I will, I will.” She and a younger woman, obviously her daughter, picked up their cooking pots and hurried down the path that wound down the hillside to the west.

Daudi was boiling the instruments we had used. “It will take more than tooth-pulling forceps to remove the evil ways and dark cunning from that woman’s thinking.”

Sechelela agreed. “Helping her and taking away her pain won’t change her. She says, ‘thank you, thank you,’ but inside she burns with rage because you have done what she couldn’t. Her pride is bruised because the women will come here to hospital rather than having their babies at home, with her as their midwife. She has no joy because there is less grain in her storage bins and less porridge in her cooking pots.”

Daudi carefully oiled the joints of the dental forceps. “Her mind is full of bitterness and resentment which will boil over, especially since the husband of her daughter, Nhoto, insists that she come to hospital to have her baby. Her first three, delivered by Majimbi, have died.”

“*Kah!*” Sechelela shook her head. “We must be prepared for violence and witchcraft.”

“She has already been at it for days,” agreed Daudi. “I hear that Majimbi speaks loudly to the women who draw water. She says, ‘Perisi, the wife of Simba, leaves the ways of the tribe to speak the language of the *wazungu* and to read from their books.’ Akisa, the teacher, heard these words and told me. She heard a woman from a distant village say, ‘These days those beyond the hill say that there is a famine in the houses of the *wadala*, for the women go to the hospital for their babies to be born and afterwards to listen to the words of welfare.’

“*Kumbe!* Majimbi had fierce anger. She cursed Perisi in a way that brought fear to the hearts of the women. She said, ‘Shall this Perisi have children of her own? Special medicine will be placed on her path and on her threshold. She will have the shame of the barren and the misery of the childless. Then she will hear the laughter of the *wadala*.’”

“Words, Seche, nothing but words.”

She shook her head. “You do not yet understand but you will learn that these things bring dark fear to a woman’s mind.”

In bed all this went through my head as I listened to the distant throb of drums and to the nearby eerie howling of hyenas. There was danger in the air—danger I didn’t fully grasp.

“Negative thinking,” I told myself. “Be positive,” so I turned my mind to the comforting thought that we had had a fine peanut harvest from the garden in the hospital—great bags of them piled from floor to ceiling in our store building. In the long dry season these were saving us a lot of money, money we needed to buy medicines. With these satisfying thoughts I dozed off, to be dragged from deep sleep by a voice screaming. “Bwana, danger! fire! black

magic!”

In a twinkling I was racing to the hospital. At the gate was an excited crowd of people staring at the flames that leaped from the grass-roofed store.

“Come and help,” I panted.

“And be bewitched?” shouted an old man pointing to a thin line of ashes on the ground across the gateway.

“Scrape it away with your shoe, Bwana,” urged Mboga’s voice. “We fear to cross it for it speaks of an evil spell.”

I kicked the powder aside and shuffled my feet over the length of it and rushed on followed by a flood of people. I dashed to the tank and twisted the tap. No water came. The glow of the fire showed where one axe blow had left a gaping hole in the corrugations. There was a great patch of wet earth beyond the tank. With four men I hurried to the concrete tank outside the ward. Armed with buckets in each hand we ran back, throwing the water at the heart of the fire.

Soon everyone was following our example. For a time it seemed certain that the flames would reach the hospital. We threw water over beams and shutters and at last the blaze was under control. The mud and wattle store and everything in it was wrecked. The peanuts were a mere pile of ashes. Against the wall was a blackened kerosene tin gashed open like the tank.

Daudi ran up, completely out of breath. For a moment he stared at all that remained of the store and its contents.

“*Yoh!* Is it not a thing of thankfulness that we moved the bags of rice to the other store.” Then he spoke in English, “Bwana, I have been a detective. When the fire started I saw someone hurrying past my window. I pulled on dark clothes and followed along the path to the west. I dodged from baobab tree to baobab tree, from shadow to shadow until at last I saw who it was. She was standing in front of a house surrounded by her friends. I could not hear her words but there was no mistaking her laughter. Truly she had little thankfulness for our tooth pulling.”

He paused and went on in Chigogo. "This is a bad business."

Mud

We were on safari at Matope, a village beside a swamp. We had worked since early morning. The last of our patients had gone and a messenger had arrived from the head man inviting us to eat porridge at his house. We put away the medicines and the instruments and arranged our sleeping bags in the back of the truck under a mosquito net which would be the only barrier between us and all that lived in the thorn bush jungle.

On our walk to the village Daudi said, “Quite an afternoon. Mosquito bite is the main cause of trouble in this place.”

I agreed. “There were also those bitten by ticks.”

“*Yoh!* I worked hard with the microscope today. And you, Bwana?”

“I treated a lot of coughs and colds and ulcers and people with ‘restless snakes within them’ but particularly it was eye trouble—dozens of infected eyes. I would think there are even more flies here than mosquitoes.”

“It is a true word that where there are *dudus* there is disease,” chucked Daudi. “And what a good thing it is that our medicines work so well for tropical troubles.”

“And how good it is to have a chief like the man here who is helpful. I like what he said about the ‘new road to health’ in his words of welcome to us this morning.”

As usual that evening meal was *ugali*, porridge. After we had eaten we sat round the camp fire which had been fortified with dry cow manure to discourage the mosquitoes. While it did this reasonably well, it also gave a certain quality to the evening air.

We listened to traditional stories of how Rabbit outwitted Jackal and how the little jungle dove, Ndudumizi, had overcome Lion. As I listened I looked up

into the clear starlight and saw the silhouette of palm trees and the dark outline of broad, heavily-leaved mango trees. Arab-planted, these were silent reminders of slave trade days.

As drums and singing started, my mind wandered into thoughts of present-day freedom eroded by disease and the unwillingness to move away from age-old traditions, some of which had proved themselves useless or damaging.

Later, as I lay in my sleeping bag, above the night noises came the sound of a solitary drum producing a melancholy rhythm. The needs of these people whose country I shared and whose language I spoke, weighed heavily on me and I was acutely aware of the role of the school and the hospital manned by trained nationals in the Africa of the coming days.

At dawn we were on our way. Ahead loomed Makali village. Daudi grunted, “*Kah!* this is a tough place to start a work. I feel as though a fierce dog, bristling, was standing there showing its teeth at me.”

Nobody came to greet us. In the village itself some small boys scurrying past stopped long enough to tell us there had been a death in the village. Before they could give us details an angry voice shouted at them from a house among the buyu trees. They fled.

Simba was building on the slope of a granite boulder-studded hill. Below it was a wide, dry river bed. Behind it grew a tight tangle of thornbush, split by a narrow zig-zag pathway. We parked under a shapely mango tree.

It was a quiet morning. Nobody approached us. For a time we sat watching Simba making mud bricks. Crows flew noisily overhead and weaver birds twittered busily as they built their nests in an acacia tree. Furtively a woman came along the concealed pathway through the thornbush. She hurried towards us and squatted on a spot where she could not be seen. I recognised her as Chidege, who had been in hospital with pneumonia.

She told us, “Last night the Chief died. He had the stabbing disease, even as I had it. Dawa, who you know well, rubbed his chest with lion fat and put a charm round his neck but this was a medicine without strength and he died.”

She dropped her voice. “Early this morning Majimbi came with the words that last night you were in the thornbush jungle below the mountain of the guinea fowl and that you made a spell that took the strength from Dawa’s medicine so the Chief died.”

Daudi raised his eyebrows. “That’s a mouthful of lies for you; and did Majimbi also bring news of the fire she started at the hospital?”

“She told of you having fierce anger because of that fire, and warned that you had come with hands full of revenge.”

Simba had been busy making mud bricks for the adobe walls of his house. He shrugged. “Those are surely words from the tongue of that woman. Did you hear that she has again threatened Perisi! ‘Go to Makali,’ she warned, ‘and the cradle you have made will never be occupied.’”

“Are you still convinced that this is the place to start a work, Simba?”

“Bwana, it’s a village of great need. Dawa grows rich. Many speak words in praise of his medicines and his spells. Many also speak in whispers of him talking to the spirits and to Shaitan himself. Strange things happen here, happenings I cannot explain.”

“People who belong to the Devil and go his way have power, considerable power sometimes. There is never a time when Shaitan is not cunningly fighting against God’s plans. Those who worship him, who travel the path of evil, *kumbe!* his hand is with them. The matter is supernatural and weird.”

“You have seen this man, Dawa,” broke in Daudi. “He certainly has these powers and they are mixed with dark wisdom and ugly cunning.”

Simba went back to his brick making. He arranged the moulds and started to fill them with red, squelchy mud. He trod it in carefully and smoothed off the top with a length of wood. We were all startled when a stocky little man appeared round a large boulder and said in a surprisingly deep voice, “I have news that Dawa boasts that he will strike your building in the darkness tonight.”

Simba scratched his head and looked at Daudi who also seemed mystified. I went across and shook hands. “Mbola, it’s a thing of joy to see you and to know you can now hear.”

He chuckled. “That medicine you put in my ears started the work and then that pump thing”—my treasured ear syringe!—“brought sound back to me. And produced wax and *taka taka*, rubbish.”

“Half the size of my smallest toe,” laughed Simba, holding up his foot to demonstrate.

Mbola was looking over his shoulder apprehensively. “My ears work with purpose but these days this whole village is full of those who look and listen. Beware!” He slid away silently as he had come.

Simba wiped his forehead. “*Kah!* the sun is hot. Come and look at the stones I have laid.”

The granite foundations were wide and solid.

Daudi was impressed. “This will be a better house than anyone has ever built in this part of the country.”

Simba looked very pleased. “Those are words of truth. I have not built it in the old way with wicker work, poles, straw and mud, but I’ve used granite and now sun-dried bricks. For a week these dry in the hot sun and then I build them in.”

Daudi did not seem to be listening. “Dawa will strike your building tonight.” He looked across at the mud bricks. “Who would try to break down what is already built when...?” Suddenly he laughed, picked up an axe and hurried off into the thornbush. He was back with a load of tough, sharp thorn clusters cut from an acacia limb.

“I have been trying to think the thoughts of Dawa.” He grinned. “Will not he aim to destroy bricks—soft things? The quick way to do this is to jump on the wet ones. Come, let us make some special bricks for hostile feet.”

Before long ten bricks containing long, tough thorns were on each end of the long line of mud bricks.

An hour before sunset we saw a girl with a cooking pot on her head walking round the hill that blocked our distant view of Mvumi hospital. Simba was on his feet and running towards her. “No need to ask who that is,” smiled Daudi. “Also she will bring food which will produce song within us all.”

We greeted Perisi. She was beaming. “Do you like our house?” She walked to the rough temporary room that Simba had put up. It was clear that she could see in her mind the finished building.

“We’re waiting for you to explain it to us.”

“Hasn’t my husband done that yet?”

“Only a little. He’s been too busy playing in the mud.”

Perisi laughed. “You can’t have bricks without mess. Soon we’re going to have a bathroom with a watering-can shower on a hook like you have, Doctor.”

“These days I wait till after dark to bathe,” laughed Simba. “See, here is how we are planning it. It will be a long house. This room which I have finished will be where the cooking is done and the food stored.”

“Kitchen,” smiled Perisi, “with cupboards. And here will be stools for those who come to talk to me. If it is too hot we will take them out and sit under the mango tree.”

“It is a big room,” said Simba, “and opening from it will be the place where we sleep. It will be such a room as is unusual in our country. There will be windows in it. These will be covered with wire to keep out the mosquitoes and flies and let in light and air. There will also be a wooden shutter on the inside in case of storms...” Simba put his hand on Perisi’s shoulder. “We do this because Majimbi and those like her come secretly with medicines that carry spells. They poke them through any hole or blow them through an open window at night—always in darkness.”

“This brings fear to people,” explained Perisi. “I will leave mine open for I do not fear spells. The women will see this and ask me why and I will tell them about God.”

“All this is most useful,” said Daudi. “Many will come and look and learn. But a children’s room needs children.”

Perisi nodded. “Majimbi has been careful that everybody should hear of spells cast to make me childless, but Simba and I know that in the days near Christmas that cot will be filled.”

In one breath Daudi and I said, “*Lusona*. Congratulations.”

Simba’s face was one big smile. “Perisi and I have joy and thankfulness.”

As we stood there it was the natural thing to ask our Almighty Father to bring His blessing on this new life and all that would happen in this new house with its special purpose.

“My heart is full of happiness,” said Perisi. “Here many people will hear about God and we will try to show them His way.”

“It will not be easy,” said Daudi quietly. “Jesus spoke of a narrow path going up hill. There will be cost in travelling it. His enemies attacked Him. They will attack you also.”

We had an evening meal of *ugali*, porridge, and boiled beans. For my benefit Perisi made tea in a heated teapot using boiling water.

Daudi and I were tired. We decided that an early night was important and were soon in our sleeping bags.

Daudi yawned, “Sleep well, Bwana. No one will come calling, ‘Doctor, run. Another baby,’ tonight.”

The back of the truck was dark, my sleeping bag comfortable and in a moment I was asleep.

Awakening was dramatic. A hand gripped my shoulder. Fingers were firmly

over my mouth. I started to struggle but stopped abruptly when I heard a hoarse whisper, “He’s here. Look.”

There was little moon, but silhouetted against the night sky was a large candelabra cactus. As I looked at it, one of the thick branches appeared to move away from the trunk and there seemed to be an unusually large swelling at one end of it. Suddenly this eerie object came into focus.

Near at hand and quite unexpectedly a hyena howled. The shadow stepped back and there was a startled gasp. Daudi’s hand went over his mouth. I murmured, “You’d think that a man who says he can turn himself into a hyena wouldn’t feel the sharpness of the cactus.” My friend was shaking with laughter.

Dawa looked carefully in our direction. The truck and the building were in deep shadow. We watched the stocky figure stride towards the newest batch of mud bricks. He stooped and tested them with his thumb, then starting in the middle, he brought his feet down decisively on brick after brick. There was the soft squelch of thick mud and the pungent smell of wet earth.

The night was still. We sat breathlessly waiting. Then it happened. Both of Dawa’s feet found thorns at the same moment. He gulped, took a further step and let out a muffled yell. I shone a strong beam of light directly into his eyes. He panicked, stumbled and fell. Other parts of his anatomy sampled the thorns. He leapt to his feet and bolted towards the narrow path through the thornbush followed by the beam of light.

Daudi was choking with laughter. “Switch it off quickly, Bwana.” I did and Dawa ran head first into the cactus. He yelled and went crashing through the thornbush whose welcome was as vicious as barbed wire.

Hyena chose that moment to voice his creepy laughter. Simba and Perisi were watching from further up the slope. Daudi slapped himself on the chest, tears running down his face. “*Yoh*, I hope Dawa’s choicest medicines will take the unkindness out of the work of those thorns.”

“You laugh,” came Perisi’s quiet voice, “but Dawa’s fear will change into hot anger and resentment. He is a man who will strike back.”

Witchcraft

In the morning, as we drove back on the road to the hospital, Perisi said again, “Two powerful people hate us. Majimbi’s tongue and the evil medicines and witchcraft of Dawa are poisons than can bring us desperate trouble.”

I drove carefully over the wide, sandy river bed and through the red, dry-season dust of the Ugogo plains. The huge baobabs, leafless, certainly deserved their nickname, upside-down trees. The arid countryside looked famine-ridden. “To think,” said Daudi, “it will be green and soft to the eyes in the days after the rains come.”

Somehow it needed more than his cheerfulness to take away the sense of trouble ahead.

At the hospital Sechelela came out to meet us. “*Heee*, the cook is sick.”

“*Kah!*” laughed Daudi, “did I not hear that many were sick of her cooking?”

Sechelela was not smiling. “We must find someone quickly to take her place.”

Perisi had an idea. “Had you thought of Raheli, the widow of Mulolo? She is here in Mvumi these days staying with her relations by the river. She is a good woman and a good cook. Also her tongue is short.”

Raheli proved to be a fine woman and the best cook we had had at the hospital for a very long time. One morning she burnt her hand and as I bandaged it she told me that she had come originally from a village on the other side of the range of hills. Her house had been near to the one where Majimbi lived.

Her burn healed well and she seemed happy and contented till one morning Perisi came, “Bwana, Raheli refuses to come to work today.”

“Why, Perisi?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

I knew that sort of shrug. It meant the best thing to do was to wait and not to ask questions. On Sunday Raheli did not come to church. I missed her from the chattering group who walked up past the hospital with gourds on their heads on the way to the well. There was a mystery about it all but nobody seemed willing to say a word.

One morning, several weeks later, after an all night session ushering twins into the world, I sat down with Sechelela to drink a cup of tea. She said wearily, “I wouldn’t mind this night duty if we worked only at night.”

“That’s exactly how I feel, Sech... Oh, look!” Past the window walked Raheli, her shoulders stooped. She looked ill. She carried an empty kerosene tin. “Sech, this is an unusual hour to draw water.”

She nodded.

“What’s happened to her? Why has this change come so suddenly?”

Reluctantly the old nurse spoke, “Bwana, this is a bad matter. I think you will find it hard to understand.”

“At least tell me that I may know.”

She poured out another cup of tea and added five teaspoonfuls of sugar. Stirring the cup she said reluctantly, “It was this way: one day when Raheli was cooking for us, strangers came to visit. They came from a village beyond the hill of the guinea fowl. They were relations of that trouble-maker Majimbi. One of them saw Raheli and said, ‘*Kah!* so she is here.’ I heard someone ask, ‘What of that?’ and the reply came, ‘Did you not know her mother was a witch? She is more to be feared than ever her mother was. She works secretly. Wherever she goes evil follows—even death. Be careful not to cross her path.’”

Sechelela drank deeply and put down her cup and said, “These were lying

words but there has been much talk. One said, 'Have you noticed strange happenings since she came here? Did not our cow dry up suddenly?' 'Eeeh,' said someone else, 'and did not our calf die for no reason at all?' Another voice added, 'And did not her sister-in-law lose her baby? It became suddenly ill and died.'

I sniffed. "I suppose, Sech, they crammed the poor little creature with porridge."

"Maybe, Bwana, or perhaps the midwife tied a cowskin charm round its neck and hoped that would cure its diarrhoea. There has been much talk. A child has broken his arm. One of the wells in the river has suddenly become salt.

"For days the whole story simmered and then as Raheli went to the well she found the other women scurrying away from her in fear that she would cast a spell. They told stories of childless mothers who blamed Raheli for their trouble. They would say, 'Let us hide. Here comes the witch.' Raheli said to them. 'Behold, I am no witch.' But they spat at her. She said, 'I am a Christian, I do not follow these ways.' But still they drew away from her.

"Then her relations refused to let her stay in their house. She is in the broken-down building near the place of burying the dead."

Sechelela walked up and down the room. "There are things my people have learnt to fear as their grandmothers and their grandmother's grandmothers feared them. When she went for firewood into the thornbush forest she went alone. When she worked in her garden other women put down their hoes.

"Bwana, we have done everything we know to help her, to strengthen her, but the words do not reach her mind. She is overwhelmed by sadness, loneliness, and fear deep down within her. Now she says she will die. All this is the work of the lying tongue and the twisted wisdom of Majimbi. Her words are deadly as poison. She knows all of Raheli's story, the death of her husband, the death of her child under the wheels of a lorry. She tells of these happenings in a way that suggests witchcraft and dark magic. She weaves her lies with skill and truly her words have power. These days few will come anywhere near Raheli."

Sechelela put her hands on my shoulders. “You can do nothing; so I say to you, my grandson, your hands are empty—without weapons. This is not a matter for the medicines of the hospital or for doctors from Australia,” she sighed.

Late that afternoon I went to the broken-down mud-walled house where Raheli lived. No one was to be seen. There was a heavy ominous stillness. Even the crows were silent in the leafless baobab trees. I stood in the doorway and called, “*Hodi*.” There was no reply. Again I called, “*Hodi*, may I come in?” A faint sound came out of the gloom. I walked in.

Raheli lay against the far wall wrapped in a threadbare cloth. In the dim light she seemed to have aged ten years in as many days. I knelt beside her. “Raheli, come to the hospital. We will care for you there.”

She shook her head weakly.

“Then let me drive you to another place; to another hospital in some other village where Majimbi will not torment you.”

Again a faint shake of the head. A dark figure moved through the doorway. I stepped back out of sight. A young woman hurried forward and bent over Raheli. “*Yaya*, little mother, do not let the wicked words of evil people bring you grief.”

I recognised Perisi’s voice. From under the black wrap which covered her uniform she took a bottle wrapped in a towel. I heard fluid being poured. “Drink this. It is hot tea with much sugar. It will strengthen you.” She supported the collapsed woman who tried to drink and then spoke in a faint toneless voice. “I am weary of life. I long for death to be with God. You, my little one, run from this place. Do you not know the same sort of thing could happen to you? My heart tells me you have to suffer untold things.”

I saw Perisi flinch but her voice was resolute. “My life is in the hands of my father, God.”

Raheli went on unheeding, in her weak monotonous voice. “My days are few. Your days are many.”

Perisi again held the gourd to the dying woman's lips. Startlingly from directly outside the door came a cackle of derisive laughter. A spasm shook Raheli. Perisi gasped, pulled her black hood over her head and ran through the door into the gloom.

Again I knelt beside the woman who only days before had quietly and efficiently cooked for a hundred people. Her pulse fluttered. I knew of no stimulant that would help her. Darkness closed in. As I crouched beside her Raheli's pulse faded into nothingness.

Next day at noon I saw Majimbi walk boldly up to the hospital, pause and then spit on the wall. And again came the scornful laughter that I had heard the night before.

Daudi looked up from his microscope. "She comes to make it known to us that she is taking revenge. She does what we have seen her do to tell us that her work is not finished. Truly, we must live with eyes wide open."

In the afternoon, for the first time that year, dark storm clouds sulked among the patchy tufts of the cotton-wool variety of the dry season.

Unaware that I was watching him and listening, Mboga sat thumbing thoughtful music from his *ilimba*. He looked at the sky and sang softly of the coming rains, of storm and lightening, of the trees coming into bloom and leaf, of cultivation and planting and the expectation of harvest. He suddenly saw me enjoying his minstrelsy and jumped to his feet, embarrassed.

I sat on a root of the baobab tree and said, "Well sung, Mboga. That is poetry, choice food for the mind."

The generally boisterous Mboga nodded, "This is to me the special time of the year. Simba feels it too." He smiled. "He has joy but his fingers do not bring music from instruments."

"This time of the year is spring, Mboga. The time of flowers, of the song of the hoe, the coming of butterflies..."

"You also remember the *dudus*," chuckled Mboga. "The caterpillars that eat

the young corn, the mosquitoes that bite people. You think of sickness and medicines and syringes and needles...” His laughing voice faded into a whisper. “Behold, who walks in the shadows but Bibi Tula Malaka? She and those like her spoil music and soil what you call spring time. Inspect your doorstep before you cross it tomorrow, Bwana. She may have a new magic to take joy from doctors these days.”

Rubbish

“When I was small,” said Daudi, “I fell from a donkey and hurt my arm. Now in the days of thunder storms it aches and brings disquiet.”

“But this isn’t the time of rains!”

He shook his head. “But I have the same sort of uneasiness. It’s a month since Raheli died and that evil woman spat on our wall. A month of quiet. At Makali Simba’s house is nearly finished. Perisi’s work here goes well. We hear nothing of Dawa. It’s all too quiet.”

As if to prove that he was right Perisi came panting in the door. “That dreadful old creature, Majimbi!” Her eyes flashed with indignation. “She threw out this baby. She said it was no person. She put her in the rubbish hole to be taken by a hyena.” She looked fondly at the baby, made motherly noises and said, “*Kah!* ‘rubbish,’ but she’s beautiful.”

By now Sechelela had arrived. “You heard what she said, Bwana? Fancy calling a baby *taka taka*. Look at her.”

The baby was small. She had an extensive bruise on her forehead and a well-marked hare-lip. I looked carefully but said nothing.

“Well?” demanded Sechelela, “do you think she is a child of no value?”

The baby gave a peculiar and rather pathetic cry. “She can’t drink properly. She nearly choked when I gave her boiled water,” said Perisi. “What are we to do?”

In the sunlight I looked into the baby’s mouth fearing a severely cleft palate that would mean tube feeding for months. I ran my little finger round the small mouth. The palate was whole except for a dimple at the back which was no great problem. There was a difficulty with the tongue, however. “Here’s something to remember, Perisi. A snip of the scissors can make the

difference between considerable trouble and none at all.”

Perisi sighed. “I’m a teacher and I tell my class things that they should know. You’re so busy operating, mixing medicines, looking down microscopes and travelling round the country in that vehicle that squeaks and rattles, that you seldom can teach us these special things.”

I agreed. “You’re right. Lets fix the matter now. Call the staff together and I’ll explain this to them.”

Half-an-hour later in the baby welfare room I talked to ten nurses and four of Daudi’s helpers.

“I want each of you to look at that baby’s tongue. With the little finger of your right hand feel under your own tongue. You notice how it’s tied down with a thin curtain of flesh?”

There was an opening of mouths, a wiggling of fingers and a nodding of heads.

“Now, with the little finger of your left hand feel the baby’s tongue. Very gently.” This was duly done.

Mwendwa raised her hand. “It is as though the child’s tongue is part of the floor of her mouth.”

The irrepressible Mboga agreed heartily. “To me it feels as though it were tied down, like the tough vines drag down trees in the thick jungle.”

“You’re both right. Now watch.”

A snip of the scissors, pressure for a minute with a cotton-wool swab and then the nurses crowded around. “*Yoh!*” said Perisi, “the tongue moves.”

“And what does that mean?”

Sechelela produced a baby’s bottle and the child sucked hungrily. “*Yoh!*” said Perisi. “We’re out of the thornbush now. This baby will grow. I’ll look after her myself. But behold, in that village half way to Makali, they have sadness

in their hearts because they think this child is no more. But we will feed her and build her up and then, what joy to the mother! What a shock it will be to the *wadala*, Majimbi and her cronies. It will be as though we bring the child back from the dead.”

“How did you get hold of the baby? You didn’t steal it or snatch it, did you?”

She shook her head vigorously. “No, Bwana, they put the baby out in the rubbish hole in the dark and waited for the hyenas to come.”

“But someone must have robbed the hyenas. Who did take it?”

Perisi smiled. “At the school they teach baby welfare and the girls come here to the hospital. See what they’re doing now.”

I looked at a place where six girls were bathing babies in the approved fashion.

“You see,” went on Perisi, “there was Merabi, the younger sister of the mother of this child. She heard the words of the old women. She heard the weeping of her sister; so she crept through the door, wrapped the baby in a cloth and ran through the darkness to my house.”

“But what about the child’s mother?”

Perisi shook her head. “*Yoh!* She has sadness. She is the third wife of an old man who drinks much beer and when he is drunk he beats her. This is her fourth child and all the others have died. They’d have lived if they had been born here. Majimbi has told her that she is bewitched. Now she lives without joy, without words, like one whose mind wanders. She has shame because after one bad beating her leg was damaged. Now she walks with a limp. And is she not scorned by the other women in her house?”

“Here is where we can help. Things could be different for her before long, but we must work with speed.”

“Truly, but the child’s father is a man of difficulty. He is unlikely to agree to you operating on that hare-lip. It would be wise to have it done when we give

the child back.”

“Send a message to the mother by Merabi, her sister, that a great joy will come to her in the days of the early rains. This could cause hope to grow within her.”

“Will it be two months before we can operate?”

“All of that.”

Perisi put the infant over her shoulder and stroked its back. The little one burped loudly. We both laughed. Perisi rocked the baby gently in her arms and said softly, “Bwana, in the days of Christmas I shall hold my own baby like this. What joy that will be.” She paused. “Do you know how to congratulate a woman when she becomes pregnant?”

I shook my head. “Tell me.”

“You say, ‘you have had a splendid meal.’ ”

I laughed, “Your meal is not obvious yet!”

“But it will be, Bwana, and then I will see if you have remembered.”

“There have been many words spoken by those who hate the hospital and all of us who work in it. Does this worry you?”

“No, Bwana, Jesus said we are to have faith in Him. And I have.”

“That is what matters most of all. But remember, Jesus did not say we’d have no troubles, no problems, no heartbreaks.”

Perisi arranged the blanket round the baby.

“Do you know that Mboga wanted to call her Takataka, but I refused. Her name will be Mikasi, ‘scissors,’ because these have set her tongue free.” The baby settled comfortably to sleep and Perisi said, “I understand that God’s road will not be always easy. Have I not already lived through many difficulties? Before, God gave special help and strength. He will do it again

and again.”

“Do you realise why God lets things become uphill?”

She raised her eyes questioningly and I went on. “When we’re in His family He makes the road we are to travel. He knows exactly where it’s going. He puts in the curves, the cross roads, the long stretches of sand that are hard to walk through, the stony bits that hurt our feet, and the steep climbs. He does it all and He has a reason.”

Perisi interrupted by calling to one of the school girls.

“Merabi, come and change the nappy on your newest relation.”

The girl ran across. “Bwana, I have special joy in this child.”

I watched how deftly she dealt with the baby. As the safety pin went into place she said, “Bwana, it has been agreed that I come to start nursing here in two weeks.”

“*Hongo!* and has your father agreed?”

She nodded. “He has words of praise for the hospital. He had a restless snake within him that breathed fire. But you gave him medicine that cured him.”

“Put the baby to rest,” ordered Perisi. “Wash that nappy properly and hang it out to dry.”

Merabi nodded and hurried away.

In English I said, “What’s this yarn about restless snakes breathing fire?”

“He had colic, Bwana, and fever. For two terrible days he had severe pain at home. He thought it would kill him. But he came here and in two hours we made all his trouble disappear.” She paused. “Why not give Merabi the special care of that baby, Bwana? This is good from the way our people think and it will give me more time to work here in the ante-natal clinic.”

Honey Problems

Two weeks later a smiling African schoolgirl walked up to the nurses' quarters at the hospital and after ten minutes emerged a smiling junior nurse. Apart from her tutorial classes and practical work in the ward Merabi looked after the baby now called Mikasi and she did it well. The baby continued to thrive and one morning I decided to operate. Sechelela thoroughly approved of this.

"The child's father, Shillingi Mbili, 'two shillings,' would refuse because it is his habit to refuse. But later on when she reaches an age when she could marry he would regret refusing because the child's lip would look different. Then it would be called *chilema*, a thing for refusal. The disabled, the blind, the deaf, the deformed often die when they are young. It is an old custom to give them little care." She smiled.

"When the work is done and the lip repaired, even if the father has great anger you can apologise. We will know that his words are empty, for he will see that the child has been greatly helped."

After the operation I had a glow of satisfaction but there was little praise for my work. Sechelela put her head on one side. "Well, yes..."

Mwendwa remarked, "It is somewhat swollen."

Perisi shook her head and said, "If that work is not the best, at least you will be able to operate again later."

Daudi was more comforting to an inexperienced surgeon. "Wait till the stitches are out before you make judgement."

For a week, special care was taken of that upper lip, and a few days later when the stitches were taken out the result was quite pleasing.

"Yoh," said Sechelela, "now we may start doing things. It is Merabi's day off

today. Why do we not ask her to go to her house and greet them? Then she can bring back the news of the village and particularly what's happening in Mavunde's mind in these days of her sadness. Now while we are all here let's ask God to be our guide in this whole matter."

Merabi was barely out of sight when a group of people came up another path. Mwendwa hurried to where I was giving injections. "Bwana, it's Majimbi again. But this time they carry her in unconscious and reeking of honey liquor. She lies there like someone who has been given an anaesthetic."

I bent over the prone figure and raised her eyelids. Her pupils were unnaturally large. "She is travelling the road to death. We must work fast. Mboga, I need the tube, the wide one with a funnel on the end and a big jug of salt and water. Daudi, the intravenous drip, glucose and saline, please." My two helpers disappeared at the double.

Washing out a drunken person's stomach is not my idea of a way to spend a pleasant half hour. However, Mboga had returned not only with the funnel-topped tube but also with the whole story.

Daudi had the intravenous drip going smoothly and I was messily busy. Mboga's cheerful voice informed us, "Behold, in the forest there is a small bird which is the friend of those who love honey."

I looked across at Daudi and said, "The Honey Guide?"

He nodded. Mboga did not pause. "Those who know its voice follow it. It is a bird that does not hurry, and it will lead them to where bees have made their house and store their honey. When you have taken their honey it is the custom to give some of the comb and the young bees to the honey guide. Fail to do this and it is said that the bird will curse you and bad luck will come your way. Behold, this has happened to Majimbi. Of course she took every drop of honey for herself. She always chooses the ways of selfishness. The bird screamed at her but she took no notice. Her mind was full of other thoughts. She had two kerosene tins full of the sweetness of the jungle. She had been brewing beer and with what was left in the pot and the honey she made a very strong brew of *nghangala*, mead."

“And drank much of it,” broke in Daudi, “and we find her here near to death.” He adjusted the drip and went on, “Here is a woman who has done great harm to the hospital and has injured many people. She hates us, but when this happens she is brought to us, not to the one she works with, Dawa.”

“Truly, Daudi. And we belong to God’s family and so we don’t say, ‘Love your friends, yes, but hate your enemies.’ Jesus taught us differently and His orders are to be obeyed. He said, ‘I tell you, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who ill-treat you.’”

“Right,” said Daudi. There and then we prayed, “Lord God, You give everybody every chance to choose Your way and receive eternal life. Help Majimbi to understand about You and Your wonderful gift.”

After a busy hour for us (and what would have been an uncomfortable one for the alcohol-poisoned woman if she had been conscious) her pulse became regular, her breathing came back to normal and the pupils of her eyes grew smaller.

Mboga was slowly pouring warm, sweet tea into a funnel which started the brown fluid on the journey to Majimbi’s stomach. “Bwana, I’ve told you the first part of the story. Here is the rest. In the place between the hills there is a spring. There Dawa has a number of plants he grows for medicines. Amongst them is one called *nhonde*. This he dries and smokes. He also makes much money selling it to people whose wisdom is greatly twisted by the medicine.”

“It is a thing called, in English, marijuana,” broke in Daudi.

Mboga nodded. “There are still others who call it *bhang*.” He grinned. “Majimbi uses this stuff like snuff. She puts it on her thumbnail and sniffs it up her nose and then she drinks her beer. These days she has been brewing a drink that has more kick in it than the hooves of Twiga, the giraffe. Into a huge clay pot, balanced above three stones, she poured the honey, wax and all. She mixed it with the dregs of her beer-brewing and left it there for days until bubbles slowly rose, bubbles that burst and made the house heavy with

the stench of stale vomit.” He held his nose and spat.

“Enter the place and breath that air and soon your eyes would run and your feet would stumble. The next step was to put fire under the pot and stir.

“Then over the top she placed a *debe*, so cut that it collected the steam and let it run down a long, hollow piece of bamboo, as long as three tall corn stalks end-to-end. From it dripped the *nghangala*—one small gourd full makes a man feel three times his size. Two may well send him on a safari to his ancestors. As she brewed, Majimbi snuffed the marijuana. She beat quietly on a drum and sang to herself. Then she threw some of the *nhonde* into the brew.

“Behold, Bwana, what she made that day had peculiar strength.” He let out a long breath. “*Yoh!* she drank but half a gourd full, and here she is.”

“What happened to the rest of it, Mboga?”

“She sold it to a man named Shillingi Mbili. He is father of the child with the lip you repaired. She sold him a large bottle full. It was a bottle with a glass stopper she had stolen from the dispensary, which had written in the glass, LINIMENT—POISON.”

“*Kumbe!* it was true to the last part of the label.”

Mboga grinned and nodded. “And he has gone to sell it to Dawa at the village of Makali.”

At that moment Majimbi’s claw-like hand reached up, dragged the tube from her mouth and she was violently sick on the floor. Mboga looked at her, and carefully weighing his words, said solemnly, “Surely, she will live.”

The woman sank back into a heavy sleep.

At the foot of the hill, well below the hospital, a lorry, driven unusually slowly, moved across the rough causeway and started to climb. Daudi watched it disappear into a cloud of talcum-fine dust. “*Yoh*, when Suliman

drives like that he brings someone who is extremely sick.”

With a squeal of brakes the lorry pulled up, and the Indian shopkeeper lifted down a woman who looked close to collapse. Daudi and Mboga hurried to help. They moved fast and I was amazed to see them take the woman, not to the outpatients’ room, but to Perisi’s house.

Merabi was beside me. “Bwana, there is trouble at Makali. Honey spirit has been brewed. My sister’s husband, Shilingi Mbili, drank some and has beaten her almost to death, and Majimbi...”

“We have her here, Merabi. She was close to death but now she is improving.” Our newest nurse nodded.

“Do not let her know about Mavunde being here. Majimbi is a vicious woman.”

I smiled confidently. “She’ll be quiet for a long time. Don’t worry.”

I found Mavunde, hardly breathing. She had a long gash on her forehead. There were bruises on her shoulders and face and arms. I made sure she had no broken bones and gave a shock-controlling injection. She had been savagely beaten. The bruises were extensive and the cuts and swellings would be very painful but the most serious damage seemed to be a desperate mental misery.

“Bwana,” said Mwendwa, “I will look after her and dress her wounds.”

“Do that, Mwendwa, and rub in the ointment that takes the swelling out of bruises if the skin is not broken. And will you report to me how she is in two hours?”

As I went back to the ante-natal clinic Perisi told me, “Mavunde is twenty-eight but she looks an old woman. She’s lame. Did not her husband strike her knee with a hunting club so that now she has pain when she carries wood and water. But what is worse to her is the sneering and scorn of the other three wives at her husband’s *kaya*. She has seen what has happened to Raheli and misery drags her along the same path.”

“She used not to be like this, Perisi?”

“No indeed, Bwana. She was once head girl at the school. She is skilled in many things, especially in music and singing. She used to be a person of strong will, but great wretchedness came into her life when she listened to the words of a young man and went with him from her father’s house. She had a baby who died. The young man became a policeman and left her and went to a city on the coast, far away. There had been no marriage and there was no dowry. Her father had anger in his heart towards her and he agreed that she should marry Shillingi Mbili and be his third wife. He received three cows. She had no choice and she had no joy in the marriage. The other wives had bitter tongues. She was forced to do the work that no one else would do. There was no laughter in her life. Baby after baby died and her days have dragged on into nothing but sadness.”

“But we can offer her better things, Perisi. Her baby is alive and well and thriving and I can operate on her knee and make her lameness a thing of the past.”

Outside his newly finished house at Makali, Simba was greeting Baruti, a well-known hunter who had become a Christian at the hospital while his broken leg was mending.

“*Kah!*” said Simba, “you have brought your family with you.”

Baruti laughed and looked across at a boy who was leading a donkey at whose heels ran a dog. The boy stepped forward. “*Mbukwa*, Bwana Simba. I am Goha. This is Seko, my dog. Seko!” The small dog ran forward and sat down and raised a paw. Simba solemnly shook hands.

“And has your donkey no words of greeting?” The sombre looking beast looked straight at him and ‘hee-hawed’ loudly.

“You see,” said Baruti, “my family is well trained. I have heard all the news about you and of the things that have happened, and of your marriage and of what you plan to do in this village. But why build here on the side of this

hill?”

“I like it here,” said Simba. “It is close to the river. That mango tree gives shade, and the hill—I like its shape—and the granite boulders that are upon it. Perisi and I call it Mandolo, the potato.”

Baruti shook his head. “Do you know why others do not build here—why others have not cultivated? It is the place where Arab slave traders used to buy men and women from an evil chief. This is where they camped. They planted that mango tree. My grandfather knew the place and called it the hill of the curse.”

“*Heeh*,” said Simba, “I’m glad you told me this because since Jesus came into my life the curse does not mean anything. Perisi and I will live here and we will tell people about Jesus. Our hope is to bring blessing to this village and the people in it.”

“Wise words,” said Baruti. “And if we ask Jesus to take the curse away He will do so.”

“Great one,” said Goha, looking at Baruti, “you have said that we should find a place to build a house in Gogo country. Could we not build a house here near Bwana Simba’s place? Could we not work with him in bringing this blessing? You can help him tell the words of God.”

“The boy speaks words of wisdom,” said Simba. “There is room for two houses. See what we have built. Only yesterday it was finished.” He stood back admiring his handiwork. “See, the foundation is of stone and the roof, is it not of *bati*, corrugated iron? Baruti, would you rather have ten cows or a roof that doesn’t leak?”

The reply came, “Cows die. Roofs last for many, many years.”

“*Eheh*, I still have two cows and I will feed them. In the days of rain I will grow special grains. I will also cut grass and so my two well-fed cows will give more milk than many others that have little in their stomachs.”

“Those are good thoughts,” agreed Baruti. “And when you dig your garden,

dig it in the same shape as the *bati*—a ridge and a hollow, a ridge and a hollow—and shape them in such a way that when the rain falls, instead of going straight down the hill and into the river it will go into the hollow you have dug between the ridges, and sink down and so there will be water deep in the roots of your corn.”

“*Eheh*,” said Goha, “Punda and Seko have been with us. They, too, have seen this thing. We have seen this thing. We have travelled a long safari right through Tanzania. We have seen new ways that are good and crops that make your eyes open wide.”

Baruti produced some coins from the calico bag that he carried. “Goha, you and Punda and Seko go on a small safari to the village and buy a bottle-full of kerosene for our lamp. We will stay here tonight. And see if there is any news.”

The boy nodded, took the coins, swung himself onto the donkey’s back, whistled gently and he and his pets moved down the path.

“Where can I build?” asked Baruti.

They spent some time choosing a suitable spot. “There,” said Simba. “There you shall have your garden.” They sat down on a broad slab of granite and Baruti started to pray. “Father God, show us what You want us to do. Help us to help our people in this village to know You and to know Your way. Please protect us and please help us to be more useful to You working together than we would be as two men working for You in different places.”

“Yes, Father,” broke in Simba, “and be close to Perisi please. Help her and bless our child. Show that you are stronger than the devil and those who work for him.”

There was the sound of hurrying donkey hooves. Goha jumped down. “Great ones, here is the kerosene. The news is that while I waited I saw another bottle—a big one I have seen before in the hospital. A man they call Dawa and another in a green hat with a piece of leopard skin around it were drinking from this large bottle. It was not ordinary beer for after they had drunk only a mouthful they spluttered and coughed. They sat there drinking

and talking but before long they quarrelled and Dawa jumped up waving his knobbed stick. The man in the green hat shouted with anger, grabbed the bottle and started down the path that leads into the hills over there beyond the dry river. He's coming this way."

They scrambled up a granite boulder the size of an elephant and watched the man in the green hat stumble along the rough track. He paused and drank deeply.

"That's Shillingi Mbili," breathed Simba. "I heard Majimbi had found honey. Much trouble comes from her brewing pots."

Baruti watched the staggering figure. "He is already very drunk. And see—he drinks more. I know that stuff. Firstly you want to laugh and then to fight. But soon strength drains from your legs and sleep comes fast."

"*Hongo!*" said Simba. "That part of the hills is not for sleep. His house is over there to the north and his feet are now taking him to the west."

Shillingi Mbili moved out of sight. Goha caught at Baruti's arm. "Those in the village have words of fear. They spoke of the curse of the honey bird."

The Curse of the Honey Bird

At the hospital the ante-natal clinic was over. Mwendwa come to my door. “*Hodi*, Bwana. Here is my report on Mavunde. She slept till a few moments ago. Her cuts are bandaged; her bruises much less swollen. I have washed her and done her hair.” There was a little smile at the corner of her mouth.

Mboga excitedly ran into the room. “No time to say *hodi*, Bwana. That woman of trouble not only recovered but she has pushed her way through the mosquito wire, tearing a great hole, and stolen a blanket. She...”

Samson looked over his shoulder. “Majimbi crouches under the umbrella tree. Strength has left her legs. She has a mouth full of words you would not understand, and...” he held up the blanket. “I felt she no longer had need of this.”

Mboga chuckled. “The father of all headaches will be beating drums and dancing inside her skull. She will be sorry she did not give the honey guide bird his share.”

Sechelela was waiting for me on the veranda. She had heard the harsh tearing of the mosquito wire and watched Majimbi reel through the gap and stagger away, clutching the stolen blanket. Her lined faced twitched with dismay. “Bwana, we’ve had a plague of cockroaches, trouble with white ants and the sadness of the meningitis sickness—that disease of death; but that woman is more danger and does more damage that all of them. It’s better that she should go. Truly, she works for the devil.”

Perisi hurried towards me. “Bwana, let Mavunde rest. I have found out what brings her deep sadness. Just hearing the girls playing basketball and singing makes her think of the times when she, too, was a happy school girl. But it all seems mixed up in her mind—a dream that she has dreamed often before. She finds herself washed and tidy in a clean bed but her mind is halfway between nightmare and reality. She fears the anger and the beatings of

Shillingi Mbili. She shrinks back from the bitter tongues of the women of her husband's house, especially Majimbi who brings to her the terror of death."

"*Eheh*," nodded Sechelela. "She said to me that her life was like a thick black cloth, covering her, choking her."

"And her life is loneliness," said Perisi, "with nothing ahead but pain and wretchedness. But she also fears to die for she knows that she has not chosen to go God's way. These days she has prayed but God hasn't answered. Now, as she lies there she talks like someone in high fever."

"I will give her another injection. It is all-important that she should rest. But before she sleeps she must also take food and fluids."

"I will arrange that," said Perisi. "But, Bwana, I have prayed with her and I believe God will answer."

"Does she believe also?"

"*Magu*, who knows?"

Early next morning Sechelela reported, "Mavunde has slept for twelve hours. She's eating but she doesn't really know where she is or what she's doing."

"Give her a couple of hours, Sech, and she will. And then we must work with special wisdom."

Two babies had been born that night. I was writing the details of their arrivals in the book when Mwendwa touched me on the shoulder. "Bwana, it would be good if you could see Mavunde now."

When I stood at the end of the bed she greeted me. "Why does Perisi pray to God to help me? I *do* pray and He doesn't listen. I asked Him for my baby, the one they threw into the rubbish hole, and the one they said was 'no person.' Perhaps God isn't there, or if He is He doesn't care to listen to me." She started to sob. "Let me die. Please, let me die."

"Why should we, Mavunde? We care. Merabi cares. Perisi cares. And God cares—make no mistake. For a very long time you have lived with your back

turned on Him. You're not a member of His family. Take things quietly. Think of these things. *We are* members of His family. *We have* asked Him to forgive us. We believe He has and He will do it for you. But now, let me have a look at this knee of yours." I wrote on her papers, "Old fractured patella. Loose body in knee joint." "It aches, Mavunde?"

"*Eheh*, Bwana. Most of the time it aches. When I walk it is worse. And sometimes fierce hands, full of pain, grasp that knee and I cannot move. The women say it is the *machisi*, evil spirits."

"There is small value in listening to their words. I will tell you what the trouble is. When that husband of yours struck you on the knee with his knobbed stick he broke the bone that is in front of your knee. Bits broke off as when you hit a soft stone, and now, inside your joint are what I call 'mice.'"

A small smile came to her lips. "Mice, Bwana?"

"Little bits of bone. Suppose I put a small pebble in your mouth. Your teeth and tongue would have no joy. But take it out and all is well. Here in the hospital we can give you sleep medicine and without pain remove the little bit of bone. And then before long, you will walk well. There will be no aches, no misery, and no scorn."

For a second a gleam came into her eye. Then it disappeared. "Shilingi Mbili would refuse and he would beat me again on the knee. He has satisfaction in causing pain." She sighed. "There is no way out of my troubles."

Outside the door stood Merabi, the baby in her arms. I sat down on a stool. "Mavunde, let me tell you a story. It may give you hope. There was a woman who had a younger sister who cared—who loved her. There was a midwife, a fierce evil person that many people feared. She saw a baby born who had a lip that was twisted, who cried in a strange way. She said, 'It is no person. There is no value in the child.' The women of the house were silent. They feared her. The mother sobbed in terror—in hopelessness—"

Mavunde was up on her elbow. "Stop! Do not tear at me with your words, Bwana. Stop!"

Merabi could stand it no longer. Tears ran down her face. She burst out, “But, Mavunde, I did not fear and I had hope. I came secretly and took her from the rubbish hole. I wrapped her up and ran through the night and brought her here. She’s safe. She’s strong. Sechelela and Perisi helped the Bwana and look...” She ran forward holding out the child.

Tears ran down smiling faces. Mavunde was sitting up, choked by emotion. She bowed her head over the baby who started to whimper. In a muffled voice she said, “God has answered. He hasn’t forgotten. Little one, oh my little one.”

Sechelela took me by the arm as I tiptoed outside. The old woman put her head against my shoulder and wept. “My first four babies died. I know her sadness. Also I can understand her joy. But what now?”

In the dawn Goha and Seko and Punda walked one behind the other up the hill path behind Makali. “I like it here in the early morning,” said Goha, slapping the donkey on the flank. His small dog trotting alongside seemed to smile up at him. They walked underneath umbrella trees. “Look up there at the monkeys and see here on the path, are there not hoof marks of antelope and those of Mbisi, the hyena, and...”

Seko suddenly stopped. He growled. The hairs on his neck bristled. Goha gasped as he peered into the shadow. Shocked, he swung onto the donkey’s back and they returned very much faster than they had come.

“Bwana Baruti. Come quickly.” Tensely Goha told his story and slumped down in the doorway of Simba’s house shivering; his dog clasped in his arms. The small animal licked his face.

The two hunters ran across the river bed. Simba was in the lead. “He went this way! See, his feet stumbled and look, the donkey’s footprints. Here the boy and the dog stopped.”

Baruti pointed with his chin and shouted, “Over there. *Yoh!* Is it not a skull, a man’s skull?”

In a patch of thornbush were bones stripped of skin and flesh. Near them a bottle on its side, still with fluid in it. Etched on the glass was LINIMENT—POISON.

“Honey spirit,” said Baruti sniffing it. “See, there is his hat. Surely those are the bones of Shillingi Mbili.”

“*Eheh!*” nodded Simba, “and this is the work of a great swarm of safari ants. It is only a little while ago that they have gone for no hyena has been here yet.”

In the distance they could see the mango tree and above it, the potato-shaped hill. As they hurried back to the house, Baruti said, “Simba, suppose you go and report this to the head chief, Mazengo, and then move with speed to the hospital. It is best that Perisi hears this news from you. Goha and I will look after your house and we will start our garden. We have seen those who do their cultivation before the rains come. They work hard but they harvest well.”

Simba moved along the road to the chief's place at a good rate. His mind was full of questions. What of Dawa? What of Majimbi? Would the threat to Perisi be less? What would happen now in Shillingi Mbili's house?

He arrived at Mazengo's village and told his story. Messengers were sent at once to investigate. The chief took Simba aside. “This is an evil thing to happen but Dawa and Majimbi are those who travel strange paths. When you return this way give me the news of the hospital. Already there have been acts of witchcraft there. These have been done by fire and by damaging water tanks.”

Simba made his farewells and as he went he prayed, “My Father, I want to live facing You and travelling Your way. Today I have seen things I will never forget. Surely those who choose evil, choose death.”

He strode over the parched red earth of the dry season, the smell of dust in his nostrils. There were large cracks in the ground. The grass and stunted shrubs were tawny brown. As he walked under a tall baobab tree he was conscious of the murmur of bees and a soft scent that made him look up.

The huge tree was in bud. Here and there were large white flowers, as large as his hand. “*Yoh,*” he muttered, “are they not food for the eyes? Do they not tell that the rains are near. They speak of the cultivating and the planting.” Again he talked to God. “Please be close to my Perisi. She is Yours. We both want to be useful to You. Please protect our child. We want to do Your work at Makali.”

He topped a rise. There was the hospital, gleaming white in the hot sun. He waved a welcome to many people sitting under the pepper trees. Noticing that an operation was in progress, he went straight into the house he had built for Perisi and himself; a specially designed house to give ideas for those who would build for themselves in the days ahead. Perisi was at the door. Her hurried to her. He was still there when the third operation was finished. When Sechelela appeared with a large teapot he and Perisi came to my room to greet me. I listened to his story and then asked, “You have heard all that has been happening here?”

He nodded and smiled at his wife. “We have talked with many words for there was much to say.”

“You will understand then why King Solomon wrote, ‘There is a way that seems right to a man but the end of it are the ways of death.’ Shillingi Mbili found that out and Majimbi should know it as never before.”

“I wonder what happened to Dawa?” said Perisi.

“It all depends on how much of that honey brew he drank.”

“We shall know before long,” Simba smiled, “for I have come to tell that my house is finished. The roof is on. It has a door with a padlock, windows that let in light. It is ready for my wife. Also I have found one who will help her. The child, Chilatu, who had that ugly swelling removed from between her shoulders blades.”

“That is all good, Simba. But have you noticed that your wife has had a very large dinner these days?”

Perisi laughed. “I have been wondering when the doctor in you would see

this. Behold, now for many days there have been legs within me that kick!”

“Would it not be good to let them kick in the house where later they will run about?”

She nodded. “It would indeed. But what of the work here?”

“Mwendwa will look after the baby clinic and the ante-natals and Merabi will be here specially to help Mavunde.” I paused. “But who will tell her about what has happened at Makali?”

In one breath they both replied. “Sechelela is the only one who can do this.”

Sometime later I watched the old woman walk quietly into Mavunde’s room and sit down on a stool. Softly she talked for quite a time. There was no hint of hurry. I caught the words Shillingi Mbili. Mavunde sat up straight, wide-eyed, and slowly sank back, her face a blank.

For a while Sechelela sat there and then, unhurriedly, walked out. “She will be all right, Bwana. She is shocked. The news brings her deep relief but she will not show it. She has no wish that anyone should know the thoughts of her heart.”

I nodded. “Would it not be a good thing if she stays here and as soon as possible I will operate on her knee. She will have joy in having her baby with her and yet having Merabi to help her till her leg will work again. It’s a great pity that she cannot breastfeed her child.”

Sechelela’s face suddenly was one big smile. “Behold, this is a thing you do not understand. She will be able to breastfeed again. I have seen it happen many times and I know what to do. Ask no questions and do not suddenly become all doctor—all European. Well-behaved grandsons listen to their grandmothers.”

In the late afternoon I drove the truck to the door of the model house. We loaded all their belongings—the furniture that Simba had made; tables, chairs, stools, mats, beds. Then there were mattresses, books and boxes.

Perisi watched as Simba put each item into its place. There was considerable waving and farewells as we drove off and I saw Mavunde watching with interest through her window.

The road was reasonably smooth. I remarked on this and Simba laughed. "When the rains come these roads are mud and the dry river is a torrent. Soon the rains will come. See the flowers on the buyu trees, Perisi?"

"In two months," laughed his wife, "the trees will be green and shady and there will be a visitor in our cot."

Ahead was the potato-shaped hill and beneath it the mango tree. Soon its dark green leaves would contrast with the young foliage of thorn bush and baobab trees. I pulled up outside the new house. "Look at the roof," exclaimed Perisi. The corrugated iron shone in the sunlight.

"Come inside," urged Simba. In the kitchen a wisp of smoke rose from under a clay cooking pot.

A young girl was busy cooking porridge, *ugali*. She ran to me and took both my hands in hers. "Bwana, see, I am like any other girl now. No great swelling on my back and you can't even notice the scar unless you look very hard. I have no shame now and there is joy in being here. See, I have cooked much *ugali* and a relish of beans. Bwana Baruti said you would come. I have worked with diligence."

"My stomach will rejoice in your cooking, Chilatu. I too rejoice that you will be helping here."

She nodded vigorously. "I shall learn to read better and to understand many things about God."

Perisi, her face alight with happiness, came through the door and put her arms around the child. Goha was standing in the background. His small dog came to me, sat, and lifted his paw. I shook hands and looked into the boy's face. When I had first met him, that face had been twisted and dragged out of shape by a tumour he had had from birth. Quietly he said, "The crooked places are straight now, Bwana. The scars hardly show and I too have no

shame.”

Baruti greeted me with a vast handclasp. “Certainly the hospital helps people. That small knife of yours has considerable cunning.”

I laughed. “It is useful, Baruti, when people break their legs while hunting snakes in the jungle.”

He laughed and ran his finger down his shin bone. “Behold, this leg is stronger now than the other one. Truly, hospitals are places where things happen.”

Chilatu had certainly cooked with skill. The large clay pots produced a savoury, appetising smell. Water was poured over my hands. We thanked God for our food and set to. After a busy silence Baruti pointed with his chin. “I’m going to build over there, Bwana.”

“*Koh*, it’s too late in the year. The rains will come and melt your mud-bricks.”

“Stone is even stronger than mud-brick, Bwana. And on this hill is much granite and in the river is much sand. There is money in my bag to buy cement and it will be a house of stone built on rock and I will follow Simba’s wisdom and have windows. For that reason I would have joy to return with you tonight to the hospital that I might talk with Elisha, the carpenter.” He stopped and clapped his hand to his forehead. “Oh, and I forgot. One came and asked had we something with more muscles to stop pain than *aspirini*.”

“Who do you think wanted it?”

Baruti shrugged. “How should I know? But Chilatu tells me that the boy was the son of the daughter of Dawa.”

Music in the Night

“Music,” said Baruti. “Music is food for the ears.” His thumbs fondled the flattened-out umbrella spokes on the book-shaped wooden box that made up his *ilimba*.

Changing gear, I drove over the strip of red earth that covered the sand of the wide river bed. Near the high bank on the far side it had been built up steeply. As we came over the top I knew that there was still three kilometres’ safari to the hospital. Baruti thumbed a few soft notes.

“My wife was a *fundi*, an expert, with rhythm and song.” His voice faltered. “Five harvests before you came to Tanzania, Bwana, she could no longer sing because of the great cough. Her strength grew less and less and she... died. She liked to hear the *ilimba* but after she died I had no joy in music. It plucked at the strings of my memory. Then the boy, Goha, came to the hospital. He was lonely, miserable, frightened. He had shame because his face was dragged out of shape. There was a great difference when you operated and the twisting disappeared but I knew of the emptiness inside him. He had no one in life who cared for him but he found satisfaction when I played the *ilimba*. Also we both had satisfaction in dogs and donkeys. Behold, when my leg mended did we not travel far together? And we had joy in each other and in Punda and Seko.” He looked up. “*Yoh!* we are already at the hospital. *Heeeh!* there is my buyu tree. *Kah!* and there walks Mboga. I shall stay at his house and tomorrow will talk with those who make windows and doors. Thank you, Bwana, for making it easy for my legs to travel.”

Sechelela sat on the steps of the women’s ward. She greeted me and held up three fingers. “Three babies, Bwana, while you were away. No trouble. All the mothers come from the clinic. Mavunde still lies there without joy. She is like one hit on the head with a club. From time to time she picks up the baby and nurses her but it all seems unreal as though she were in a dream. It is strange, Bwana.”

A call came from the veranda, “Mama Sech, bring the Bwana. Marita is having trouble.” Trouble it was. For a long slow hour. Complication followed complication. Difficulty followed difficulty. Then suddenly and satisfactorily the baby was born.

With action over, tiredness gripped me. I sat back in a solid, uncomfortable chair and sighed. “Bring him medicine,” ordered Sechelela. A solemn-faced nurse produced a suitably-sized teapot and poured two cups.

For the first time I realised that from outside the ward was coming soft, soothing *ilimba* music, backed by a deep bass voice with a lighter voice joining in.

“How long has that been going on, Sech?”

“*Nusu saa*, half-an-hour,” smiled the old nurse. “They sing well and both are *fundi* at playing the *ilimba*. Look at them over there in the moonlight.”

On the curved roots that grew out of the side of the hospital buyu tree were Baruti and Mboga, quite lost in their music. “It’s food for the ears, truly, Sech. And in it are the seeds of sleep and of a quiet mind. Listen to them now.” Music and voices blended. I translated the words in my mind.

“So I’ll not stop my song,
the words of which is my witness strong.
On the cross He died,
so I can be forgiven. Oh, yes!
Now Jesus lives and He says to me,
You watch and pray, eyes open wide.
So I’ll not stop my song.
On the cross He died,
and I have been forgiven.”

Sechelela and I went back to see Marita. It was clear that our night’s work was not over. Again I scrubbed my hands and then, all in a moment, we fought the battle against haemorrhage. Action, team work, every weapon ready to hand and then the acute satisfaction of saving a life. I glanced at the battered alarm clock. We had been hard at work for nearly two hours and still the

music was going on.

“It’s getting late, Sech. I’ll send those songsters to bed. There would be no profit in them waking forty babies!”

Mwendwa had come in soundlessly. “Don’t do it, Bwana. Let them keep going. And you come and see what has happened to Mavunde. She listened for a long time to the music, and as she listened she relaxed—completely relaxed. The tightness has gone from her face. It’s smoothed out. *Yoh!* and then they sang their song about Jesus. You heard them?”

“I did indeed.”

“You heard the words?”

“I know them in my heart.”

“And so does she, now. She listened with ears that heard and they sang it again and again as if they knew it was what she wanted above all things. Tears, soft tears, ran down her face and she seemed to want to speak. For a some time the words did not come and then she started to talk to Jesus. She asked Him to forgive her and to give the great life. Then she asked me to pray, too, in case God had not understood.”

“And you told her?”

“Yes, I told her. I told her how He had done it for me and how I had prayed a prayer just like hers and He had heard and answered. And now, she sleeps like a child.”

Mwendwa looked at me. “Bwana, there are tears running down your face.”

“*Eheh,*” said Sechelela, “and mine, and yours, too. While this has been happening, we, here, have been saving a woman’s life. Her ordinary life. At the same time Mavunde has found the great life.”

“True, Sech. This is the birth of the soul. It is the reason for us being here. The great reason for the hospital. Truly, we see much of the birth of the body but it is a thing of special joy when we see this new birth.”

I went out into the night. Baruti and Mboga were walking along the path. I caught up with them and told them what had happened. Baruti put his strong arm round my shoulder. "This is a thing of deep joy."

"*Hodi, Bwana!*" Simba was at my door gingerly fingering a fist-sized bruise on his forearm. "Better to be hit there, than on the head."

"Truly, who was doing the hitting?"

"He came out of the darkness waving his knobbed stick. His mouth full of curses. Wham!" The broad shouldered young man grinned ruefully. "This is the way of those who smoke hashish. Their wisdom becomes tangled and full of fire."

I gently applied some ointment. "So you took his stick from him and told him to go home?"

The grin was broader. "There was the matter of a bucket of water and a twisting of his arm also. He was the helper of Dawa. Behold, he has no joy, not even a little, in the thought of Perisi and myself coming to the village of Makali." He rubbed his forearm against his cheek. "That ointment of yours has skill in making bruises become smaller, Bwana."

I ran my fingers over the lump. "Perhaps it was a good thing that knobbed stick struck your arm and not behind your ear."

Simba grunted. "Words of truth. He meant to kill. See, is it not a weapon of death?"

I balanced the knobkerrie. The lump on the business-end was the size of a tennis ball. It could crush in a skull like an egg.

"Truly, Makali is a place of fierceness."

Simba shrugged. "It is also a place with a need. There Perisi and I can do much. God is with us."

“You’ll all face much danger!”

“Truly, and the anger of people is fiercer than teeth or claws. It is a thing of joy that Baruti will work with us. We both hope there will be no more trouble. Behold, now I am beginning to understand what the word ‘fellowship’ means.”

“Dust,” said Daudi. “See? On the path through the buyu trees. Someone rides fast.”

“Rides?”

“*Eheh*, it can only be a donkey.”

It was Goha, urging along his almost exhausted donkey. Breathlessly he slid of Punda’s back and thrust a note into my hand. I recognised Perisi’s neat writing. The note read:

Dear Bwana, Urgent Ante-partum haemorrhage. There are small contractions. Please help, quickly. Perisi.

Sechelela was beside me. She put on her glasses and looked at the letter. She sniffed. “*Kah!* In English.”

“Worse than that, Sech. It’s technical English, but it means one thing only and that is that we must have Perisi in hospital fast and keep her at absolute rest. Movement is danger, both to her and her baby. We will need...” I outlined what we would need to do directly Perisi arrived.

The old nurse nodded. “Go quickly, then, Bwana. Look at the sky. We have waited eight months for the rain and my bones tell me that it will fall today. There is much water in those dark clouds.”

Simba came running, anxiety all over his face.

“There is much trouble. We must move fast and get Perisi back here,” I urged.

He nodded. Into the lorry we tossed a mattress, blankets, pillows, a long

length of rope and a canvas sheet. Goha watched it all in amazement. Punda had his head down and his ears drooped. He had travelled far and fast. Seko, the small smiling dog, quivered all over and crouched beside the donkey's front legs.

"They hear thunder. Both of them fear storms," said the boy.

"Leave Punda here. He will be weary. Mboga will care for him. Bring Seko with you. He'll feel safe in your arms. Now, let's go, fast." Turning to Simba, "It's the baby, Simba, and it's nearly two months early."

Goha spoke into the donkey's ear, pointed to the hospital and clasp his dog, climbed into the front seat beside a dazed Simba. I checked the contents of my medical bag and we drove off. Goha grabbed the side of the window as we swayed down the track from the hospital. "Punda has never run so fast as he did today. Does not your heart beat on your ribs like a drum, Bwana?"

"That's exactly right, Goha. Urgency is the word."

"*Eheh*, and you feel it here." His free hand covered his stomach. Wordlessly Simba nodded.

Somehow that feeling of urgency seemed to make the kilometres go uncomfortably slowly. Swinging round a corner we almost drove head on into a herd of humpbacked cattle. They stopped, stared stupidly and almost had to be pushed out of the way. Goha jumped down whistling shrilly and Seko barked and bit heels in an experienced fashion. At last we could move freely, noisily bumping and shuddering our way over corrugations and pothole. Goha was peering excitedly through the windscreen. "The hills have disappeared," he shouted. "They're walled off by a great downpour of rain."

I shouted back, accelerating. All I succeeded in doing was to skid sideways. The tyres spun uselessly in thick sand. In a second Simba was out of the door and pushing with all his strength. Driving crab fashion, I coaxed the truck back onto the rough track. Again we were on our way, but moving now with special care.

"We're nearly there," said Goha. "See, there's our mango tree."

As I slowed down to cross the river, Simba leaped out and raced to the door of his house. A moment later when I followed him he was crouching behind his wife supporting her head. She lay huddled on a mattress on the floor. Her pulse rate was high. She gasped with pain. It only took seconds to confirm the diagnosis and give emergency treatment.

Simba and Baruti lifted the mattress and placed it securely in the back of the truck. "There is a thermos flask of hot tea in the brown box, Simba," I called. "Give her sips as we go." He nodded.

Baruti helped me put chains on the back wheels. "We must travel fast, Bwana. Look at those clouds. Everything depends on crossing the river near Chihembe before it floods..."

We were barely past Makali when the storm broke with vivid lightening and a volley of thunder. "*Yoh!* My stomach is gripped by fear!" shouted Baruti. It was hard to hear above the roar of the motor in low gear and the almost constant thunder.

"Bwana, heavy rain is falling on the hills all round us. Soon many rivers will foam with flood. See, even now there is a downpour between us and the hospital." His voice became shrill. "*Look!*" In the grey gloom a jagged flash of lightening gave us a glimpse of the shambling figure of Majimbi. "You saw her, Bwana?"

"I did indeed, Baruti. Soon her tongue will be at work. All the villagers will know that she has brought a mighty rain to make the way perilous for Perisi."

I glanced into the back of the truck. Simba had covered his wife with a blanket and canvas sheet. His arm was round her and his shoulder did much to overcome the bumping and vibrations.

The air was heavy with the smell of moist earth, generally the sweetest scent of the year as the dry season was broken. But at the moment it reeked of danger.

Already the road was wet and slippery. There were puddles in our wheel tracks of less than half-an-hour before but the chains gave extra grip. We

were making excellent headway. The landmarks seemed to slide by. Goha's small dog poked his nose from under his shirt. "Seko thinks that all is going well."

"I hope he's right, Goha. See, here comes the rain."

Deluge

Great drops splashed against the windscreen. The roadway ahead of us seemed to disappear. I was in low gear now, nosing through the downpour. Suddenly we were out of the rain and the road ahead was dry. Through the cloud I could see the hill, Chihembe. At the bottom of it was the danger river. Over a rise we went and down the long slope to our last hazard. Gusts hit us from the side.

Blurribly I could see that the river was running but it looked quite possible to reach the S-bend up the high vertical bank on the far side. A woman with a heavy load of firewood on her head was walking ankle-deep through shallowly running brown water. Another gust hit us. The back wheels skidded but still we were able to move forward.

“Behold, Bwana,” shouted Simba, “in a very few minutes this will be a torrent. We’re only just in time. We...”

Again the wheels skidded and startlingly the bonnet plunged under water. Perisi screamed as she was thrown out of the back into the river. Simba was clinging to the mattress while Baruti, stunned when his head smashed into the windscreen, slumped to the floor. The steering wheel saved Goha and myself. We struggled out as the truck turned over on its side. In seconds Baruti had recovered. Simba had Perisi in his arms while I grabbed the medical bag and a blanket.

Thunder exploded overhead and rain deluged us. Goha had his dog tucked into his shirt and was doing his best to tow the mattress to the bank. Baruti grabbed him and shouted a warning as a metre-high red wave, crested with grass and rubbish, swept down on us. Simba struggled up the bank, Baruti sharing Perisi’s weight. I pushed Goha ahead of me and grabbed the canvas sheet. Our feet slipped in the mud but we managed to struggle out of reach of the angry water.

Perisi lay on the sodden mattress with Simba trying to shelter her from the storm with the canvas sheet. I heard Goha shout, “The lorry rolls over and over.” He sobbed, his arms tightly round the trembling small dog.

Perisi started to shiver violently. “Bwana,” she gasped. “I’m bleeding and the pains are strong and regular.”

The truck was upside down, its wheels turning futilely in the rushing water. A tree trunk thumped into its side. There was a crash of broken glass.

Simba drew in his breath. “Behold, this is a victory for Shaitan, the devil.”

Into my mind came a verse from the Bible: “When the enemy shall come in like a flood the spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.”

A hissing sheet of rain blotted out the countryside. Shrieking wind tore at the trees. The girl beside me was in agony. I heard her groaning. The wild weather only lasted for ten minutes, then the gloom seemed to evaporate. The sun was shining on the hills. Great drops of water from the trees fell splashing into pools that filled every hollow. Already the cracks in the ground, parched by eight months of dry season, had disappeared. The surface was soft as red paint. Saw-toothed waves tore at the rich soil of the river bank—tons of it splashed down into the flood.

Perisi lay covered with a soaking blanket, her face drawn with pain and shock. If two lives were to be saved it was imperative that she should be in the hospital, but we were an hour’s walk away.

“*Yoh*,” growled Baruti. “What shall we do? Few travel this road and nothing on wheels will pass this way because of the rain.”

Even as he spoke there was the sound of an engine and over the crest of the rise, in front of us, came a three-ton lorry.

Simba was on his feet. “It’s Suliman. He’s coming this way and he can go no further because of the river.” He raced towards the big truck, shouting and waving his arms.

Our Indian friend turned sharply and skidding through the mud was soon beside us. "I am sorry to see your dilemma, Doctor."

"Suliman, probably we can salvage the truck, but Perisi here, her life is in danger. She needs to be in hospital, urgently. Will you help us?"

"Certainly. At once we will drive back that way. The road is wet but passable. Later I will help you with that unhappy vehicle. I have ropes and a winch."

Wet as we were the last part of the safari went by quickly. Steam rose from our soaking clothes as the sun shone down. Sechelela took in the situation at a glance. Perisi was in bed, sponged, warmed and half-an-hour later, with Mwendwa's help, we embarked upon a most complicated obstetrical procedure. When the full facts of the situation were clear to me my heart sank.

With the staff, equipment and supplies of a modern hospital it would be regarded as an emergency. Here, by myself, without ordinary facilities the chances of saving both mother and baby were slim. Improvise I must and improvise I did.

Two hours later I walked out of the maternity ward. Simba was sitting on the steps, his head in his hands. I touched him on the shoulder. "Lion hunter, you are the father of a son who is the smallest baby ever to be born in our hospital."

His mouth dropped open. Huskily he said, "What of Perisi?"

"She is exhausted. It's been a terrible day for her. She needs your support and your strength, so be patient and calm. Will you stay with her and watch the drip that goes into her vein? If it stops call me at once."

"I will, Bwana," he muttered, squatting on the floor.

"Your son needs all the help Sechelela and I can give him. We will be in the next room."

Simba swallowed. "My son... is he...? will he...?"

“He’s smaller than any baby you’ve ever seen and is extremely frail.”

He sighed and shook his head.

I hurried to the room where the baby lay. An hour later when I returned the fluid was running smoothly. Simba sat there, his eyes fixed on the apparatus. I injected a sedative into the rubber tube and watched it find its way into the exhausted girl. She drifted into sleep.

Simba and I went outside into the night. “Let’s talk for a while, Simba. Come and drink tea with me.” As we walked through the warm African night I asked, “Has anyone ever kicked you in the stomach?”

“*Ngheeh!*” he nodded. “Bwana, and at this moment within me is dark misery.”

“I know how you feel, lion hunter, but I’m thankful that Chisanga is no longer with us.”

Simba spat. “But his thoughts have been in my mind; thoughts like ‘drink much beer and forget’ and ‘go and make trouble at the house of Majimbi.’”

“And what was the answer?”

“I told myself that Jesus is now my Chief, but—” He stopped and looked directly at me, “That hasn’t helped much. I prayed but nothing seems to happen...” His voice trailed off.

I made tea and poured a cup for him. “Simba, we’ve both had a rough day. That makes it easy to look at the uncomfortable happenings; but open your eyes to the splendid things. Perisi and the baby are both alive, there is a future to look forward to, and remember, God never makes mistakes.”

Simba drank slowly and said, “*Mmmm!*”

“I know a man who didn’t think that being knocked about by a lion had much profit in it. But it turned into a good thing because he found faith when he trusted in God. He also found a wife!”

Simba looked at the teapot and again said, “*Mmmm.*”

I refilled his cup. “One day a man with broad shoulders and greying hair will say to his son who probably will be taller than he is, ‘The day you were born I was the most miserable man in East Africa.’ ”

Again came a grunt but Simba’s eyes twinkled.

“What you and I need is a night’s sleep and to remember that having faith in God doesn’t depend on how you feel. Now, sleep well, lion hunter.”

Premature

Sechelela was at my door just before dawn. “Bwana, Bwana, *hodi!*”

“*Karibu,*” I mumbled sleepily, “come in. What’s the news?”

“The child still lives, but whoever heard of a baby of *that* size living!”

“He’s small, Sech. It’s going to be an uphill fight but we can win it. We must feed him with great care. It is good we have that book on premature babies.”

Sechelela nodded. “This is good but there is difficulty. It is only an hour ago that a baby was born to Nhoto. She has never followed our way. She laughs with scorn at the hospital and the welfare work. Her baby is three times the weight of Perisi’s and a lovely child. Already her voice is loud with derision.” The old nurse’s eyes flashed. “I have spoken with strength to stop her poisonous tongue.” She mimicked Nhoto’s voice. “‘She refused to wear a charm. She chose to follow the ways of the *wazungu* and look at her child. It is nothing but *taka taka*. Is there any value in a child who looks like the small monkeys of the forest?’”

“And you, grandmother?” I raised my eyebrows.

“Oh yes, I spoke with strength but that did not stop the news from reaching Perisi. She lies in bed. Her tears are many and strength goes as her sadness grows.”

“I’ll be with you soon.”

She sat down with a sigh. As we walked up the path a few minutes later she said, “She has great longings that her child might be a model for the mothers of this part of Africa. Do they not wear useless charms round their necks and tie them round their children’s bodies to keep away evil spirits? But the babies die because they’re not fed properly and hundreds upon hundreds of women have deep sadness.”

Sechelela gripped my arm almost fiercely. “Did not Perisi pray to God for a child who would be strong and healthy? Did she not do all the right things? And, behold, see how her prayer is answered.” There was a hot, angry look in the old woman’s eyes.

“Sech, would you have anger against God?”

“*Hongo*,” she nodded, “I would. Is not God almighty? Why should He allow this to happen?”

“You keep asking yourself that question, and keep asking it until you reach the place where Perisi is. There is an answer, an answer that will cause you to feel sorrow in your heart for this anger of yours. Do you remember the prayer that you and I have so often prayed when we have been in difficulty and trouble: ‘Hold up our goings in Your path that our footsteps do not slip?’”

But Sechelela did not seem to be listening. Together we walked up the steps of the maternity ward. The usual swarm of African mothers were sitting in the early morning sun with their babies in their arms. They eyed us curiously. Some laughed. I knew that the story was spreading; that the Bwana, and what was much worse, that the Bwana’s God, had been overcome by the charms and the medicines of Dawa, the witch-doctor, and of his helper Majimbi. I could see this hostile old woman with some of her companions squatting under the pepper trees.

“Bwana,” she cried, “have you no congratulations for one who is a grandmother? Whose grandchild is large and strong?”

“*Lusona*,” I answered. “I have congratulations.”

There was a sneer in her voice. “*Heeh!* I hear that other babies were born in the night. Others who will never be fed porridge and who will never even cut teeth.”

I walked into the ward. Perisi lay staring sightlessly at the white-washed wall. I went past the bed to the padded box in which the tiny baby lay. We had no specialised equipment, but we had used every trick of makeshift. The baby, at

least two months premature, had one chance of survival—that was the unremitting care of his mother.

I sat down on a three legged stool and said quietly, “*Lusona*, congratulations.”

The girl turned to me almost fiercely. “*Kah!* how can you give me congratulations when my child will die. *Kah!* I am scorned by the laughter of many. Do they not call my son *nyani*, monkey?”

Her voice broke. “Did not Simba and I ask God for a child of strength? We planned that we would look after him in a way that would help many others see and understand. But now,” after a pause she spoke more calmly, “so many prayers, so many plans... And Jesus said, if two of you shall agree in anything that you ask for, I will do it. Why has God not replied in this thing that we asked for so strongly?”

“Remember, Perisi, God’s way is not always what we ask for.”

The girl looked at me in amazement. “But, Bwana, why? Why has this happened to us?”

“Do you remember what God says in the Bible in the book called Romans? ‘We know that for those who love God, who are called according to His plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good.’”

The young mother settled back on her pillows. “But how can this work out as part of a plan for good? My baby has practically no chance for life. And Majimbi’s daughter, who followed none of the ways of health, does she not have a perfect child?”

“Perisi, you have answered your own question.” I leaned over the bed. “Listen, is not your child among the smallest that has ever been born in the hospital alive?”

She nodded.

“Do you not see that God has trusted you with the responsibility of a child

who would certainly die if he did not belong to a mother who had special skill and training, special patience, special love in her heart?”

She turned to me squarely. I went on. “Listen. Hear the laughter of the old women outside? They call your child rubbish. If we follow the way of welfare and look after the baby with infinite care, feed him in the right way and keep him from the attacks of insects and germs, behold, he will grow and become strong. It will be hard work, but...”

A smile spread over Perisi’s tired face. “I see it, Bwana. It was God’s plan to give me the hard way. But it’s a plan that will bring amazement and show those who scorn that there is a better way and that it works.” Her voice was thick with tears. “How hard things have been.”

“Truly, Perisi. God doesn’t promise to make things easy for us. He has His plans and they are the best. Now the child of Nhoto is a large well-favoured one, but what will he be like in three months?”

There was concern in Perisi’s tone. “Poor little chap. His skin will be covered with sores, there will be flies in his eyes, his stomach will stick out because they have not fed him right.”

“Truly, and what of your child?”

“I will feed him in the right way. It will be work, Bwana. Day and night I will look after him.”

“And in three months, Perisi?”

“He will be double his birth weight.” She pushed aside the blankets and got to her feet. “I must start on this great responsibility that God has given to me, now, at once.”

I saw her walk over to the cot.

Sechelela came up behind me. “I did wrong to have anger.”

“Sech, we have all learned many things these last days. We will not question the love of God as we did before, but we will look for His purpose—the plan

that He has behind what He does or what He allows to happen.”

There were tears in the old woman’s eyes. “In seeing that child an old scar was opened in my heart. Did not my first four children die and my heart was drowned in sorrow? It was because of this that I came when I was still a young woman to hear the words of God and because of that I learned to follow Him.”

“Sech, you can see God’s plan now when you look back?”

The old woman looked out at the countryside. Standing close behind her I picked up the words, “I see it now, Lord Jesus, and the wound is healed.”

I went back into the room. Perisi, exhausted, lay asleep. I picked up the box with the baby in it and carried it into a room as carefully set up as an operating theatre.

A pensive Simba sat in the sun. He struggled to his feet and greeted me, “*Mbukwa*, Doctor.”

“*Mbukwa*, Simba. What is the news?”

“The news is good. But...” he sighed, “The child is so small. Its voice is like that of a newly-born cat.”

“Watch your words. Call your son an *it* or say that bit about a newly-born cat and you will find a score of women attacking you.” This produced a faint smile. I went on, “Sit around and your misery will grow and you certainly will be no use or joy to Perisi.”

“Bwana, I am still sad, deep within me. I don’t know what to do. I fear that I am not able to bring strength or comfort to my wife.” Again came that deep sigh.

“My news for you is good. Perisi understands that the birth of the child is a challenge and an opportunity, not a grief. She sleeps at this moment. When she wakes she will have hunger. She needs food; milk, meat, pawpaws.

“For the baby to live and grow into a healthy child will be a matter of wonder for the whole country. And between you, you can do it.”

Precarious Existence

It was no usual early morning in our part of East Africa. There was the muted sound of soft rain on the corrugated iron roof. The usual brilliant sunlight was replaced by a grey-green light, the baobab trees were huge and green, the red countryside was mellow with young crops and the thornbush blossomed. Everything seemed alive, growing, hopeful.

I was surprised to see Perisi moving around in her room, masked and gowned. She bent over the makeshift cot that housed her son. I watched her deftly slip a slim tube into the baby's mouth and pass it down his throat. Simba, also masked and gowned, stood at a distance and watched fascinated as she slowly poured a measured amount of expressed milk down the tube.

"Yoh," he breathed. "It brings fear to me even to watch that work. Perhaps the child will stop breathing."

"If he did, Simba, your wife knows well what to do."

Perisi heard. She smiled at us, picked up the gauze swab, put it over the baby's lips and made as though to blow gently into his lungs.

"Right," I nodded, but Simba stood there with sweat on his forehead.

Perisi patted his shoulder. "This is my work, my training. I can do it as you know how to catch reptiles and animals. Let your mind be at peace."

"Truly," I nodded. "But your strength still is small. Do what needs to be done for your son. Feed him as is written up on that welfare chart, but rest now."

She lay down. "It is different today. The way ahead I can see. Yesterday my head was full of turmoil but today..." She smiled.

"And what about this husband of yours?"

“He, too, begins to understand,” answered Simba. “And Bwana, we have decided that his name is Yohana.”

“All this is good. Now here is the alarm clock. It will ring in three hours when again it will be time to use the tube and to change the position of the cradle.”

Hearing the bell I walked over to watch how the routine was progressing. Again all was carefully and successfully done. Sechelela stood beside me. She followed Perisi’s every move and nodded her approval.

Glancing through the window I saw Nhoto squatting under the buyu tree, her baby in her lap and a clay pot of thin gruel beside her.

“What have you got there, Nhoto?” I called.

Startled, she scrambled to her feet. “Only gruel, Bwana.”

“Make sure you eat it yourself. None of it must find its way into your baby.” There was a hint of a sneer on her face as she stared at me.

Sechelela was looking thoughtfully at Nhoto as she hurried away in the direction of the kitchen. “She is in a trap, that one,” said the old nurse. “Her husband looks to her to have children, live children. He listens to the word of Chief Mazengo. He orders her to go the way of the hospital. Majimbi speaks with poison on her tongue. If Nhoto does not follow the words of her husband, he beats her. But she fears the ways of her mother more than his whip.”

The old nurse sighed. “Majimbi and I were young women together. When I understood about Jesus I talked to her, for behold her mind is sharp. She chose to turn her back on God and to travel the pathway of witchcraft and evil. She travels with purpose!”

Simba waited till she had finished speaking then said, “I bring meat and fruit for my wife...” He paused. “Do you speak words of truth when you say that with the care that we can give, the child will really become a person?”

“They are indeed true, lion hunter, but make no mistake, there will be days with difficulty in them and nights without sleep.”

A week later, Simba and Perisi stood looking at baby Yohana. I could see improvement and growth but it was small and came slowly.

After a time Perisi said, “When can I bathe him, Bwana?”

“In three days time you may gently rub his body with warm oil. Remember the proverb: Hurry, hurry has no blessing. We do not want germs to attack him through his skin until he has strength to resist them. But remember, every hour he grows stronger.”

A tinkle came from the alarm clock. Simba looked enquiringly at Perisi. She nodded. Somewhat clumsily he moved the makeshift cradle with Yohana in it and then stood up grinning. “Bwana, we asked God for a strong child, and here is His answer. Behold, I had sadness until I understood that here was our opportunity to show people what they wouldn’t believe unless they saw it.”

Perisi nodded. “This now fills our thinking.”

“You’re both right. God has a plan for every one of us. He has a plan for Yohana. His question is: would any of you who are fathers give your son a stone when he asks for bread or would you give him a snake when he asks for a fish? Your Father will give good gifts to His children.”

Simba looked over his mask at his son lying there. All he could see was a small pink, wrinkled face. He shook his head and sighed. “It is so easy to doubt.”

“Truly, and the medicine for this trouble is to keep on encouraging each other.”

Simba was shading his eyes and peering into the heat haze. “Look over there, Bwana.”

A massive man in a red fez was walking stolidly behind an angry woman who was screaming at him over her shoulder.

Mboga came hurrying over to me, full of news. “There, Bwana, there goes Mrs. Tula Malaka, our Majimbi. Chief Mazengo does not like her being here so he sends that large calm man, M’fupi, who does not understand the word ‘I refuse.’ His orders are to take her back to her village where she must stay till given permission to leave. Truly, she has little joy.” He doubled up with merriment.

Many people stood watching what was happening, amongst them Baruti, who was striding up the path to the hospital. He came up to us and greeted. There was a murmured reply but everyone was watching Majimbi’s departure.

“I prayed that she would go,” breathed Mavunde. “When she was near I had a heavy feeling in my head and my heart...”

Baruti laughed. “I have a song the one who was a shepherd wrote.” His thumbs moved over the *ilimba* and he started to sing:

“Listen, Lord, to my prayer;
hear my cries for help.
I called You in times of trouble,
because You answer my prayers.
There is no God like You, oh Lord.
No one has done what You have done.”

“Who was the shepherd who wrote that?” asked Mavunde.

“King David of long ago, and he wrote many more songs—songs that bring peace to heart and mind.”

Mavunde hurried into the room and came back with a smaller *ilimba*. Her thumbs moved over the slithers of thin iron, producing a sound like an old-fashioned musical box.

Baruti was singing the words of the psalm again. The music Mavunde made

weaved happily into his basic melody. He sat down on the steps and they played on and on and always Mavunde came in with a tuneful obbligato. Unobtrusively Mboga came and sat in the shade, his head moving in time with the music.

Half-an-hour later Merabi came bustling up to the veranda. "Is it not time to feed Mikasi, oh my little sister?"

Mavunde looked up dreamily and then suddenly became aware of her surroundings and what was going on. She took her baby in her arms and walked into the ward.

Mboga ran his fingers through his hair. "She has wisdom in her thumbs, that one. There is no lameness in her hands. *Kumbe!* That *ilimba* sang just then as it never sings when I play it."

Baruti nodded thoughtfully. "Was that not choice food for the ears?" He sat on the steps, his hands fondling his musical instrument as he looked out over the countryside in the direction of Makali.

Simba and Perisi came out and stood behind him. "The baby seems stronger today," said Perisi.

"*Hmmm,*" said Baruti, still staring into the darkness.

"*Yoh,*" burst out Simba, "have you no other word but *hmmm?* Is this not our first child? Is it not a..."

"*Hmmm,*" said Baruti again. "I shall make one myself that will bring amazement to..."

"You'll what?" demanded Simba.

"I'll make one. Light brown with..."

"What, a baby?"

Baruti stood up and shook his head. "An *ilimba*—a special one, from the best wood I can find. I shall decorate it."

"Kah!" exploded Simba. "We're talking about babies."

His thoughts far away, Baruti nodded. "She'll like it."

Perisi stood close to her husband and looked into his bewildered face. "He's not sick," she laughed. "I understand his thoughts."

Fathercraft

“Things have happened in this last week, Simba. Yohana is growing. Even you can see that. It’s time you did some fathercraft.”

He blinked at me. “What is that, Bwana?”

“It is the work that a father does in looking after his child. You have special work ahead of you and you must realise your responsibility and opportunity. It’s time we took Yohana out of that box and built him a small bed all of his own. Take your choice. You may build one with the skill of a carpenter or go to the jungle and cut sticks and vines and weave one Gogo fashion.” I showed him pictures and left him discussing the matter earnestly with the carpenter.

Before long he appeared with an armful of odds and ends of timber, some wire, some rope and a strip of canvas.

“Build with care, Simba. This small bed must have strength. The legs must not wobble. The child must not roll out onto the floor because of the lack of skill of his father.”

“You know me better than that, Bwana. With the carpenter’s help I will build one with strong legs. It will stand firmly on the ground even as do the legs of an elephant. But first I will go and explain my plans to Perisi.” His hand went to his pocket and he tied a mask over his nose and mouth.

I went with him into the room where Perisi was sitting, duly masked and gowned, feeding her baby in a most efficient manner through the minute rubber tube. She raised one hand. “Quietly, Bwana. My work is nearly finished.”

Simba looked across at me, raised one eyebrow and said behind his hand, “*Yoh*, does she not do it with skill?”

“*Ngheeh?* Simba, there’s no doubt about it, women can do these things in a

way that we men cannot.”

“Yoh,” he agreed. “Behold, has she not got the hands of kindness and gentleness?”

Gentleness was the active word. As Perisi withdrew the tube Yohana was placed on his opposite side in the temporary cot.

Perisi smiled at us. “*Kah!* I have joy today. His skin improves with the oil I rub in and behold, he gains weight. I’ve weighed him.”

“How much?” demanded Simba.

“The weight of a large egg,” came the cheerful reply.

“It is not much,” muttered Simba. “He is only growing slowly.”

I hit him hard between the shoulders and laughed. “He’s going well. Cheer up.”

Perisi was frowning. “Don’t make such a noise in here. You will disturb the baby.”

I took Simba by the arm. “Come on. We’ll be getting into trouble and I must be getting on with my work.”

Work seemed to fill every corner of the next week. I was busy ushering babies into the world at all hours of the day and night. I operated again on Mavunde’s baby and Yohana surpassed himself by putting on the weight of two eggs.

Simba proudly announced this fact as he showed me the cot that he had made. It certainly was a solid affair and would fulfil its purpose excellently.

While I was inspecting his craftsmanship, Baruti and Chief Mazengo’s man, M’fupi, walked up to us. Baruti glanced at the cot and said, “*Mmmh.*” Under his arm he carried an *ilimba*. The polished wood shone in the sunlight. The

tall man in the red fez greeted me and said, “The woman, Majimbi, left her house and came in this direction before dawn this morning. Do you know if she is here, Bwana?”

I did not, but as usual Mboga was full of information. “Not ten minutes ago she arrived. She had no desire to be seen coming through the gate so she hacked a way of her own with a *panga*. Even now she is close to where we stand.” He grinned at the huge man who was a head taller than he was.

“Be careful, small one. Put a knife in her hands and you see fierceness itself.”

A small boy ran to Mboga and whispered. He nodded. “Even now she is sitting among the roots of the big baobab tree.”

We walked around the other side of the building. There was Majimbi with her grandchild, now some three weeks old, propped on her knee. Beside her was a clay pot filled with gruel—lumpy grey stuff that looked like rancid paste. Scooping up a handful of the clammy mixture and forcing the baby’s mouth open, she pushed it into the small mouth, ramming it down with her thumb. Her reluctant grandchild did his best to resist, coughing and spluttering; but the old midwife wiped the sticky gruel from the sides of his mouth and pushed it back. Suddenly and explosively the child rejected all that had been given to him. Majimbi’s hand went over his mouth and again it was forced down the small throat.

I stepped forward. “Majimbi, what do you think you’re doing?”

She spat in my direction. “*Kah!* whose child is it, yours or mine?”

“Is there any profit in a dead grandchild?” I countered.

“*Yoh!*” she hissed. “Do you cast spells against my grandchild?”

Simba was quick to answer. “Perhaps she wants the child to die. She fears that my child will grow stronger than that of her daughter, so she follows the old ways.”

“*Ngheeh?*” agreed Sechelela. “When the child dies she will say it is a spell and

blame us. She fears to hear it said in the village that baby Yohana, who we all know is small, will in a year's time be larger than the child she now holds in her arms."

"Enough words," said M'fupi. "The Chief has forbidden you to come to Mvumi village, especially to the hospital. Come, we..."

Majimbi thrust the baby into Nhoto's arms and grabbed the *panga*. She waved the great knife in the air, the sharp edge glinting in the sun as she rushed at M'fupi. The tall man hesitated. Mboga scooped up a double handful of dust and threw it into the furious woman's face. She dropped the knife. M'fupi put a large foot on it and both his hands on her shoulders. Without a word he steered her through the gate.

Baruti watched them go. He handed the *ilimba* he had made to Mavunde. "Let us make music."

She shook her head. Her eyes were bright with fear. Breathing hard, she ran into the room and threw herself onto the bed, covering her head with a blanket.

Sechelela spoke quietly. "Sit in the shade and rest for a while. Fear overwhelms her."

"But," grunted Baruti, "I will protect her."

Sechelela smiled. "Sit in the shade and play your *ilimba* very softly."

Simba raised his eyebrows. "*Kah*, Bwana. Majimbi is filled with fierce anger. We will do well to keep out of her way."

"You are right; but the problem is that she thinks that what she does is right. She has convinced herself. King Solomon wrote, 'There is a way that seems right to a person, but at the end of that road is death.' It is not good enough to follow the way you think is right. Lion fat is no cure for pneumonia, the stabbing disease."

"But remember," said Simba, "there are those who think that if they wear a

charm made from the skin of a white goat they will overcome malaria.”

“*Kah!* Simba, you and I know differently.”

He grinned and rubbed the place where there was a hip pocket in his shorts.

“*Hongo*, and if these things are true of the body how much more are they true of the soul?”

“Bwana, my people have strange ways of trying to quiet the fear of what happens to *mitima*, the soul, when *mwili*, the body, dies. They make offerings to the ancestors. Not only do they wear charms but they swallow them as well. Some build them into their roofs or their doorways. But fear still remains. Some drink beer and others, honey spirit. They hope that in their glow and the dreams that follow, fear may be forgotten. I know these things. Have I not tried them? But fear still gnaws.”

“But when you’re in God’s family, Simba, everything is different. You’re now walking on God’s road, not Shaitan’s. You listen to God’s voice, not the whispering of temptation.”

Later that afternoon Sechelela called me. “Bwana, there’s a baby here I want you to see.” Laughing softly she led me to a perfectly normal infant and said, “You will be interested to hear that Baruti has gone to ask Daudi to make a *shauri* with the father of Mavunde. He wishes to marry her.”

“*Yoh*, he has talked to her himself?”

“No, but I have. To her the whole thing is a matter of joy. It would mean the start of a new life. With Perisi she could do much in the village of Makali. Baruti has finished his house and if all this happens, it would not be a place of tears,” Sechelela chuckled, “but a house full of music.”

“Talking of music,” I exclaimed, “listen to that.”

The alarm call, high-pitched, came from near the gate. In rushed Nhoto. She almost threw herself at me.

“Bwana, quickly. Help me. My child. He has *ndege ndege*.”

Her baby was convulsing in her arms. Mwendwa took one look and ran to the kitchen where a kerosene tin full of water was always kept on an open fire ready for emergencies. I grabbed Nhoto’s arm and almost dragged her to the children’s ward. Two nurses were on the spot. One poured the hot water into the baby’s bath. The other added cold water and checked with her elbow that the temperature was exactly right.

Mwendwa put the convulsing child into the water. Nhoto squatted on the floor, moaning and swaying from side-to-side. The convulsions were quieting.

Sechelela shook her head. “*Hongo*, see what gruel does to a baby’s stomach and then to every bit of him. See, there is some *wubaga* even now around his mouth.”

Perisi came to the door. Nhoto leapt to her feet. “Spells,” she screamed. “She has cast spells. Keep her away! Keep her away!”

“Stop those foolish words,” snapped Sechelela. “No spells have been cast. You have fed the child wrongly and this is the result.”

Bewildered, Majimbi’s daughter wrung her hands.

Without fuss Mwendwa was carrying out the second stage of the treatment. Already the baby was quieter. I measured out a dose of sedative and picked up a narrow tube which I slipped down the small throat to make sure the medicine arrived safely inside the sick child.

Shrilly Nhoto screamed and rushed towards me. “He poisons my child. He pushes *chizoka*, a small snake, down his throat.”

Sechelela barred her way. “Open your eyes and see. It is rubber, a little tube. Through it the medicine goes safely into the child. He is too small to swallow without help.”

Panting, Nhoto slumped back onto the floor, tears running down her cheeks.

“Nhoto,” I said, “we know you were there when your mother pushed gruel into him. We saw it happen. Enough talk of spells. Enough shouting in anger. Your baby will be all right but you must be calm.”

Mwendwa was briskly towelling the baby who was now almost normal. She placed him in a cot and tucked him in.

“Let your eyes tell you the truth about the way to look after babies. A quarter of an hour ago you bring the baby here dying, his arms waving like the flutterings of a frightened bird. You have seen everything that has been done and the child lives and is comfortable again.”

“Aren’t you a lovely thing?” said Mwendwa, bending over the baby with a smile on her face. The baby looked into her face and gurgled.

The wild look came again into Nhoto’s face. She pushed Mwendwa aside, tore the blankets of the cot, wrenched off the little shirt in which the baby had been dressed and, clasping him in her arms, ran out into the sun and across the corn field on the downhill path to the village.

Perisi was weeping. “What can we do to help people like that? She has such a lovely baby.”

Simba answered. “Things happen slowly in this country, but when they watch Yohana improve, when their eyes talk to them, then...”

Baruti nodded. “This is happening at Makali. There are those who laughed when we dug our garden to catch water but they stop and stare now, for our crop is taller and stronger than any in the district.” He smiled widely. “They laughed when I bought manure for the garden. Those large round melon-sized balls of elephant manure; a hundred of them for a shilling. Some said I was mad. Others said there was something magical about those elephants. But you should hear young Goha tell them that it is nothing more than food for the roots of the corn. He has a patch with no manure. He shows it and says, ‘No food, therefore poor corn,’ and then he moves to where there is manure, in the place where we have scooped out earth between the rows of corn and says, ‘Look, see and understand that when you feed corn it grows better.’ ”

“*Hongo*, Baruti, you should turn that into music. Make a song about it. Write songs that talk to people, that bring new thoughts into their heads.”

Mboga grinned widely. “*Yoh*, these days he sings songs full of soft, gentle words that...”

“The same songs that you sang when you first met your wife,” smiled Sechelela.

I broke in. “Now come on, everybody. There’s work to be done in this hospital.”

Two weeks came and went. Yohana’s baby weight card showed an encouraging upward red line. He was still very small but he was a happy, lively baby.

“It is a wonderful day,” said Perisi, tucking her belongings into the end of Yohana’s cot. “We have great thanks to God for what He’s done here and what He’s going to do at Makali. Splendid things are in front of us there. Soon we will start the welfare work.”

“Actually, you’ve started it already by taking Yohana with you alive, growing and well. There will be many who come to greet you and they will watch with wide open eyes what you do and how you look after him. Now tell me, is there not a parting gift that I may give you?”

The young mother smiled. “More than anything we would like some safety pins, Bwana.”

I produced six and solemnly linked five together. The sixth, with a touch that spoke of long practice, I put into its own special use in the baby realm.

Quite a crowd came to wave good-bye. I listened to the talk, “He is indeed a proper child.”

“*Yoh!* It is beyond belief that one so small could live.”

“They called him ‘rubbish.’ Behold, how wrong they were.”

“It is Perisi’s work. There is wisdom in this way, truly.”

First the cot was put into Suliman’s lorry and then they all climbed on board.

“*Kwaheri*,” called a score of voices.

“When will we see you again?” I shouted.

Simba grinned. “Ask Baruti.”

“Bwana, before long we would like you to share in a large pot of goat stew at my new *kaya*.”

“Also,” chuckled Sechelela, “he would like you to drive Mavunde and himself back to Makali after their marriage.”

Mboga stepped forward. “And me, and of course Daudi and Mwendwa and our grandmother, Sechelela...”

It was late afternoon. The lush corn waved gently in the faint breeze. People sat under the mango tree. We drove across the dry river bed. The women trilled with their tongues as Mavunde stepped down with baby Mikasi in her arms and walked without a hint of a limp. Her face glowed as she walked with Baruti to his *kaya*.

Sechelela moved close to me. “Bwana, my heart is warm. That is her house, her own place. It is the first one she has had and this is the first time she has seen it.”

Perisi, with Yohana in her arms, walked to where Chilatu tended the large pots. A quiet woman moved busily in the background helping her.

The sunset lit up the hillside. I pointed with my chin. “It was over there, Simba, that you had a taste of claws and teeth?”

Simba nodded and looked down at the scars on his arm. “That turned out to be a good day for me.”

“Yohana and I think that, too,” smiled Perisi.

I nodded. “Never did a bottle of blood do more.”

Mboga sat on the ground, his back to the stone-and-cement wall of Baruti’s newly-built, new-style African house. He was playing a love song on his *ilimba*. Thumbs still working, he came over to us and whispered confidentially, “See, my wife Mzito and Chilatu prepare our feast. *Kumbe*, that girl has learned to cook quickly.”

“They share special understanding and have joy in each other,” murmured Perisi.

“It’s a thing of satisfaction,” replied Mboga and Simba together.

Across the wet sand of the river came Goha riding Punda, the donkey, with Seko close at his heels barking with excitement.

Goha jumped down and walked to where Chilatu was nursing the baby. His eyes opened wide as he turned round to the donkey who stood behind him.

“Behold, he is a small child but, Punda, you will be surprised how soon he will be riding with me on your back. You will not find him a burden. And you, Seko, you have the work of protecting him at all times. No snake must come near this *kaya*.”

The small dog pricked up his ears and smiled his doggy smile.

“*Chakula tayari*, food is ready,” called Mzito.

Simba placed a stool for me in the firelight. I put my hand on his shoulder. “It’s good to see many prayers answered and many dreams come true. Is it not, my lion hunter?”

Smiling Perisi interrupted. She put her arm around her husband and drew him close to her. There was deep happiness in her voice. “Doctor, he’s *my*

lion hunter.”

Epilogue

Both Simba and Perisi accomplished a great deal in the church and in education.

Yohana, the premature baby of 40 years ago, is at work in the medical service of Tanzania.

Glossary

Ch—Chigogo

Sw—Swahili

assante (Sw)—thank you

bati (Sw)—corrugated iron

Bibi (Sw)—lit. grandmother—a term of respect

Bwana (Sw)—sir, mister, lord

bwete (Ch)—useless

chenga (Ch)—alarm cry

chidindilo (Ch)—prison, “The Hotel of King George”

chifuko (Ch)—a pocket, a bag, generally cloth with a purse-string around its neck

Chigogo (Ch)—the language of the Central Plains of Tanzania

chigongo (Ch)—swelling on the back

Chizungu (Ch)—English language

Daudi (Sw)—David (pron. *Dhowdee*)

debe (Sw)—a kerosene tin

dudu (Sw)—an insect; anything that creeps or crawls

eheh (Ch)—agreement—affirmative

fundi (Sw)—an expert, a trained person

hodi (Sw)—May I come in

hongo! (Ch)—behold

ilimba (Ch)—a musical instrument

kabisa (Sw)—very—emphasis

kah! (Sw)—an exclamation of surprise or disgust depending on tone of voice

karibu (Sw)—Come in, welcome. The reply to *hodi*

kaya (Ch)—house

koh! (Sw)—as for *kah*

kumbe! (Sw)—behold—with a raising of the eyebrows

kwaheri (Sw)—good-bye

lulo (Ch)—thank you (for congratulations)

lusona (Ch)—congratulations

machisi (Ch)—evil spirits
magu (Ch)—I don't know—with a shrug
mbisi (Ch)—hyena (pl. *mabisi*)
mbukwa (Ch)—good day (pl. *mbukwenyi*)
muganga (Ch)—witch-doctor
mutemi (Ch)—king, paramount chief
mzungu (Sw)—European (pl. *wazungu*)
ndege ndege (Ch)—convulsions
nghangala (Ch)—mead
ngheeh (Ch)—affirmative—with a nod of the head
ng'o (Ch)—no
nhonde (Ch)—marijuana
nyani (Ch)—monkey
panga (Sw)—a cane-cutting knife or machete
safari (Sw)—a journey
shauri (Sw)—a court case, discussion, dispute
sikuku (Sw)—a party or feast
taka taka (Sw)—rubbish
tula malaka (Ch)—scraping of the throat (native medicine)
ugali (Sw)—porridge
wadala (Ch)—old women, midwives
wubaga (Ch)—gruel
yaya gwe (Ch)—oh my mother—an exclamation
yoh! (Ch)—ejaculation of surprise or disgust

The End