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## *On the Spot*

'Where did this leopard attack exactly?' asked the business-like voice of Yonah, the African Game Scout.

'Away over there.' The tall Tanzanian tribesman pointed with his chin and raised his voice to show distance. 'I, Yobwa, heard that it happened there to the south, near the village of Cibogolo.'

Now Cibogolo means 'witchdoctor's box' and was a place where violent things had been happening.

From one of the hair-pin bends of the road cut into the mountainside the two men looked out over the flat sweep of savannah, with its thornbush jungle and huge baobab trees. In a clearing two hundred metres below was a flat-roofed, mud-walled house.

The young man spat. 'That is the house of M'sala. *Koh!* It is a place of death. Since the days of harvest, five who lived there have returned to the ancestors. They...'





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The Game Scout interrupted him. 'There have been words of trouble, of black magic?'

'*Kah!* Words?' Yobwa raised his eyebrows. 'Were there words? Great One, you know these affairs of witchcraft, when men of anger speak furtively behind their hands. And *hongo!* Then came this leopard.'

He shrugged.

'Have you actually seen it?'

'No, but one who saw it kill the new leader of this place said it had great spots like the bunched-up fingertips of a man's hand.' He dropped his voice. 'And the right forepaw is like this...' He drew four dots in the shape of a square in the dust then rubbed them out hastily, looking round as though he expected to be spied upon. He moved closer to the Game Scout and muttered, 'The hand of Madole, chief of this village for twenty years, has but four fingers on it.'

'He no longer rules here?'

'Not even a little. In a night he found himself no longer chief, stripped of authority and without power. *Hongo!* And did resentment and jealousy burn in his heart! It is said that he paid the price of many cows to witchdoctors for a medicine of such strength it was possible for him to change himself into a leopard.'

The Game Scout spat. 'Who was given his place?'

Yobwa fingered the charms that were round his neck. 'The eldest son of M'sala had education and wisdom. *Koh!* But before a moon had passed, he was dead, terribly dead. It was the leopard with but four toes that killed him – in the middle of the marketplace at high noon! This is not the way of most leopards.'





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Many say that there is the cunning mind of a jealous man within that spotted creature's skin.'

The tall tribesman again looked furtively around. Yonah's face was mask-like. He ground out, 'Go on, - what happened?'

'Sickness came like a thunderstorm upon this house but death did not come fast enough to all of them. So again comes leopard.' He shrugged. 'It is a place of fear. All are dead there...' As he spoke, out of the house below them staggered a boy. He stood peering up at them and then fell flat on his face.

The Game Scout jumped behind the wheel of his landrover. They skidded round the curves of the mountain pass, crashed through thornbush scrub and bounced through huge elephant footprints in the black soil. In their path a covey of guinea fowl scuttled away screeching.

The landrover bumped on over what had been a millet garden. There was room for only one wheel on the narrow path.

Unexpectedly and forcibly the driver stamped on his brake. The man beside him shot forward, bumping his chin hard against the windscreen.

'Yoh!' he growled, 'why did you do...?' His mouth flopped open. Across the path was a distinct line of white ashes. His voice was tense. 'Let us travel with care.' Both men jumped to the ground and walked at right angles to the path, threading their way through the dead millet stalks. They peered at the ground most carefully before taking a forward step.

At last Yobwa spat in front of him. '*Koh!* The spell of death does not reach as far as this.'





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Yonah grunted his assent and hurried across the clearing to where the boy lay.

Striding down the path towards them came a tall, cheerful man with a spear in his hand.

The Game Scout shouted, 'Stop! Look at the path in front of you! Stop!'

The new arrival paused, then deliberately scattered the ashes with his foot. He smiled, '*Habari* – what news?'

'*Njema* – good,' said the Game Scout automatically. Then he stretched out his hand. '*Kumbe!* It is Baruti!' They were both tall, solidly built men.

'*Eheh*, it is I, O Yonah Nhuti, and I have joy to greet you. *Kah!* But is there trouble here?'

'*Eheh!* Great trouble.'

Baruti bent and lifted the boy's head out of the dust. He was painfully thin, and his skin was burning hot.

'Is he dead?' Yobwa stepped back a pace.

'No, but he has much need of strong medicine.'

'*Kah!*' Yonah Nhuti scratched his head. 'I've been sent to deal with this man-killing leopard, and I find myself landed with a sick boy.'

'Let me put him in your machine and give him water to drink,' said Baruti, 'and perhaps we will find a way to help.'

Yonah grunted. He stepped confidently over the place where Baruti had trampled on the witchdoctor's medicine. He threw open the door of the landrover, and put a blanket under the boy's head as Baruti placed him down gently.





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'You look after him,' he said gruffly. 'I will seek for the tracks of this great cat.'

Baruti saw that the boy was quite unconscious.

'*Yoh!* He cannot swallow,' he muttered, moistening the boy's feverish lips. 'Truly, he too is very near the ancestors.'

A shout came from the Game Scout, who was down on one knee in the dust near the house. 'Come and look at these tracks! Not only has a leopard been here, but it has walked right round the house, just as if it were a witchdoctor...and look at this!' He pointed to a group of paw marks still clearly seen in the dust.

'*Eheh!*' said Baruti, 'he lacks one finger in his right forepaw.'



Their eyes met. '*Hongo!*' said Baruti. 'You fear this creature?'

'*Koh!*' growled Yonah, 'any wise hunter fears any leopard.'

A cloud of dust was rising into the hot air two kilometres away across the plain. 'Let us drive to the road,' said Baruti. 'This is the bus to Dodoma and it will be the quickest way to carry the boy to the hospital. It will turn a safari of two days into one of two hours.'

At the hospital, we were having a special clinic to try and steal a march on tuberculosis. We had injected a drop of tuberculin into the skin of the forearms of a dozen people. I had just arranged with them when they were to come in again for me to see the result when Mboga, one of the hospital orderlies, came running round the corner.





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'Bwana! Baruti, the hunter, has just arrived on the bus...'

'Has he, Mboga? Useful things, buses...'

'*Eheh*, Bwana. They take the weariness out of your feet, and shorten safaris truly...but as I said, Baruti has arrived, with a sick one. He says it is a matter of importance!'

Baruti stood in the shade of a baobab tree with his arm held firmly round a boy who coughed in a way that shook his thin body. The boy groaned and leaned back against Baruti.

'*Mbukwa!*' I greeted.

'*Mbukwa.*' The boy's voice was little more than a husky murmur.

'*Habari?* – what is the news?'

'*Njema* – the news is good, but...'. He shook his head slowly. 'Are you the Great One here?'

'I am the doctor.'

'Have you medicines for the Great Cough?'

'Yes, we have many medicines.'

His eyes were bright with fever. He stood unsteadily to his feet. 'I have no gifts to bring for medicines.'

'Have you no relations?'

'In our house,' said the boy, 'were my father, mother, my big brothers, and my small sister. But one who visited us had the Great Cough, and *yoh...*!' He made a gesture with his hands and I realised that tuberculosis, like a bush fire, had swept through their home.

'*Heeh,*' he said, 'what can I do, Bwana? I have no-one. Evil has come upon our house.'





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A bright yellow landrover came slowly along the road. Mboga, standing directly behind me, whispered very softly, 'That is Juma bin Ali, Bwana. He is a new sort of medicine man and has been causing trouble with the ex-chief, Madole, who has only four fingers. It is said that he is trying to kill the old man with spells.'

Baruti gently sat the boy down with his back to the tree. He moved across to me.

'Bwana, he has small strength, truly. The only strong thing about him is his cough. You must help him.'

'We will, Baruti.'

The boy struggled to stand up, but his knees buckled under him. I picked him up and carried him the rest of the distance to the ward and put him into the hands of Mali, the trained nurse in charge of the men's ward.

'Put him to bed, and keep him quiet. I will come and examine him soon.'

'Yes, doctor.'

Baruti was squatting in the shade of the pepper trees.

'What is his story, O hunter?'

'His name is Tembo and, as he told you, death and trouble have come to his house. It would seem that this Great Cough has struck again and again. Three days ago this boy, his elder brother and his father, all gripped by this sickness, sat in the sun as is the custom of the tribe. They live in a part of the country where there are many animals. Behold, through the thornbush stalked a leopard. He came straight at them. *Pow!* He hit the father and he died. He sprang





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at the larger boy, who rolled over and over, and this child fainted. When his wisdom returned he was by himself. When I found him he had tasted neither food nor water for two whole days, and *hongo!* If there had been no bus, *kah!* He would have been dead by now.'



Baruti unslung his *ilimba*, sat down under the pepper trees, and started to play softly.

'*Kah!*' said Daudi as we walked toward the ward. 'He always plays that tune when he has sadness in his heart. And behold, today it seems to well up in him. Have you heard his story? He had four sons and all of them died from tuberculosis when they were young. There is great sadness in Baruti's heart. When he looks at Tembo he sees his own children all over again.'

'From the look of that boy, Daudi, I'd think that we're all facing tragedy. I wouldn't give young Tembo much chance of living even twenty-four hours.'

'*Kah!* Bwana, then he stands at the very gates of death?'

'He does. And our supply of drugs for this disease is desperately small. We need every pill and injection for other sick people. We have hardly any to spare.'

Daudi looked at me quickly. 'You're going to give him a chance?'

'We have to. There's so much more at stake than his body.'

Daudi nodded. 'Shall I test his blood?'

'Yes, please.'





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Deftly he took a sample and hurried away to the laboratory. Gently I examined Tembo's chest, and then the whole of his emaciated body. The disease had gone a long way and the further that examination went the further my heart sank.

Baruti stopped his *ilimba*-playing as Daudi came briskly back to the ward with his report. I read, 'Haemoglobin 20%. Malaria parasites present – plus, plus.'

Not only was Tembo suffering from two diseases ranking among the world's worst killers, but his defences were down and his blood was only a fifth of the strength it ought to be.

In English, which Baruti did not understand, I said, 'What Tembo needs first of all is a blood transfusion, Daudi. What about asking Baruti if he'd give a pint?'

Daudi nodded. 'That would be a good thing.'

'Right. Prepare the instruments and the apparatus and I'll see about donors.'

Baruti sank heavily down on a chair and said, 'He will die, Bwana. Many times I've seen it happen before. This is a disease that I hate.' I put my hand on his shoulder.

'Perhaps we can cheat your enemy if we build up the boy's strength a little and give him a better chance to fight the germs of this sickness. It would be like holding a leopard away from its victim with a spear till more help comes, for the medicines we have these days are very powerful.'

Baruti sighed. 'What sort of a spear would you use to hold back this leopard?'





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'A bottle of good blood from a healthy man.'

Baruti jumped to his feet. 'Would my blood do?'

'If you are willing to give it and it's the right sort.'

He bunched up his fist and stretched out his arm till the veins stood out. 'Koh! Test it quickly! Remember, leopards will not wait.'

Daudi appeared through the doorway with a tray of test tubes, needles and syringes. He grinned, 'Leave this to me, Bwana. Come on, Baruti.'

The boy coughed and clutched at his throat. I bent down. 'We understand how it hurts you to cough, to talk and to swallow. If you want to tell us things do so with your fingers. Try and make us understand without talking.'

His eyes told me that he understood. Then they turned towards the window where a bee buzzed as it bumped against the flywire gauze.

'Eheh,' I smiled, 'honey, eh? Would you like some? It would help.'

A smile flickered around the corners of his mouth.

'You shall have some straight away.'

