

Mafununhula

'Peroxide,' said Daudi, 'and call the Bwana with feet that make dust fly. Tell him it's *mafununhula*.'

The message reached me in such dramatic form that I arrived at the hospital panting and out of breath.

'Daudi, what's this *ma-fun-un-hula*?'

'Nose-bleeding, Bwana, rather brisk, and the girl who's doing it all is Nzugu, the small daughter of Mubi, the Chief.'

He pointed to a tray. 'Everything's ready.'

Half a minute later, a rather scared small girl had a rolled-



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up piece of cotton-wool soaked in peroxide up her nose.

'Push with your finger against it, Nzugu, and the bleeding will stop. That's it. Pinch one side of your nose so that the cotton-wool comes right up against the place where the bleeding comes from.'

Rather gingerly she did so, and then found it didn't hurt. In a few moments the bleeding had stopped.

'What started it off, Nzugu?'

'Sneezing, Bwana,' and then, with a grin that was somewhat twisted by the cotton-wool up her nose, 'those of my household are experts in the matter of sneezing. *Heh*, my father – he sneezes with strength, but my sister Wendwa, *hongo!* Sneeze? Bwana!' She raised her eyebrows.

'Wendwa? – didn't she go to school here?'

'*Eh-heh*, Bwana, she still does, but these days she is visiting in my father's village.'

'Well, if she sneezes more strongly than you do, she'll get *mafununhula*, too!'

Daudi was putting everything in order on the tray again.

'Funny thing, I've never heard the word '*mafununhula*' before.'

My African assistant smiled.

'*Heh*, truly, say things like that, Bwana, and you will hear of it again.'

Carefully I removed the plug of cotton-wool from Nzugu's nose.

'*Yoh*, it's stopped, Bwana.'

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'*Eh-heh*, that is good, but be careful how you sneeze in future. Here is some more cotton-wool and the medicine. I will leave it in this little dish beside your bed. You know what to do if it starts again?'

'*Eh-heh*, Bwana, I could do it.'

Daudi and I walked back to the hospital along the frangipani-lined track. Pedalling violently towards us was an African on a woebegone looking bicycle. He leapt off.

'Bwana, I come from Mubi, the Chief of the village of Iganha. Wendwa, his daughter – the strength has gone from her body. She has...'

'Yes,' said Daudi, 'we know – *mafununhula*, and the Waganga – the witchdoctors – have not helped her, *heh?*'

The messenger nodded.

'Bwana, the Chief is getting Suliman the Indian to bring her in to hospital in his lorry after nightfall.'

'Why after nightfall, Simba?'

He shrugged his broad shoulders. 'It's a matter of witchcraft. There are eyes to see and spells to be cast in the daylight.'

'They say her trouble is caused by a spell?' asked Daudi.

Simba nodded vigorously.

'She sneezes with strength. Is not this the cause of her *mafununhula?*'

'Let me know directly they arrive, Daudi. Get as much of her story as you can.'

The African assistant nodded. '*Ndio*, yes, Bwana.'

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Two hours after sunset I heard running feet.

'Bwana,' came Daudi's voice, 'they've brought in Wendwa, Mubi's daughter. She's been nose-bleeding for nearly two days. I think she's dying; there's hardly any pulse. She breathes in little sighs, like someone very tired. Bwana, hurry, her nose still bleeds with strength.'

She lay on a blanket on the hospital veranda, surrounded by people. She was dangerously shocked.

Those with her moaned and swayed on their feet as they chanted a dirge.

'She will die,' they said mournfully.

I lifted her with Daudi's help and soon she was in bed. She was a girl of seventeen or so.

Marita, the nurse on night-duty, tucked in the blankets.

'What would you do in a case like this?'

'Treat shock and stop the haemorrhage, Bwana.'

I nodded. 'Marita – morphia, hot water bottles, blankets, get them ready. Daudi, boil up these instruments and get these dressings.' I scribbled a list.

Rapidly we worked. Outside, the relations talked in hoarse whispers.

Marita appeared with the morphia. I injected, and helped with the blankets and hot water bottles, then, borrowing the nurse's scissors, I snipped off charms from her wrists and neck.

'Witchdoctor's futility,' I thought. 'More use in a museum than a hospital.'

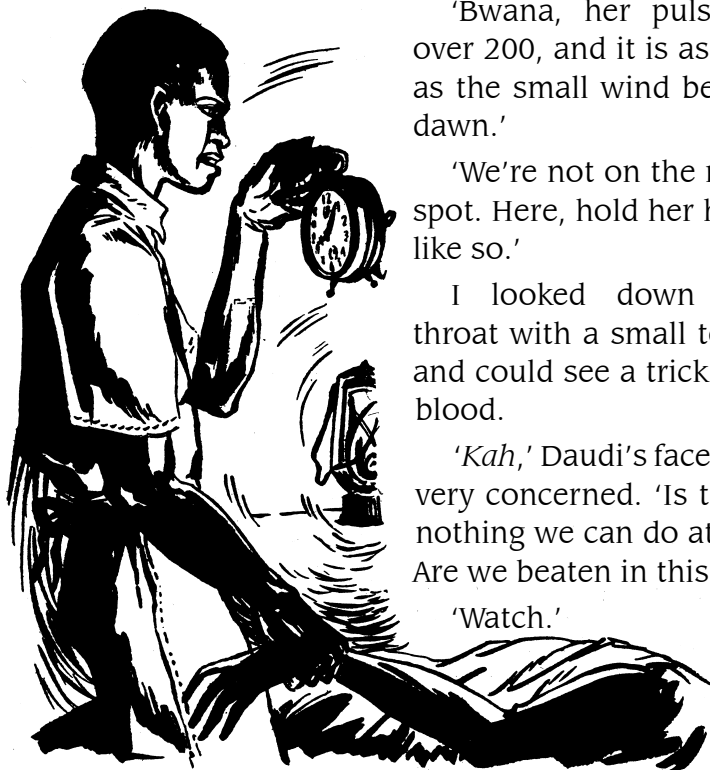
Daudi came hurrying in with a tray.

'Hold her head, Marita, while I pack the nostril with gauze.'

'*Ndio*, Bwana.'

'Take her pulse, Daudi.'

He went into the sterilising room and returned with an alarm clock. Solemnly grasping the large and dilapidated timepiece in one hand, Daudi felt the girl's pulse. As the second hand moved round to the minute, he grunted.



'Bwana, her pulse is over 200, and it is as soft as the small wind before dawn.'

'We're not on the right spot. Here, hold her head like so.'

I looked down her throat with a small torch and could see a trickle of blood.

'*Kah*,' Daudi's face was very concerned. 'Is there nothing we can do at all? Are we beaten in this?'

'Watch.'

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Out came the gauze. Gently I pushed a very thin tube up her nostril.

'Hold that light, Daudi. I must see right in behind her tonsils.'

Slowly the tube was coaxed on until it appeared in her throat. I groped for long forceps and with them grasped the rubber, pulling it out of her mouth.

'Hongo, Bwana, it goes into her nose and comes out of her mouth!'

'Truly, but watch.'

I rolled up gauze, stitching it firmly to the rubber and attaching a length of tape. Carefully we checked the firmness of the thread.

'See, Daudi, pull the tube, in goes the gauze right over the bleeding place, tape out here over the corner of her mouth. Keep it there with a bit of sticking-plaster and all should be well. The tape is to get out easily afterwards.'

Daudi rolled his eyes and made the whole range of African noises that express amazement.

Carefully we watched, but the bleeding had stopped. Wendwa's head was lowered.

'Haemorrhage controlled. Now to fight her loss of blood.

'Fluids in every way possible,' said Marita.

'Carry on,' I smiled, and wrote in the Report Book: '9 p.m. Pharynx plugged; Shock treated; Morphia gr. $\frac{1}{4}$; Fluids; Pulse feeble 200.'

The door opened and Sechelela came quietly in. From outside came a moaning dirge.

'Terrible row, Seche.'

She nodded. 'They think she will die. She...'

Then Wendwa sneezed seven times. Hastily the plug was readjusted. Marita looked at me with raised eyebrows.

I nodded.

'Drink this, Wendwa.'

The girl tried and then said, in a muffled voice:

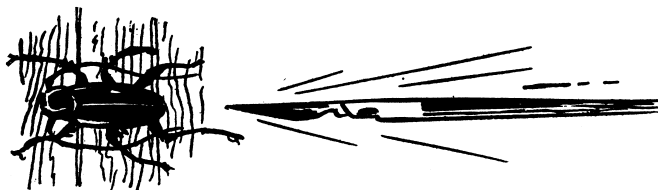
'I can't swallow properly. There is a big thing in my throat. Also my head swims and spins.'

She drank again, spluttered and then sank back.

'I'll watch her till 10 p.m., Marita.'

The hands of the old alarm clock moved towards the hour. I dipped the pen in a bottle of ink and wrote on.

Suddenly a cockroach's head appeared through a crack in the door. I watched it come right out, then




suddenly threw the pen like a spear. The insect fell to the floor. My foot came down on it smartly.

To my surprise, Wendwa's voice came weakly from the bed.

'You are a hunter of courage, Bwana.'

I grinned. 'What fun it would be to stop *mafununhula* in an elephant, Wendwa.'



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I loosened the tube and peered down her throat.

'Stopped.'

She drew in her breath sharply.

'I'm going to sneeze, Bwana. I'm going to...'

'No, you're not.' I put my finger firmly under her nose and pressed. 'Whatever you do, O daughter of Mubi, don't sneeze.'

Her eyes twinkled. 'My father sneezes with strength,' she whispered.

'Does he? Well, don't follow his ways. Swallow this pill, it will stop your desire to do so. Sleep now, and, Marita, report any change to me at once.'

In the moonlight outside the ward were sitting a number of Wendwa's relatives, among them a picturesque old man with elaborate ear adornments and a native axe in his hand. He rose and greeted me.

'*Mbukwa*, Bwana.'

'*Mbukwa*,' I replied.

'I am her uncle, Bwana. Her father Mubi seeks news. Will she recover?'

'That, Great One, is in the hands of God. We have stopped the bleeding, but she is very weak. Much of her blood has been wasted.'

'*Kah*,' said the old man, 'and a cow and two tins of food were paid for spells to be made which would stop the bleeding.'

Behind him were three old African women. I turned round to them.

'Tell me, O wise ones of the tribe, what would you do if a small hole appeared in your water-carrying gourds?'

'Yoh,' said one old woman, 'we would plug it with a thorn or with cloth so that the water would not run out.'

'You answer with wisdom, but would you cast spells to close the hole or would you plug it?'

The old woman shook her head.

'Would you cast spells for a little thing like that? Listen, then, to the news of Mubi's daughter. She had a little hole in a little vein, and I simply plugged it. There is no danger now from that. Wendwa, however, is not like a water-pot. You may refill one of these easily again with water at the well if it leaks, but how may you fill a body again with blood when much has leaked out?'

They shook their heads. 'It is an impossibility.'

'No, it is not an impossibility, but it will mean much work. But first, we will rest her and give her strength for whatever the future will hold.'

'Bwana,' said the old man, 'yours is the way of wisdom. Surely the hospital has great merit. *Assante sana* – thank you greatly.'

They turned and went away.

'Marita, call me if the pulse rate rises.'

Drums throbbed on through the night. At midnight Marita was outside the mosquito-proof wire of my window.

'Bwana, Bwana,' she called.

'*Nhawule* – what's up?'

'Wendwa's pulse races and flutters.'

'Be there in five minutes, Marita,' and I was.

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The tube had moved. Wendwa's voice came softly.

'I sneezed, Bwana, and it started again. I'm frightened, everything goes round and round.'

'Hold on to me, it'll help, for I, too, often feel like that but I put my hand in His and fear goes.'

She gripped my arm while I fixed another plug in.

'You mean Jesus,' she whispered.

'Yes, He knows just what to do whenever I'm in trouble.'

'Bwana, tell me about Him.'

'I will, but first, another injection.'

She hardly moved as the needle pierced her skin. I settled down on a stool beside her bed and started.

'One day there was a great one who had a daughter whose stay on earth had covered twelve harvests. She was greatly ill, and all her relations grieved for



her with much wailing. But He came when they were *chengering*.'

On the night air faintly came again and again the *chenga* – the alarm signal of the tribe.

Marita looked up at me anxiously and whispered, 'Even now in the village the *washenzi*, the tribesmen, wail for someone who has died.'

Wendwa, heavy-eyed now, looked up. 'Bwana, go on.'

'Right. Well, He said to those who wailed, "She is not dead, she is asleep." They laughed with strength, but He took her by the hand and spoke words gently, and she sat up, fully alive again. You see, He was the Son of God.'

Wendwa lay back on her pillow.

'Bwana,' she whispered, 'I think He's here now.'

As we watched, her eyes closed, she relaxed and soon slept. The village drums throbbed still. I walked quietly to my house, knowing that the African girl was right – the Son of God Himself had been with us that night in Tanganyika.