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# Mbuli, Just Another Patient

'Put out your tongue,' I ordered.

The small African boy exhibited coyly the pink tip of that organ.

'Come on,' I said, 'show me the other end.'

'*Yah, Bwana,*' said he, 'is it not tied on?'

'Show me where?' I replied.

A smile creased his dark face, his mouth opened, and out poked the full length.

'*Ah,*' said I sagely, 'I know just the medicine for you.'

He beamed upon me and walked out clutching a small piece of pasteboard which gave him the right, three times that day, to swallow a teaspoonful of a concoction which most definitely would quieten what he had termed the restless snake in his interior.

'*Yunji yaze,* next one come in, I called out.

## Jungle Doctor Attacks Witchcraft

In walked an African woman dressed in a black cloth tucked under her armpits. 'Bwana,' said she, 'I have come for medicine, and did I not bring a gift?'

She displayed a gourd which held about a quarter-of-a-pint of millet seed. Daudi poured some of this on to his palm and blew on to it.

'Yah,' he said, 'look at the *dudus*, weevils.'

'Heh,' said the woman tossing her head.

'Heya, yes,' said Daudi, 'I know; your husband said 'don't take any of the good corn, take some of last year's. The Bwana's a European, he would never know the difference.'

The woman seemed anxious to change the subject.

'Bwana,' she said, 'I have walked from Makasuku.'

'Heh!' said Daudi, 'a three-day journey.'

The woman nodded.

'Bwana, I want your help. There is great trouble in our home.'

'Yah,' said Daudi, 'but why come to us? Are there no other doctors nearer your home?'

The woman looked from side to side.

'Of course,' she said, 'there are our *waganga*, witchdoctors, but I was frightened. You see, he's my only son living. Eye medicine failed with my other two and they died.'

Daudi nodded. 'So you came to us.' My African helper's tone changed.

'Alu,' said the woman, 'I heard that the Bwana had eye medicine, and so I brought my child.'

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'Where is he?' I asked.

The woman walked along the veranda and around the corner. We followed. Sitting in the shade of a well was a small boy.

'*Mbukwa*, good day,' I said.

The child had his hand over his eyes.

'*Mbukwa*,' he replied, not looking up.

'*Itagwa lyako gwe gwe nani?* What's your name?' I asked in Chigogo, the language of Central Tanganyika.

Without moving, he replied, '*Malalanganbuli.*'

I looked at Sechelela, her eyes were twinkling.

'I call you Mbuli,' I replied, 'for short. When you grow up and are tall I'll add the other part.'

The mother smiled. The child put out his hand and moved towards her, but somehow his hand found mine, and then I saw his eyes, swollen with crying and inflamed unbelievably.

'You have pain?' I asked.

His mouth twitched – he nodded.

'You have hunger?'

He shook his head, and then, 'Pain, Bwana, is the enemy of hunger.'

We were in a shadow now. The absence of glare encouraged him to open his eyes.

'Mbuli,' I asked, 'would you like me to help you?'

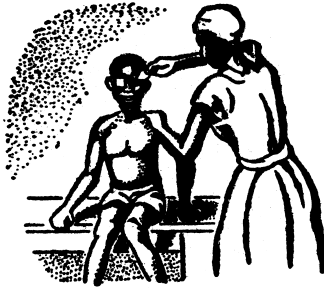
His pathetic eyes were turned towards my face.

'Bwana,' said he, 'I don't like pain.'

We went into the dressing-room. I put drops into the small boy's eyes. He blinked and sat down. 'Is that all?' he asked.

'That's only the beginning,' I said.

Turning to Daudi, I pointed out what was the cause of the trouble – an ulcer on the eye itself. A dish of lotion was brought, cotton wool swabs, bright yellow ointment, some black drops, and a roll of sticking plaster. The African nurse bathed his eyes, put drops into them, smeared ointment round the lids and then cut two flaps of sticking plaster, sticking one just above each of his eyebrows.



'Mbuli,' I said, 'this saves you putting your hand over your eyes. If you want to see anything you can lift up the flap, but if you want to keep the light out, just leave it down.'

'Bwana,' said the little boy, 'I will follow your words.'

He was a most attractive little chap. I expected a screaming match – to be spattered from neck to knee with eyedrops and lotion. Often I had to call in two or three nurses to hold the struggling patient – but Mbuli did not struggle. Instead, he solemnly held my hand and said, 'Thank you, Bwana; will my eyes be better soon?'

'It will be three weeks, Mbuli, and every day I must do what I have done today. You can stay in our hospital; we shall feed your mother, too.'

'*Kah!* But I must...' said the mother and then stopped herself.

I noticed Sechelela, our old African senior nurse, looking at her strangely, but I thought no more about it, and they walked off towards the ward.

'*Yunji yaze,*' I called.

Nothing happened. I stretched out my feet, looking at the drug cupboard over the way behind the shiny enamel of the door on which I could still see faintly the words 'motor spirit.' Above it were mud-coloured streaks on the white-washed wall, the result of a thunderstorm, a leaky roof, and sun-dried bricks.

The door of the dressing-room opened, and the African nurse put her head through.

'Dressings report, Bwana. Seventeen ulcers, twelve eyes, four ears syringed, and the little boy with the hyena bite.'

'A nice collection,' I replied. 'There doesn't seem to be anybody else, and about time, too; I've seen eighty-one people this morning.'

Turning, I saw her large eyes peering through the window behind me. All I could see was the business end of a spear which had appeared in the place quite soundlessly.

'Bwana,' said a deep voice, '*hodi?* May I come in?' '*Karibu,* come in,' I replied.

In walked an African man who obviously had travelled a considerable distance. His hair was done in the latest fashion, red mud having been worked into his tight curly hair. It fitted above his ears like a tight skull cup. He came in, put his spear and knobbed stick

carefully in one corner, and squatted down in front of me, after dumping a woven palm-leaf mat in the middle of the floor. Daudi picked it up and examined it. My interest was not on the mat but upon a creature the size of my thumb-nail, and of a greyish-green colour, that moved slowly on its sinister-looking legs across the floor towards me. I picked up a piece of blotting-paper, scooped it up and walked outside with the creature.

Over my shoulder I called in English, 'Buy all the mats he's got, Daudi, at thirty cents each.'

Daudi nodded. 'Bwana, he's the uncle of the child with the eye. He has been very surprised to see him here.'

*'Mm!* Put the mats in the store, Daudi.'

I turned to four of the dispensers, who had just finished their morning task of giving out medicines and filling up ward bottles. I held the insect out for their inspection. They looked at it and grinned.

*'Ikutapa,*' they replied in chorus.

'In English?' I asked.

'Tick, sir,' replied one of the lads, and in his best form, 'she bites very nasty, much discomfort, fevers and such.'

'Quite,' I replied, 'quite.'

Turning to the first lad, I said, 'In the dust there draw me a picture of what you would see under the microscope if that tick bit you.'

The lad smoothed out an area on the path, marked out a large circle with his foot and proceeded to draw.

To the second one I said, 'You go farther up the path and draw me what his temperature chart would look like if he had been bitten.'

To the third lad I said, 'Now you get ready to tell me what treatment you would give.'

All were busy for a moment.

From a little grass-thatched hut fifty yards away came the *thump-thump-thump* of a great drum. It was what the locals call *sao tano*, the fifth hour of the day, which to them starts at sunrise. From the various wards of the hospital emerged African nurses and dispensers. They all came across to me to report. The first lad had a syringe in his hand and a rubber-capped bottle.

'Check, Bwana,' he said, bringing up exactly five drops into the syringe.

'Who's it for?' I asked.

'The man with the broken leg, Bwana, whose name is Mwalimu.'

'Right,' I said.

Behind me was a solemn-looking lad dressed in shirt and shorts with a white apron that indicated he was a pathologist. He worked all day with microscopes, test tubes and the like.

'Bwana,' said he, 'here are the latest leprosy tests.'

In very neat handwriting he showed me a list of names. Against four of them was a dash.

'Good,' I said, 'Kalebi here has got three negative tests, now we can regard him as symptom free. How about the little fellow who came in because of his cough and who we discovered had leprosy?'

'Bwana,' said the dispenser, 'he has still many germs, but his weight is increasing. He will, I think, do well.'

'Splendid,' I replied, 'keep them going on the treatment.'

'Bwana,' said the nurse behind me, 'What a day, what a night – nine babies, nothing unusual; I did them all myself, and now I'm going to bed. I bathed them all, oiled them all, put drops in their eyes, they are all in bed, their mothers are comfortable and everything is quiet in the ward, and I suppose it will stay quiet until tonight when I come on again.' She tossed her head and smiled, and went off towards her home, her own baby on her back, leading by the hand a three-year-old who had spent the night at the hospital while his mother, a fully-trained African nurse, had been very much on duty.

'Excuse me, sir,' said a quiet voice, and I saw another African girl who was a teacher in our nurses' training school, 'But may I remind you that you have a lecture for the nurses at eleven-thirty?'

'Right,' I answered, 'I'll be there, Yuditi.'

The three lads who had been busily engaged in writing on the ground said, 'Come and look, Bwana.'

The first showed me a picture – large round affairs the size of the palm of your hand with a series of corkscrew-like drawings in between them.





'Explain this to me,' I said.

'Bwana,' said he, 'the round things are the blood cells, the other things are the *dudus*, germs, that give tick fever.'

The second lad had drawn a picture that would convey nothing unless you were in the know. A vague wobbly line moved along the path for some seven or eight footmarks. You could see how he had measured it out with his bare feet. Beyond that, a line suddenly shot up and looked like a series of mountain peaks. This went on for four or five footmarks, then down it went again.

'Bwana,' said he, 'the temperature goes up for a time and after that it goes down for a while, and then it goes up and then it goes down, and then it goes up and then it comes down.'

'That,' I replied, 'is why they call it relapsing fever.'

Turning to the third lad, I said, 'What happens if you don't have treatment?'

He had not been idle while his companions had been drawing, for he suddenly produced a spade, and with a mournful expression on his face, commenced to dig. Everyone laughed.

'And all of that trouble,' I said, 'because of one little tick the size of your thumbnail, a tick that makes no noise, that bites you when you are asleep, a tick that is so easy to kill when you know it's there.'





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I squashed the offending brute under my heel.

'Bwana,' came a voice, 'we are ready for the lecture.'

'Right,' I replied, 'coming.'

'And, Bwana,' called Daudi, 'five cataract operations at *saa nane*, two o'clock.'