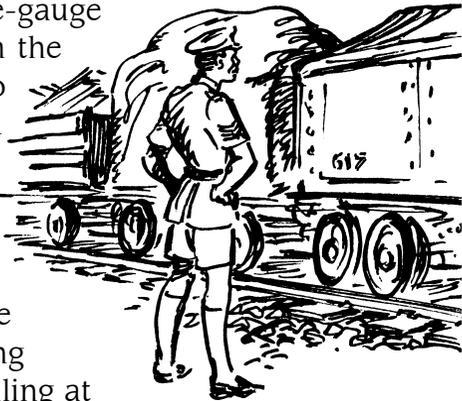


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Bhang!

'That's *bhang*, *hash-hish!*' Mboga shouted to make himself heard above the clatter of the railway yard. 'It's an evil medicine that makes some people as mad as a charging rhino and others too stupid to move off an ants' nest.'

We were standing near the railway station at Dodoma in Tanzania along a path that was some twenty paces from the metre-gauge track which led from the East African coast to the Great Lakes. A large African police sergeant marched a gaudily dressed young man of the local tribe. The prisoner was frothing at the mouth and yelling at the top of his voice.





Jungle Doctor and the Whirlwind

The whistle of a goods train sounded long and shrill. The policeman glanced over his shoulder and in that second was tripped by the frenzied man who dragged his arm free and dashed across the rails almost under the wheels of the engine.

The driver yelled, '*Mpumbafu Nye!* You stupid muddle head!'

The irate sergeant stood with his hands on his hips. To attempt to follow was hopeless. There were thirty trucks in that train and by the time the guard's van had passed, his prisoner was lost in the crowded streets.

We walked across the shaded avenue of trees. The sergeant shook his head. 'Behold, he nearly became food for vultures and hyenas. Many are using this marijuana these days. We will certainly catch him again, but he can do all sorts of damage in the meantime.'

'Is it not possible to destroy the gardens of those who grow this Indian hemp plant?' I asked.

The big policeman shrugged his shoulders. 'To grow is not forbidden by the law.'

'*Kah!*' grinned Mboga. 'So he and those like him smoke their cigarettes, snuff their snuff, lose their wisdom and give much trouble to you and to the other *askaris*.'

The sergeant nodded. 'And they can bring difficult work to you at the hospital. Are you on safari, Bwana doctor?'

'Yes, and we're nearly finished. We're visiting small hospitals, giving out medicine in villages way out in the bush and finding those who need to come into hospital for operations on their eyes.'

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'And your helper is this man of many words, Mboga?' I nodded. 'Travel with special care. There is trouble about these days since they prepare to grow many peanuts in the fertile country below the hills near Kongwa.'

'What kind of trouble, Bwana sergeant?'

He shook his head. 'Many who are *fundis* - experts - at taking what isn't their own are about. They come from all over the land and even from Kenya. They will steal anything they think they can sell - even the wheels from your car.'

Mboga laughed. 'There is small profit in the wheels of Sukuma.'

I explained. '*Sukuma* in Swahili means "push" and that is the best way to start her. See, is she not waiting for us on a slope?'

'*Heeh.*' Mboga's eyes twinkled. 'This we find the easiest way to wake her from sleep.'

As we opened the doors of the veteran Ford the *askari* saluted. '*Kwaheri* - goodbye - may your safari be successful.'

Sukuma coughed and sputtered and then moved sedately away from the township. We shuddered our way along the corrugated gravel road leaving behind us a cloud of fine dust.

Soon we were driving through thorn bush country dotted every now and then with small hills of piled-up granite boulders. In places there were patches of dried stalks of maize and millet.

Mboga pointed with his chin. 'Where the soil is good they plant. These last two years the rains have been

good. They started in November and went through to March. The harvest was excellent. This year I fear it will be different. I fear for the peanut planters.'

Lorry after lorry came towards us almost smothering us with red, powdery dust. '*Kumbe!* They pay much money to those who drive trucks these days.' A wistful note came into Mboga's voice. 'I wish I had much money, but a second-year male nurse receives few shillings for much work.'

I changed from Swahili into English. 'Listen, Spinach, it is a wise saying that enough is enough.'

He nodded and went on in Swahili. 'I understand you, but many think your words have small value and that your proverb is of the same sort. At the peanut growing there is money for those who want it and have cunning in their heads. *Kumbe!* There are many who love money.' He paused and spoke slowly and with emphasis, 'And I am one of them.'

We drove along in silence for a while. I avoided the larger potholes and accelerated when we came to a long downhill stretch. With Sukuma going as fast as she knew how, we jolted less and entered into a patch of thorn bush jungle. 'Tell me, Spinach, is this a piece of country where there are rhinos?'

He nodded vigorously. 'And there are those that trap them in a way that would bring you no joy. They make a big loop in a strong piece of wire and put it along the paths that the great animals travel to a water hole. *Kifaru* blunders along and pokes his head into the loop.' Mboga turned towards me and acted out the scene. 'It tightens. He struggles. It cuts into him. He battles. He runs this way. He runs that and

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the wire cuts in deeper and deeper. He is frantic with pain but all his efforts are useless. Perhaps for a day or longer he struggles and then he dies. Then comes the trapper, hacks the great horn from the bridge of the dead beast's nose and sells it to one of the traders and makes much money.'

'And the trader makes a lot more money, I suppose. But what of the rhino?'



'Food for hyaenas and vultures and thousands of flies and ants.'

'How would you like to be caught in a trap like that, Mboga?'

He shook his head. 'It is a thing of no joy.'

'You mean to say that if you saw a trap you would not walk into it?'

He laughed. 'Do you think I'm stupid, Bwana doctor?'

'I hope not. *Kah!* How I hope not.'

We turned off from the main road and drove between great grey boulders over a wide stretch of red earth. Occasional cacti stuck out their spikes. Crows flew

overhead to roost in a grove of baobab trees. Abruptly the wheel was almost wrenched from my hands. We skidded wildly and pulled up against a thorn tree, its limbs weighed down with weaver birds' nests.

Mboga sighed. 'There is small joy in punctures. Let us mend this one with speed and skill or there will be no answer for the famine that calls within me.' He used a trick he had learned from Samson, our hospital strong man, and lifted the whole of the left side of the car off the ground while I slipped the jack into place. He grunted and started to unscrew the punctured wheel.

I lay at full length under the old box-bodied Ford. I could see Tanzania from an unusual angle. In front lay the apology for a road. Framed between the front wheels was a typical picture of the thorn bush savanna country: a squat Gogo house - mud-and-wattle walled with a bundle of grass and some pumpkins on the flat roof, and beyond it a boy armed with a knobbed stick was driving a few hungry-looking hump-backed cattle and an assortment of goats and fat-tailed sheep.

Mboga levered off the tyre, blew up the punctured tube and placed it on a patch of dust. A small crater in the dust showed us where the puncture was. He marked it quickly and ran his hand round inside the tyre cover. Using an old pair of dental forceps he drew out a five-centimetre long thorn. Ten minutes later we were on safari again. Mboga was handling the thorn thoughtfully.

'It's hard, sharp, difficult to see, and the cause of all our trouble.'

I nodded. 'In a way it's a trap too.'

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'Trap?' questioned Mboga. 'You're talking a lot about traps this afternoon.'

'You started it. You said, "I wish I had much money. I love money."'

'Well, why not, Bwana? If you have money you can buy things.'

'Spinach, my friend, you do not understand. Would Rhino have put his head into the noose if he'd seen it? Would I have driven over that thorn if I had seen it sticking up in the dust? This is the cunning of traps. Animals and people don't realise they're there.'

'Yoh, when you call me Spinach I know you have something you want me to remember.'

'It's what your name means in English and I like the sound of it.'

We drove over a dry riverbed and up the steep bank on the far side. Ahead of us was a hospital where we would work for a few days. People ran out to greet us.

'Make sure you deal properly with your famine,' I laughed, 'for we will be busy tomorrow. I will have many injections to give and you will have the chance to show your skill in bandaging. Oh, and, Mboga, would you see if Elisha has finished his building? Ask him to be ready to return with us in two days' time.'

