

JANE MCCLUSTER, who had been a nurse before she married, started a clinic on the farm within a month of arriving. Though she had been born and brought up in town, her experience of natives was wide, for she had been a sister in the native wards of the city hospital, by choice, for years; she liked nursing natives, and explained her feeling in the words: 'They are just like children, and appreciate what you do for them.' So, when she had taken a thorough diagnosing kind of look at the farm natives, she exclaimed, 'Poor things!' and set about turning an old dairy into a dispensary. Her husband was pleased; it would save money in the long run by cutting down illness in the compound.

Willie McCluster who had also been born and raised in South Africa was nevertheless unmistakably and determinedly Scottish. His accent might be emphasized for loyalty's sake, but he had kept all the fine qualities of his people unimpaired by a slowing and relaxing climate. He was shrewd, vigorous, earthy, practical and kind. In appearance he was largely built, with a square bony face, a tight mouth, and eyes whose fierce blue glance was tempered by the laughter wrinkles about them. He became a farmer young, having planned the step for years: he was not one of those who drift on to the land because of discontent with an office, or because of failure, or vague yearnings towards 'freedom.' Jane; a cheerful and competent girl who knew what she wanted, trifled with her numerous suitors with one eye on Willie, who wrote her weekly letters from the farming college in the Transvaal. As soon as his four years training were completed, they married.

They were then twenty-seven, and felt themselves well-equipped for a useful and enjoyable life. Their house was planned for a family. They would have been delighted if a baby had been born the old-fashioned nine months after marriage. As it was, a baby did not come; and when two years had passed Jane took a journey into the city to see a doctor. She was not so much unhappy as indignant to find she needed an operation before she could have children. She did not associate illness with herself, and felt as if the whole thing were out of character. But she submitted to the operation, and to waiting a further two years before starting a family, with her usual practical good sense. But it subdued her a little. The uncertainty preyed on her, in spite of herself; and it was because of her rather wistful, disappointed frame of mind at this time that her work in the clinic became so important to her. Whereas, in the beginning, she had dispensed medicines and good advice as a routine, every morning for a couple of hours after breakfast, she now threw herself into it, working hard, keeping herself at full stretch, trying to attack causes rather than symptoms.

The compound was the usual farm compound of insanitary mud and grass huts; the diseases she had to deal with were caused by poverty and bad feedings

Having lived in the country all her life, she did not make the mistake of expecting too much; she had that shrewd, ironical patience that achieves more with backward natives than any amount of angry idealism.

First she chose an acre of good soil for vegetables, and saw to the planting and the cultivating herself. One cannot overthrow the customs of centuries in a season, and she was patient with the natives who would not at first touch food they were not used to. She persuaded and lectured. She gave the women of the compound lessons in cleanliness and baby care. She drew up diet sheets and ordered sacks of citrus from the big estates; in fact, it was not long before it was Jane who organized the feeding of Willie's two-hundred-strong labour force, and he was glad to have her help. Neighbours laughed at them; for it is even now customary to feed natives" on maize meal only, with an occasional slaughtered ox for a feasting; but there was no doubt Willie's natives were healthier than most and he got far more work out of them. On cold winter mornings Jane would stand dispensing cans of hot cocoa from a petrol drum with a slow fire burning under it to the natives before they went to the fields; and if a neighbour passed and laughed at her, she set her lips and said good-humouredly: 'It's good sound commonsense, that's what it is. Besides—poor things, poor things!' Since the McClusters were respected in the district, they were humoured in what seemed a ridiculous eccentricity.

But it was not easy, not easy at all. It was of no use to cure hookworm-infested feet that would become reinfected in a week, since none wore shoes; nothing could be done about bilharzia, when all the rivers were full of it; and the natives continued to live in the dark and smoky huts.

But the children could be helped; Jane most particularly loved the little black piccanins. She knew that fewer children died in her compound than in any for miles around, and this was her pride. She would spend whole mornings explaining to the women about dirt and proper feeding; if a child became ill, she would sit up all night with it, and cried bitterly if it died. The name for her among the natives was The Goodhearted One. They trusted her. Though mostly they hated and feared the white man's medicines, they let Jane have her way, because they felt she was prompted by kindness; and day by day the crowds of natives waiting for medical attention became larger. This filled Jane with pride; and every morning she made her way to the big stone-floored, thatched building at the back of the house that smelled always of disinfectants and soap, accompanied by the house-boy who helped her, and spent there many hours helping the mothers and the children and the labourers who had hurt themselves at work.

Little Tembi was brought to her for help at the time when she knew she could not hope to have a child of her own for at least two years. He had what the natives call 'the hot weather sickness.' His mother had not brought him soon enough, and by the time Jane took him in her arms he was a tiny weazened skeleton, loosely covered with harsh greyish skin, the stomach painfully distended. 'He will die,' moaned the mother from outside the clinic door, with that fatalistic note that always annoyed Jane. 'Nonsense!' she said briskly—even more briskly because she was so afraid he would.

She laid the child warmly in a lined basket, laid the house-boy and she looked grimly into each other's faces. Jane said sharply to the mother, who was whimpering helplessly from the floor where she squatted with her hands to her face: 'Stop crying. That doesn't do any good. Didn't I cure your first child when he had the same trouble?' But that other little boy had not been nearly as sick as this one.

When Jane had carried the basket into the kitchen, and set it beside the fire for warmth, she saw the same grim look on the cookboy's face as she had seen on the houseboy's—and could feel on her own. 'This child is not going to die,' she said to herself. 'I won't let it! I won't let it.' It seemed to her that if she could pull little Tembi through, the life of

the child she herself wanted so badly would be granted her. She sat beside the basket all day, willing the baby to live, with medicines on the table beside her, and the cookboy and the houseboy helping her where they could. At night the mother came from the compound with her blanket; and the two women kept vigil together. Because of the fixed imploring eyes of the black woman Jane was even more spurred to win through: and the next day, and the next, and through the long nights, she fought for Tembi's life even when she could see from the faces of the house natives that they thought she was beaten. Once, towards dawn of one night when the air was cold and still, the little body chilled to the touch, and there seemed no breath in it, Jane held it close to the warmth of her own breast murmuring fiercely over and over again: You will live, you will live—and when the sun rose the infant was breathing deeply and its feet were pulsing in her hand.

When it became clear that he would not die, the whole house was pervaded with a feeling of happiness and victory. Willie came to see the child, and said affectionately to Jane: 'Nice work, old girl. I never thought you'd do it.' The cookboy and the houseboy were warm and friendly towards Jane, and brought her gratitude presents of eggs and ground meal. As for the mother, she took her child in her arms with trembling joy and wept as she thanked Jane.

Jane herself, though exhausted and weak, was too happy to rest or sleep: she was thinking of the child she would have. She was not a superstitious person, and the thing could not be described in such terms: she felt that she had thumbed her nose at death, that she had sent death slinking from her door in defeat, and now she would be strong to make life, fine strong children of her own; she could imagine them springing up beside her, lovely children conceived from her own strength and power against sneaking death.

Little Tembi was brought by his mother up to the house every day for a month, partly to make sure he would not relapse, partly because Jane had grown to love him. When he was quite well, and no longer came to the clinic, Jane would ask the cookboy after him, and sometimes sent a message that he should be fetched to see her. The native woman would then come smiling to the back door with little Tembi on her back and her older child at her skirts, and Jane would run down the steps, smiling with pleasure, waiting impatiently as the cloth was unwound from the mother's back, revealing Tembi curled there, thumb in mouth, with great black solemn eyes, his other hand clutching the stuff of his mother's dress for security. Jane would carry him indoors to show Willie. 'Look,' she would say tenderly, 'here's my little Tembi. Isn't he a sweet little piccanin?'

He grew into a fat shy little boy, staggering uncertainly from his mother's arms to Jane's. Later, when he was strong on his legs, he would run to Jane and laugh as she caught him up. There was always fruit or sweets for him when he visited the house, always a hug from Jane and a good-humoured, amused smile from Willie.

He was two years old when Jane said to his mother: 'When the rains come this year I shall also have a child.' And the two women, forgetting the difference in colour, were happy together because of the coming children: the black woman was expecting her third baby.

Tembi was with his mother when she came to visit the cradle of the little white boy. Jane held out her hand to him and said: 'Tembi, how are you?' Then she took her baby from the cradle and held it out, saying: 'Come and see my baby, Tembi.' But Tembi backed away, as if afraid, and began to cry. 'Silly Tembi,' said Jane affectionately; and sent the houseboy to fetch some fruit as a present. She did not make the gift herself, as she was holding her child.

She was absorbed by this new interest, and very soon found herself pregnant again. She did not forget little Tembi, but thought of him rather as he had been, the little toddler whom she had loved wistfully when she was childless. Once she caught sight of Tembi's mother walking along one of the farm roads, leading a child by the hand and said: 'But where's Tembi?' Then she saw the child was Tembi, She greeted him; but afterwards said to Willie: 'Oh dear, it's such a pity when they grow up, isn't it?' 'He could hardly be described as grown-up,' said Willie, smiling indulgently at her where she sat with her two infants on her lap. 'You won't be able to have them climbing all over you when we've a dozen,' he teased her—they had decided to wait another two years and then have some more; Willie came from a family of nine children. 'Who said a dozen?' exclaimed Jane tartly, playing up to him. 'Why not?' asked Willie. 'We can afford it.' 'How do you think I can do everything?' grumbled Jane pleasantly. For she was very busy.

She had not let the work at the clinic lapse; it was still she who did the ordering and planning of the labourers' food; and she looked after her children without help—she did not even have the customary native nanny. She could not really be blamed for losing touch with little Tembi.

He was brought to her notice one evening when Willie was having the usual weekly discussion with the bossboy over the farm work. He was short of labour again and the rains had been heavy and the lands were full of weeds. As fast as the gangs of natives worked through a field it seemed that the weeds were higher than ever. Willie suggested that it might be possible to take some of the older children from their mothers for a few weeks. He already employed a gang of piccanins, of between about nine and fifteen years old, who did lighter work; but he was not 'sure that all the available children were working. The bossboy said he would see what he could find.

As a result of this discussion Willie and Jane were called one day to the front door by a smiling cookboy to see little Tembi, now about six years old, standing proudly beside his father, who was also smiling. 'Here is a man to work for you,' said Tembi's father to Willie, pushing forward Tembi, who jibbed like a little calf, standing with his head lowered and his fingers in his mouth. He looked so tiny, standing all by himself, that Jane exclaimed compassionately: 'But, Willie, he's just a baby still!' Tembi was quite naked, save for a string of blue beads cutting into the flesh of his fat stomach. Tembi's father explained that, his older child, who was eight, had been herding the calves for a year now, and that there was no reason why Tembi should not help him.

'But I don't need two herdboys for the calves,' protested Willie. And then, to Tembi: 'And now, my big man, what money do you want?' At this Tembi dropped his head still lower, twisted his feet in the dust, and muttered: 'Five shilling's.' 'Five shillings a month!' exclaimed Willie indignantly. 'What next! Why, the ten-year-old piccanins get that much.' And then, feeling Jane's hand on his arm, he said hurriedly: 'Oh, all right, four and sixpence. He can help his big brother with the calves.' Jane, Willie, the cookboy and Tembi's father stood laughing sympathetically as Tembi lifted his head, stuck out his stomach even further, and swaggered off down the path, beaming with pride. 'Well,' sighed Jane, 'I never would have thought it. Little Tembi! Why, it seems only the other day...'

Tembi, promoted to a loincloth, joined his brother with the calves; and as the two children ran alongside the animals, everyone turned to look smiling after the tiny black child, strutting with delight, and importantly swishing the twig his father had cut him from the bush as if he were a full-grown driver with his team of beasts.

The calves were supposed to stay all day near the kraal; when the cows had been driven away to the grazing, Tembi and his brother squatted under a tree and watched the calves, rising to run, shouting, if one attempted to stray. For a year Tembi was 'apprentice to the job; and then his brother joined the gang of older piccanins who worked with the hoe. Tembi was then seven years old, and responsible ' for twenty calves, some standing higher than he. Normally a much older child had the job; but Willie was chronically short of labour, as all the farmers were, and he needed every pair of hands he could find, for work in the fields.

'Did you know your Tembi is a proper herdsboy now?' Willie said to Jane, laughing, one day. 'What!' exclaimed Jane. 'That baby! Why, its absurd.' She looked jealously at her own children, because of Tembi; she was the kind of woman who hates to think of her children growing up. But she now had three, and was very busy indeed. She forgot the little black boy.

Then one day a catastrophe happened. It was very hot, and Tembi fell asleep under the trees. His father came up to the house, uneasily apologetic, to say that some of the calves had got into the mealie field and trampled down the plants. Willie was angry. It was that futile, simmering anger that cannot be assuaged, for it is caused by something that cannot be remedied: children had to herd the calves because adults were needed for more important work, and one could not be really angry with a child of Tembi's age. Willie had Tembi fetched to the house, and gave him a stern lecture about the terrible thing he had done. Tembi was crying when he turned away; he stumbled off to the compound with his father's hand resting on his shoulder, because the tears were streaming so fast he could not have directed his own steps. But in spite of the tears, and his contrition, it all happened again not very long afterwards. He fell asleep in the drowsily-warm shade, and when he awoke, towards evening, all the calves had strayed into the fields and flattened acres of mealies. Unable to face punishment he ran away, crying, into the bush. He was found that night by his father who cuffed him lightly round the head for running away.

And now it was a very serious matter indeed. Willie was angry. To have happened once—that was bad, but forgivable. But twice, and within a month! He did not at first summon Tembi, but had a consultation with his father. 'We must do something he will not forget, as a lesson,' said Willie. Tembi's father said the child had already been punished. 'You have beaten him?' asked Willie. But he knew that natives do not beat their children, or so seldom, it was not likely that Tembi had really been punished. 'You say you have beaten him?' he insisted; and saw, from the way the native turned away his eyes and said, 'Yes, baas,' that it was not true. 'Listen,' said Willie. 'Those calves straying must have cost me 'about thirty pounds. There's nothing I can do. I can't get it back from Tembi, can I? And now I'm going to stop it happening again.' Tembi's father did not reply. 'You will fetch Tembi up here, to the house, and cut a switch from the bush, and I will give him a beating.' 'Yes, baas,' said Tembi's father, after a pause.

When Jane heard of the punishment she said: 'Shame! Beating my little Tembi...'

When the hour came, she took away her children so that they would not have such an unpleasant thing in their memories. Tembi was brought up to the verandah, clutching his father's hand and shivering with fear. Willie said he did not like the business of beating; he considered it necessary, however, and intended to go through with it. He took the long light switch from the cookboy, who had cut it from the bush, since Tembi's father had come without it, and ran the sharply-whistling thing loosely through the air to frighten Tembi. Tembi shivered more than ever, and pressed his face against his father's thighs. 'Come here, Tembi.' Tembi did not move; so his father lifted him close to Willie. 'Bend down.' Tembi did not bend down, so his father bent him down, hiding the small face against his own legs. Then Willie glanced smilingly but uncomfortably at the cookboy, the houseboy and Tembi's father, who were all regarding him with stern, unresponsive faces, and swished the wand backwards and forwards over Tembi's back; he wanted them to see he was only trying to frighten Tembi for the good of his upbringing. But they did not smile at all. Finally Willie said in an awful, solemn voice; 'Now, Tembi!' And then, having made the occasion solemn and angry, he switched Tembi lightly, three times, across the buttocks, and threw the switch away into the bush. 'Now you will never do it again, Tembi, will you?' he said. Tembi stood quite still, shuddering, in front of him, and would not meet his eyes. His father gently took his hand and led him away back home.

'Is it over?' asked Jane, appearing from the house. 'I didn't hurt him,' said Willie crossly. He was annoyed, because he felt the black men were annoyed with him. 'They want to have it both ways,' he said. 'If the child is old enough to earn money, then he's old enough to be responsible. Thirty pounds!'

'I was thinking of our little Freddie,' Jane said emotionally. Freddie was their first child. Willie said impatiently: 'And what's the good of thinking of him?' 'Oh no good, Willie. No good at all,' agreed Jane tearfully. 'It does seem awful, though. Do you remember him, Willie? Do you remember what a sweet little thing he was?' Willie could not afford to remember the sweetness of the baby Tembi at that moment; and he was displeased with Jane for reminding him; there was a small constriction of feeling between them for a little while, which soon dissolved, for they were good friends, and were in the same mind about most things.

The calves did not stray again. At the end of the month, when Tembi stepped forward to take his four shillings and sixpence wages, Willie smiled at him and said: 'Well, Tembi, and how are things with you?' 'I want more money,' said Tembi boldly. 'Wha-a-at!' exclaimed Willie, astounded. He called to Tembi's father, who stepped out of the gang of waiting natives, to hear what Willie wanted to say. 'This little rascal of yours lets the cattle stray twice, and then says he wants more money.' Willie said this loudly, so that everyone could hear; and there was laughter from the labourers. But Tembi kept his head high, and said defiantly: 'Yes, baas, I want more money.' 'You'll get your bottom tanned,' said Willie, only half-indignant; and Tembi went off sulkily, holding his silver in his hand, with amused glances following him.

He was now about seven, very thin and lithe, though he still carried his protuberant stomach before him. His legs were flat and spindly, and his arms broader below the elbow than above. He was not crying now, nor stumbling. His small thin shape was straight, and—so it seemed— angry. Willie forgot the incident.

But next month the child again stood his ground and argued stubbornly for an increase. Willie raised him to five and sixpence, saying resignedly that Jane had spoiled him. Tembi bit his lips in triumph, and as he walked off gave little joyous skipping steps, finally breaking into a run as he reached the trees. He was still the youngest of the working children, and was now earning as much as some three or four years older than he: this made them grumble, but it was recognized, because of Jane's attitude, that he was a favourite.

Now, in the normal run of things, it would have been a year, at least, before he got any more money. But the very month following, he claimed the right to another increase. This time the listening natives made sounds of amused protest; the lad was forgetting himself. As for Willie, he was really annoyed. There was something insistent, something demanding, in the child's manner that was almost impertinent. He said sharply: 'If you don't stop this nonsense, I'll tell your father to teach you a lesson where it hurts.' Tembi's eyes glowed angrily, and he attempted to argue, but Willie dismissed him curtly, turning to the next labourer.

A few minutes later Jane was fetched to the back door by the cook, and there stood Tembi, shifting in embarrassment from foot to foot, but grinning at her eagerly. 'Why, Tembi...' she said vaguely. She had been feeding the children, and her mind was filled with thoughts of bathing and getting them to bed — thoughts very far from Tembi. Indeed, she had to look twice before she recognized him, for she carried always in the back of her mind the picture of that sweet fat black baby who bore, for her, the name Tembi. Only his eyes were the same: large dark glowing eyes, now imploringly fixed on her. 'Tell the boss to give me more money,' he beseeched.

Jane laughed kindly. 'But, Tembi, how can I do that? I've nothing to do with the farm. You know that.' 'Tell him, missus. Tell him, my missus,' he beseeched. Jane felt the beginnings, of annoyance. But she chose to laugh again, and said, 'Wait a minute, Tembi.' She went inside and fetched from the children's supper table some slices of cake, which she folded into a piece of paper and thrust into Tembi's hand. She was touched to see the child's face spread into a beaming smile: he had forgotten about the wages, the cake did as well or better. 'Thank you, thank you,' he said; and, turning, scuttled off into the trees.

And now Jane was given no chance of forgetting Tembi. He would come up to the house on a Sunday with quaint little mud toys for the children, or with the feather from a brilliant bird he had found in the bush; even a handful of wild flowers tied with wisps of grass. Always Jane welcomed him, talked to him, and rewarded him with small gifts. Then she had another child, and was very busy again. Sometimes she was too occupied to go herself to the back door. She would send her servant with an apple or a few sweets.

Soon after, Tembi appeared at the clinic one morning with his toe bound up. When Jane removed the dirty bit of cloth, she saw a minute cut, the sort of thing no native whether child or adult, would normally take any notice of at all. But she bound it properly for him, and even dressed it good-naturedly when he 'appeared again, several days later. Then, only a week afterwards, there was a small cut on his finger. Jane said impatiently: 'Look here, Tembi, I don't run this clinic for nonsense of this kind. When the child stared up at her blankly, those big dark eyes fixed on her with an intensity that made her uncomfortable, she directed the houseboy to translate the remark into dialect, for she thought Tembi had not understood. He said, stammering: 'Missus, my missus, I come to see you only.' But Jane laughed and sent him away. He did not go far. Later, when all the other patients had gone, she saw him standing a little way off, looking hopefully at her. 'What is it?' she asked, a little crossly, for she could hear the new baby crying for attention inside the house.

'I want to work for you,' said Tembi. 'But, Tembi, I don't need another boy. Besides, you are too small for housework. When you are older, perhaps.' 'Let me look after the children.' Jane did not smile, for it was quite usual to employ small piccanins as nurses for children not much younger than themselves. She might even have considered it, but she said: 'Tembi, I have just arranged for a nanny to come and help me. Perhaps later on, I'll remember you, and if I need someone to help the nanny I'll send for you. First you must learn to work well. You must work well with the calves and not let them stray; and then we'll know you are a good boy, and you can come to the house and help me with the children.'

Tembi departed on this occasion with lingering steps; and some time later Jane, glancing from the window, saw him standing at the edge of the bush gazing towards the house. She despatched the houseboy to send him away, saying that she would not have him loitering round the house doing nothing.

Jane, too, was now feeling that she had spoiled Tembi, that he had 'got above himself.' And now nothing happened for quite a long time. Then Jane missed her diamond engagement ring. She used often to take it off when doing household things; so that she was not at first concerned. After several days she searched thoroughly for it, but it could not be found. A little later a pearl brooch was missing. And there were several small losses: a spoon used for the baby's feeding, a pair of scissors, a silver christening mug. Jane said crossly to Willie that there must be a poltergeist.<sup>33</sup> 'I had the thing in my hand and when I turned round it was gone. It's just silly. Things don't vanish like that.' 'A black poltergeist, perhaps,' said Willie. 'How about the cook?' 'Don't be ridiculous,' said Jane, a little too quickly. 'Both the house-boys have been with us since we came to the farm,' But suspicion flared in her, nevertheless. It was a well-worn maxim that no native, no matter how friendly, could be trusted; scratch any one of them, and you found a thief. Then she looked at Willie, understood that he was feeling the same, and was as ashamed of his feelings as she was. The houseboys were almost personal friends. 'Nonsense,' said Jane firmly. 'I don't believe a word of it.' But no solution offered itself, and things continued to vanish.

One day Tembi's father asked to speak to the Boss. He untied a piece of cloth, laid it on the ground—and there were all the missing articles. 'But not Tembi, surely, protested Jane. Tembi's father, awkward in his embarrassment, explained that he had happened to be passing the cattle kraals, and had happened to notice the little boy sitting on his antheap, in the shade, playing with his treasures. 'Of course he had no idea of their value,' appealed Jane. 'It was just because they were so shiny and glittering.' And indeed, as they stood there, looking down at the lamplight glinting on the silver and the diamonds, it was easy to see how a child could be fascinated. 'Well, and what are we going to do?' asked Willie practically. Jane did not reply directly to the question; she exclaimed helplessly: 'Do you realize that the

little imp must have been watching me doing things round the house for weeks, nipping in when my back was turned for a moment—he must be quick as a snake.' 'Yes, but what are we going to do?' 'Just give him a good talking-to,' said Jane, who did not know why she felt so dismayed and lost. She was 'angry; but far more distressed—there was something ugly and persistent in this planned, deliberate thieving, that she could not bear to associate with little Tembi, whom she had saved from death. 'A talking-to won't do any good,' said Willie. Tembi was whipped again; this time properly, with no nonsense about making the switch whistle for effect. He was made to expose his bare bottom (across his father's knees, and when he got up, Willie said with satisfaction: 'He's not going to be comfortable sitting down for a week.' 'But, Willie, there's blood.' said Jane. For as Tembi walked off stiffly, his legs straddled apart from the pain, his fists thrust into his streaming eyes, reddish patches appeared on the stuff of his trousers. Willie said angrily: 'Well, what do you expect? The child stole pounds worth of stuff—what do you expect me to do— make him a present of it and say: How clever of you?' 'But blood, Willie!' 'I didn't know I was hitting so hard,' admitted Willie. He examined the long flexible twig in his hands, before throwing it away, as if surprised at its effectiveness. 'That must have hurt,' he said doubtfully. 'Still, he deserved it. Now stop crying, Jane. He won't do that again.'

But Jane did not stop crying. She could not bear to think of the beating; and Willie, no matter what he said, was uncomfortable when he remembered it. They would have been pleased to let Tembi slip from their minds for a while, and have him reappear later, when there had been time for kindness to grow in them again.

But it was not a week before he demanded to be made nurse to the children: he was now big enough, he said; and Jane had promised. Jane was so astonished she could not speak to him. She went indoors, shutting the door on him; and when she knew he was still lingering there for speech with her, sent out the houseboy to say she was not having a thief as nurse for her children.

A few weeks later he asked again; and again she refused. Then he took to waylaying her every day, sometimes several times a day: 'Missus, my missus, let me work near you, let me work near you.' Always she refused, and always she grew more angry.

At last, the sheer persistence of the thing defeated her. She said: 'I won't have you as a nurse, but you can help me with the vegetable garden,' Tembi was sullen, but he presented himself at the garden next day, which was not the one near the house, but the fenced patch near the compound, for the use of the natives. Jane employed a garden boy to run it, telling him when was the time to plant, explaining about compost 'and the proper treatment of soil. Tembi was to help him.

She did not often go to the garden; it ran of itself. Sometimes, passing, she saw that beds full of vegetables were running to waste; this meant that a new batch of natives were in the compound, natives who had to be educated afresh to eat what was good for them. But now she had had her last baby, and employed two nannies in the nurseries, she felt free to spend more time at the clinic and at the garden. Here she made a point of being friendly to Tembi. She was not a person to bear grudges, though a feeling that he was not to be trusted barred him as a nurse. She would talk to him about her own children, and how they were growing, and would soon be going to school in the city. She would talk to him about keeping himself clean, and eating the right things; how he must earn good money so that he could buy shoes to keep his feet from the germ-laden dust; how he must be honest, always tell the truth and be obedient to the white people. While she was in the garden he would follow her around, his hoe trailing forgotten in his hand, his eyes fixed on her. 'Yes, missus; yes, my missus,' he repeated continually. And when she left, he would implore: 'When are you coming again? Come again soon, my missus.' She took to bringing him her own children's books, when they were too worn for use in the nursery. 'You must learn to read, Tembi,' she would say. 'Then, when you want to get a job, you will earn more wages if you can say: "Yes, missus, I can read and write." You can take messages on the telephone then, and write down orders so that you don't forget them.' 'Yes, missus,' Tembi would say, reverently taking the books from her. When she left the garden, she would glance back, always a little uncomfortable, because of Tembi's intense devotion, and see him kneeling on the rich red soil, framed by the bright green of the vegetables, knitting his brows over the strange coloured pictures and the unfamiliar print.

This went on for about two years. She said to Willie: 'Tembi seems to have got over that funny business of his. He's really useful in that garden. I don't have to tell him when to plant things. He knows as well as I do. And he goes round the huts in the compound with the vegetables, persuading the natives to eat them.' 'I bet he makes a bit on the side,' said Willie, chuckling. 'Oh no, Willie, I'm sure he wouldn't do that.'

And, in fact, he didn't. Tembi regarded himself as an apostle of the white man's way of life. He would say earnestly, displaying the baskets of carefully displayed vegetables to the native women: 'The Goodhearted One says it is right we should eat these things. She says eating them will save us from sickness.' Tembi achieved more than Jane had done in years of propaganda.

He was nearly eleven when he began giving trouble again. Jane sent her two elder children to boarding-school, dismissed her nannies, and decided to engage a piccanin to help with the children's washing. She did not think of Tembi; but she engaged Tembi's younger brother.

Tembi presented himself at the back door, as of old, his eyes flashing, his body held fine and taut, to protest. 'Missus, missus, you promised I should work for you.' 'But Tembi, you are working for me, with the vegetables.' 'Missus, my missus, you said when you took a piccanin for the house, that piccanin would be me.' But Jane did not give way. She still felt as if Tembi were on probation. And that demanding, insistent, impatient thing in Tembi did not seem to her a good quality to be near her children. Besides, she liked Tembi's little brother, who was a softer, smiling, chubby Tembi, playing good-naturedly with the children in the garden when he had finished the washing and ironing. She saw no reason to change, and said so.

Tembi sulked. He no longer took baskets of green stuff from door to door in the compound. And he did as little work as he need without actually neglecting it. The spirit had gone out of him.

'You know,' said Jane half indignantly, half amused, to Willie: 'Tembi behaves as if he had some sort of claim on us.' Quite soon, Tembi came to Willie and asked to be allowed to buy a bicycle. He was then earning ten shillings a month, and the rule was that no native earning less than fifteen shillings could buy a bicycle. A fifteen-shilling native

would keep five shillings of his wages, give ten to Willie, and undertake to remain on the farm till the debt was paid. That might take two years, or even longer. 'No,' said Willie. 'And what does a piccanin like you want with a bicycle? A bicycle is for big men.'<sup>1</sup>

Next day, their eldest child's bicycle vanished from the house, and was found in the compound leaning against Tembi's hut. Tembi had not even troubled to conceal the theft; and when he was called for an interview kept silent. At last he said: 'I don't know why I stole it. I don't know.' And he ran off, crying, into the trees.

'He must go,' said Willie finally, baffled and angry.

'But his father and mother and the family live in our compound,' protested Jane.

'I'm not having a thief on the farm,' said Willie. But getting rid of Tembi was more than dismissing a thief: it was pushing aside a problem that the McClusters were not equipped to handle. Suddenly Jane knew that when she no longer saw Tembi's burning, pleading eyes, it would be a relief; though she said guiltily: 'Well, I suppose he can find work on one of the farms nearby.'

Tembi did not allow himself to be sacked so easily. When Willie told him he burst into passionate tears, like a very small child. Then he ran round the house and banged his fists on the kitchen door till Jane came out. 'Missus, my missus, don't let the baas send me away.' 'But Tembi, you must go, if the boss says so.' 'I work for you, missus, I'm your boy, let me stay. I'll work for you in the garden and I won't ask for any more money.' 'I'm sorry, Tembi,' said Jane. Tembi gazed at her while his face hollowed into incredulous misery: he had not believed she would not take his part. At this moment his little brother came round the corner of the house carrying Jane's youngest child, and Tembi flew across and flung himself on them, so that the little black child staggered back, clutching the white infant to himself with difficulty. Jane flew to rescue her baby, and then pulled Tembi off his brother, who was bitten and scratched all over his face and arms.

'That finishes it, she said coldly. 'You will be off this farm in an hour, or the police will chase you off.'

They asked Tembi's father, later, if the lad had found work; the reply was that he was garden boy on a neighbouring farm. When the McClusters saw these neighbours they asked after Tembi, but the reply was vague: on this new farm Tembi was just another labourer without a history.

Later still, Tembi's father said there had been 'trouble,' and that Tembi had moved to another farm, many miles away. Then, no one seemed to know where he was: it was said he had joined a gang of boys moving south to Johannesburg for work on the gold mines.

The McClusters forgot Tembi. They were pleased to be able to forget him. They thought of themselves as good masters; they had a good name with their labourers for kindness and fair dealing; while the affair of Tembi left something hard and unassimilable in them, like a grain of sand in a mouthful of food. The name 'Tembi' brought uncomfortable emotions with it; and there was no reason why it should, according to their ideas of right and wrong. So at last they did not even remember to ask Tembi's father what had become of him: he had become another of those natives who vanish from one's life after seeming to be such an intimate part of it.

It was about four years later that the robberies began again. The McClusters' house was the first to be rifled. Someone climbed in one night and took the following articles: Willie's big winter coat, his stick, two old dresses belonging to Jane, a quantity of children's clothing and an old and battered child's tricycle.<sup>43</sup> Money left lying in a drawer was untouched. 'What extraordinary things to take,' marvelled the McClusters. For except for Willie's coat, there was nothing of value. The theft was reported to the police, and a routine visit was made to the compound. It was established that the thief must be someone who knew the house, for the dogs had not barked at him; and that it was not an experienced thief, who would certainly have taken money and jewellery.

Because of this, the first theft was not connected with the second, which took place at a neighbouring farmhouse. There, money and watches and a gun were stolen. And there were more thefts in the district of the same kind. The police decided it must be a gang of thieves, not the ordinary pilferer, for the robberies were so clever and it seemed as if several people had planned them. Watchdogs were poisoned; times were chosen when servants were out of the house; and on two occasions someone had entered through bars so closely set together that no one but a child could have forced his way through.

The district gossiped about the robberies; and because of them, the anger lying dormant between white and black, always ready to flare up, deepened in an ugly way. There was hatred in the white people's voices when they addressed their servants, that futile anger, for even if their personal servants were giving information to the thieves, what could be done about it? The most trusted servant could turn out to be a thief. During these months when the unknown gang terrorized the district, unpleasant things happened; people were fined more often for beating their natives; a greater number of labourers than usual ran away over the border to Portuguese territory; the dangerous, simmering anger was like heat growing in the air. Even Jane found herself saying one day: 'Why do we do it? Look how I spend my time nursing and helping these natives! What thanks do I get? They aren't grateful for anything we do for them.' This question of gratitude was in every white person's mind during that time.

As the thefts continued, Willie put bars in all the windows of the house, and bought two large fierce dogs. This annoyed Jane, for it made her feel confined and a prisoner in her own home.

To look at a beautiful view of mountains and shaded green bush through bars, robs the sight of joy; and to be greeted on her way from house to storerooms by the growling of hostile dogs who treated everyone, black and white, as an enemy, became daily more exasperating. They bit everyone who came near the house, and Jane was afraid for her children. However, it was not more than three weeks after they were bought that they were found lying stretched in the sun, quite dead, foam at their mouths and their eyes glazing. They had been poisoned. 'It looks as if we can expect another visit,' said Willie crossly; for he was by now impatient of the whole business. 'However,' he said impatiently, 'if one chooses to live in a damned country like this, one has to take the consequences.' It was an exclamation that meant nothing, that could not be taken seriously by anyone. During that time, however, a lot of settled and contented people were talking with prickly anger about 'the damned country.' In short, their nerves were on edge.

Not long after the dogs were poisoned, it became necessary for Willie to make the trip into town, thirty miles off. Jane did not want to go; she disliked the long, hot, scurrying day in the streets. So Willie went by himself.

In the morning, Jane went to the vegetable garden with her younger children. They played around the water-butt, by themselves, while she staked out a new row of beds; her mind was lazily empty, her hands working quickly with twine and wooden pegs. Suddenly, however, an extraordinary need took her to turn around sharply, and she heard herself say: 'Tembi!' She looked wildly about her; afterwards it seemed to her she had heard him speak her name. It seemed to her that she would see a spindly earnest-faced black child kneeling behind her between the vegetable beds, poring over a tattered picture-book. Time slipped and swam together; she felt confused; and it was only by looking determinedly at her two children that she regained a knowledge of how long it had been since Tembi followed her around this garden.

When she got back to the house, she sewed on the verandah. Leaving her chair for a moment to fetch a glass of water, she found her sewing basket had gone. At first she could not believe it. Distrusting her own senses, she searched the place for her basket, which she knew very well had been on the verandah not a few moments before. It meant that a native was lingering in the bush, perhaps a couple of hundred yards away, watching her movements. It wasn't a pleasant thought. An old uneasiness filled her; and again the name 'Tembi' rose into her mind. She took herself into the kitchen and said to the cookboy: 'Have you heard anything of Tembi recently.' But there had been no news, it seemed. He was 'at the gold mines.' His parents had not heard from him for years.

'But why a sewing basket?' muttered Jane to herself, incredulously. 'Why take such a risk for so little? It's insane.'

That afternoon, when the children were playing in the garden and Jane was asleep on her bed, someone walked quietly into the bedroom and took her big garden hat, her apron, and the dress she had been wearing that morning. When Jane woke and discovered this, she began to tremble, half with anger, half with fear. She was alone in the house, and she had the prickling feeling of being watched. As she moved from room to room, she kept glancing over her shoulders behind the angles of wardrobe and cupboard, and fancied that Tembi's great, imploring eyes would appear there, as unappeasable as a dead person's eyes, following her.

She found herself watching the road for Willie's return. If Willie had been there, she could have put the responsibility on to him and felt safe: Jane was a woman who depended very much on that invisible support a husband gives. She had not known, before that afternoon, just how much she depended on him; and this knowledge—which it seemed the thief shared—made her unhappy and restless. She felt that she should be able to manage this thing by herself, instead of waiting helplessly for her husband. I must do something, I must do something, she kept repeating.

It was a long, warm, sunny afternoon. Jane, with all her nerves standing to attention, waited on the verandah, shading her eyes as she gazed along the road for Willie's car. The waiting preyed on her. She could not prevent her eyes from returning again and again to the bush immediately in front of the house, which stretched for mile on mile, a low, dark scrubby green, darker because of the lengthening shadows of approaching evening. An impulse pulled her to her feet, and she marched towards the bush through the garden. At its edge she stopped, peering everywhere for those dark and urgent eyes, and called 'Tembi, Tembi.' There was no sound. 'I won't punish you, Tembi,' she implored. 'Come here to me.' She waited, listening delicately, for the slightest movement of branch or dislodged pebble. But the bush was silent under the sun; even the birds were drugged by the heat; and the leaves hung without trembling. 'Tembi!' she called again; at first peremptorily, and then with a quaver in her voice. She knew very well that he was there, flattening himself behind some tree or bush, waiting for her to say the right word, to find the right things to say, so that he could trust her. It maddened her to think he was so close, and she could no more reach him than she could lay hands on a shadow. Lowering her voice persuasively she said: 'Tembi, I know you are there. Come here and talk to me. I won't tell the police. Can't you trust me, Tembi?'

Not a sound, not the whisper of a reply. She tried to make her mind soft and blank, so that the words she needed would appear there, ready for using. The grass was beginning to shake a little in the evening breeze, and the hanging leaves tremored once or twice; there was a warm mellowing of the light that meant the sun would soon sink; a red glow showed on the foliage, and the sky was flaring high with light. Jane was trembling so she could not control her limbs; it was a deep internal trembling, welling up from inside, like a wound bleeding invisibly. She tried to steady herself. She said: This is silly. I can't be afraid of little Tembi! How could I be? She made her voice firm and loud and said: 'Tembi, you are being very foolish. What's the use of stealing things like a stupid child? You can be clever about stealing for a little while, but sooner or later the police will catch you and you will go to prison. You don't want that, do you? Listen to me, now. You come out now and let me see you; and when the boss comes I'll explain to him, and I'll say you are sorry, and you can come back and work for me in the vegetable garden. I don't like to think of you as a thief, Tembi. Thieves are bad people.' She stopped. The silence settled around her; she felt the silence like a coldness, as when a cloud passes overhead. She saw that the shadows were thick about her and the light had gone from the leaves, that had a cold grey look. She knew Tembi would not come out to her now. She had not found the right things to say. 'You are a silly little boy,' she announced to the still listening bush. 'You make me very angry, Tembi.' And she walked very slowly back to the house, holding herself calm and dignified, knowing that Tembi was watching her, with some plan in his mind she could not conjecture.

When Willie returned from town, tired and irritable as he always was after a day at traffic, and interviewing people, and shopping, she told him carefully, choosing her words, what had happened. When she told how she had called to Tembi from the verges of the bush, Willie looked gently at her and said: 'My dear, what good do you think that's going to do?' 'But Willie, it's all so awful...' Her lips began to tremble luxuriously, and she allowed herself to weep comfortably on his shoulder. 'You don't know it is Tembi,' said Willie. 'Of course it's Tembi. Who else could it be? The silly little boy. My silly little Tembi.'

She could not eat. After supper she said suddenly: 'He'll come here to-night. I'm sure of it.' 'Do you think he will?' said Willie seriously, for he had a great respect for Jane's irrational knowledge. 'Well, don't worry, we'll be ready for him.' 'If he'd only let me talk to him,' said Jane. 'Talk to him!' said Willie. 'Like hell! I'll have him in prison. That's the only place for him.' 'But, Willie...' Jane protested, knowing perfectly well that Tembi must go to prison.

It was then not eight o'clock. 'I'll have my gun beside the bed,' planned Willie. 'He stole a gun, didn't he, from the farm over the river? He might be dangerous.' Willie's blue eyes were alight; he was walking up and down the room, his hands in his pockets, alert and excited: he seemed to be enjoying the idea of capturing Tembi, and because of this Jane felt herself go cold against him. It was at this moment that there was a sound from the bedroom next door. They sprang up, and reached the entrance together. There stood Tembi, facing them, his hands dangling empty at his sides. He had grown taller, but still seemed the same lithe, narrow child, with the thin face and great eloquent eyes. At the sight of those eyes Jane said weakly: 'Willie.. .'

Willie, however, marched across to Tembi and took that unresisting criminal by the arm. 'You young rascal,' he said angrily, but in a voice appropriate, not to a dangerous thief, who had robbed many houses, but rather to a naughty child caught pilfering fruit. Tembi did not reply to Willie: his eyes were fixed on Jane. He was trembling; he looked no more than a boy.

'Why didn't you come when I called you?' asked Jane. 'You are so foolish, Tembi.'

'I was afraid, missus,' said Tembi, in a voice just above a whisper. 'But I said I wouldn't tell the police,' said Jane.

'Be quiet, Jane,' ordered Willie. 'Of course we're calling the police. What are you thinking of?' As if feeling the need to remind himself of this important fact, he said: 'After all, the lad's a criminal.'

'I'm not a bad boy,' whispered Tembi imploringly to Jane. 'Missus, my missus, I'm not a bad boy.'

But the thing was out of Jane's hands; she had relinquished it to Willie.

Willie seemed uncertain what to do. Finally he strode purposefully to the wardrobe, and took his rifle from it, and handed it to Jane. 'You stay here,' he ordered. 'I'm calling the police on the telephone.' He went out, leaving the door open, while Jane stood there holding the big gun, and waiting for the sound of the telephone.

She looked helplessly down at the rifle, set it against the bed, and said in a whisper: 'Tembi, why did you steal?' Tembi hung his head and said: 'I don't know, missus.'

'But you must know.' There was no reply. The tears poured down Tembi's cheeks.

'Tembi, did you like Johannesburg?' There was no reply. 'How long were you there?' 'Three years, missus.' 'Why did you come back?' 'They put me in prison, missus.' 'What for?' 'I didn't have a pass.' 'Did you get out of prison?' 'No, I was there one month, and they let me go.' 'Was it you who stole all the things from the houses around here?' Tembi nodded, his eyes cast down to the floor.

Jane did not know what to do. She repeated firmly to herself: 'This is a dangerous boy, who is quite unscrupulous, and very clever,' and picked up the rifle again. But the weight of it, a cold hostile thing, made her feel sorry. She set it down sharply. 'Look at me, Tembi,' she whispered. Outside, in the passage, Willie was saying in a firm, confident voice: 'Yes, Sergeant, we've got him here. He used to work for us, years ago. Yes.'

'Look, Tembi,' whispered Jane quickly, 'I'm going out of the room. You must run away quickly. How did you get in?'

This thought came to her for the first time. Tembi looked at the window. Jane could see how the bars had been forced apart, so that a very slight person could squeeze in, sideways. 'You must be strong,' she said. 'Now, there isn't any need to go out that way. Just walk out of that door,' she pointed at the door to the living-room, 'and go through into the verandah, and run into the bush. Go to another district and get yourself an honest job and stop being a thief. I'll talk to the baas. I'll tell him to tell the police we made a mistake. Now then, Tembi.. .' she concluded urgently, and went into the passage, where Willie was at the telephone, with his back to her.

He lifted his head, looked at her incredulously, and said: 'Jane, you're crazy.' Into the telephone he said: 'Yes, come quickly.' He set down the receiver, turned to Jane and said; 'You know he'll do it again, don't you?' He ran back to the bedroom. But there had been no need to run. There stood Tembi, exactly where they had left him, his fists in his eyes, like a small child.

'I told you to run away,' said Jane angrily.

'He's nuts,' said Willie.

And now, just as Jane had done, Willie picked up the rifle, seemed to feel foolish holding it, and set it down again.

Willie sat on the bed and looked at Tembi with the look of one who has been outwitted. 'Well, I'm damned,' he said. 'It's got me beat, this has.'

Tembi continued to stand there in the centre of the floor, hanging his head and crying. Jane was crying too. Willie was getting angrier, more and more irritable. Finally he left the room, slamming the door, and saying: 'God damn it, everyone is mad.'

Soon the police came, and there was no more doubt about what should be done. Tembi nodded at every question; he admitted everything. The handcuffs were put on him, and he was taken away in the police car.

At last Willie came back into the bedroom, where Jane lay crying on the bed. He patted her on the shoulder and said, 'Now stop it. The thing is over. We can't do anything.' Jane sobbed out: 'He's only alive because of me. That's what's so awful. And now he's going to prison.'

'They don't think anything of prison. It isn't a disgrace last is for us.' 'But he's going to be one of those natives who spend all their lives in and out of prison.'

'Well, what of it?' said Willie. With the gentle, controlled exasperation of a husband, he lifted Jane and offered her his handkerchief. 'Now stop it, old girl,' he reasoned. 'Do stop it. I'm tired. I want to go to bed. I've had hell up and down those damned pavements all day, and I've got a heavy day to-morrow with the tobacco.' He began pulling off his boots. Jane stopped crying, and also undressed. 'There's something horrible about it all,' she said restlessly. 'I can't forget it.' And finally, 'What did he want, Willie? What is it he wanting, all this time?'